

Research Article

Exploration of Phenomenology and Dimensionality of Happiness: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Happiness is characterized by joy and satisfaction, and the two are essential for both society and personal wellbeing. The aim of this study was to investigate the phenomenology and dimensionality of happiness in university students using thematic analysis. Our goal is to explore subjective experiences and multifaceted components of happiness in university students, to identify their primary source of happiness, to investigate the strategies and approaches employed by individuals to achieve happiness, to assess the perspective of participants on the measurability of happiness and to explore the influence of interpersonal relationships and environment on happiness. Our target population was university students both male and female, age ranging from 18 to 26. We used convenience samples to collect data from open ended questionnaire (43) and took semi-structured interviews (6) by thematic analysis to investigate the phenomenology and dimensionality of happiness. Our results highlighted the individualized and variable aspect of happiness emphasizing the subjective nature of happiness. Happiness incorporates a lot of thrilling emotions such as pleasure, satisfaction, contentment, fulfillment and relaxation. The study emphasizes the huge influence of interpersonal relationships and environment on happiness. The concept of happiness varies from person to person, stressing that happiness is highly complicated and unique concept. Our research identified various strategies to achieve happiness such as taking part in fun activities, fostering meaningful relationships and achieving goals. The study adds to our understanding of variables affecting individual happiness, the influence of relationships on our happiness and emphasizes the importance of living in better environment to promote wellbeing.

Keywords: Happiness, Thematic analysis, Relationships, Environment, Wellbeing, University students

Introduction

Concept of happiness is a unique yet highly individual concept which has been fascinating many philosophers, psychologists and researchers. Happiness is essential to both the harmony of the society and the wellbeing of a person. It is characterized by joy, satisfaction, fulfillment and contentment. This study explores the phenomenology and dimensionality of happiness among university students by thematic analysis to understand its complex nature.

Happiness has several different facets. It is not a single, cohesive feeling. Our objective is to explore and investigate what pleasure means to university students by comprehending these elements. Happiness is a multidimensional concept so it is not studied merely as a single emotion but as a composite of different pleasant emotions and experiences. The aim of our study is to improve our knowledge of how happiness affect our everyday life, especially the life of university students because there experiences and developmental phases provide us new insights in happiness.

Number of variables that affect happiness have been identified in previous studies. These variables includes fulfilling relationships, achieving objectives and taking part in worthwhile experiences. Watson et al. [1] developed the Positive And Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS). According to Watson, PANAS serves as a fundamental

instrument to measure the wide range of components that affect happiness.

Furthermore, other important and comprehensive theories of happiness were developed by Csikszentmihalyi [2] and Seligman [3] which gave the idea of flow and positive psychology have enhanced our knowledge of well being and positive emotions by providing the difference between Hedonia (pleasure) and eudaimonia (meaning and self-actualization). These concepts were explored by Ryan and Deci [4] and further evolved by Huda and Waterman (2014).

This study examines adolescent happiness through thematic analysis of data from surveys and semi-structured interviews. This approach makes it possible to conduct a comprehensive, in-depth analysis of the participants' experiences, emphasizing the value of early experiences and connections as well as common sources of pleasure like reaching objectives and having fun. The results demonstrate the relevance of social relationships and personal accomplishments in influencing happiness, underscoring the role that supportive environments play in fostering well-being.

Literature Review

To better comprehend the multifaceted nature of happiness, a wide range of domains and perspectives have been covered in past studies

on happiness. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi [5] established positive psychology by defining the fundamental components of happiness, which include accomplishments, positive feelings, engagement, connections, and purpose.

Their ground-breaking study demonstrated the criticality of cultivating a feeling of purpose and fulfillment for enduring happiness. An important contribution to the field was made by Ryan and Deci (2001) when they distinguished between hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. They emphasized that although pleasure and enjoyment are essential to happiness (hedonia), a deeper sense of meaning and self-actualization are also vital for long-term wellbeing (eudaimonia).

Their conclusions highlighted how crucial it is to have sincere connections and pursue noble goals in order to enjoy life to the fullest. Diener et al. [6] conducted a ground-breaking study on subjective well-being in which they looked at people's affective and cognitive assessments of their own lives. According to their research, personality traits, financial situation, and social ties all play a big role in happiness. Diener's work laid the groundwork for comprehending subjective well-being as an essential component of overall contentment.

The field was enhanced by Kahneman et al. [7] by generating the concept of affective forecasting, which studies how people anticipate and assess their future emotional experiences. Their research highlighted systematic flaws in human judgment and highlighted how hard it is to foresee what will ultimately make us happy. The findings of this study have important ramifications for treatments meant to enhance wellbeing and judgment. Additionally, research on how to improve subjective well-being delves into the science of happiness [8]. Through experimental and long-term studies, they discovered that feeling thankful, showing kindness to others, and having wonderful experiences are all effective strategies to boost happiness.

Their findings have informed interventions aimed at improving well-being and resilience. Stress causing factors in university students are related to well-being [9]. Those can be replaced with happiness and positive emotions. In addition to these basic studies, ongoing research endeavours' continue to explore various facets of pleasure, including its cultural diversity, biological underpinnings, and social implications. Scholars endeavor to enhance their comprehension of the intricate characteristics of pleasure and its role in human wellbeing by integrating viewpoints from other disciplines, including psychology, neurology, sociology, and others.

Objective

- To explore the subjective aspect and multifaceted components of happiness.
- To explore the source of happiness.
- To investigate the strategies and approaches employed by individuals to achieve happiness.
- To assess the perspective on measurability of happiness.
- To explore the impact of relationships and environment on happiness.

Method

Qualitative research design was used in current research. This study involves in depth interviews to understand the opinions and viewpoint of individuals on phenomenology and dimensionality of happiness. Furthermore, open ended questionnaire was used in qualitative analysis to measure the frequency of happiness promoting variables.

Procedure

54 university students participated in the study. Participants ranged from 18 to 26 years old. 44 participants completed open ended questionnaires and 7 participants were engaged in semi-structured interviews. Participants were not organized based on ethnicity and socioeconomic status. Participants were given the right to engage in interviews and questionnaire voluntarily. After verbal consents were taken, we recorded the interview. Confidentiality of the participant data was strictly maintained throughout the study. Thematic analysis was used in our research. Our research was formulated in themes and sub themes. Participants who took part in open ended questionnaire were coded as O.E.Q and those who gave interviews were coded as S.I.

Findings

Several significant findings have come from our research on the phenomenology and dimensionality of happiness in university students. Through the analysis of data from (6) semi-structured interviews and (43) class open ended questionnaire, we were able to find common patterns that highlight the complex nature of happiness. The participants in the study were people with a variety of age, gender, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The complexity of human experiences was reflected in the wide range of viewpoints on happiness that descriptive statistics revealed. Our study showed that the source of happiness of female participants were their friends and the source of happiness of male were their mothers. Following are the themes and sub themes of our study.

Subjective Aspect and Multifaceted Components of Happiness

The participants highlighted the individualized and variable aspect of happiness, emphasizing its subjective nature. Wide variations in responses suggest that everyone experiences and perceives happiness in various ways. Pleasure, satisfaction, fulfillment, and good emotions were all mentioned as parts of the complex emotion that is happiness. The various facets of happiness were expressed by the participants, highlighting its complexity and richness.

- *"Feeling of pleasure and contentment."* (O.E.Q, 3)
- *"Happiness to me is a profound sense of contentment and fulfillment derived from living authentically, fostering meaning full connections, pursuing passion and finding joy in the present moment."* (O.E.Q, 37)

Following are the sub themes:

Personal Perspectives on Happiness

According to participants, Happiness is a complex yet highly individualized concept. It has variable aspects emphasizing its

subjective nature. According to our participants, happiness is characterized by joy, satisfaction, fulfillment and contentment.

- *"A state of satisfaction and relaxation, fulfillment."* (O.E.Q, 12)

Diverse Factors Contributing to Well-being

Wide variations in responses suggest that everyone experiences and perceives happiness in various ways. According to our participants, wide range of factors contribute to their happiness such as goal attainment, achievements and pursuing their interests.

- *"Completing my task makes me happy".* (S.I, 6)

Goal Attainment and Achievement

Taking part in worthwhile activities and reaching goals were mentioned as significant factors in happiness. Participants who completed tasks and pursued their interests showed feelings of contentment and happiness.

- *Achieving goals that I have set for myself makes me happy."* (S.I, 3)

Source of Happiness

According to our findings, The primary source of happiness for our participants are their mothers. They emphasized that spending time with their mothers and seeing them happy is their greatest happiness. Their social circle and interests and their achievements all comes later. Following are the sub themes:

Primary Source of Happiness

For a considerable number of participants, their mother was the source of their greatest happiness. It was said that they felt love, support, and emotional fulfillment from their mother. Participants emphasized how their happiness and general well-being were shaped by their mothers' love and nurturing.

- *"For me, making my mother happy ultimately makes me happy."* (O.E.Q, 13)
- *"Although there are a lot factors that makes me happy but seeing me mother happy bring me the most happiness."* (S.I, 5)

Secondary Source of Happiness

According to the data we collected from our interviews, the social circle of the participants, their goals and interests, their achievements played the role of secondary source of happiness.

Psychological Impact of Happiness

While the participants' approaches to happiness varied, similar elements included goal-setting and achievement, cultivating deep connections, and engaging in mindfulness practices. Finding joy in the present, following passions, and leading an authentic life were found to be important routes to happiness. A happy existence, according to the participants, also requires having inner peace, being grateful, and spending quality time with loved ones. In order to experience lasting enjoyment, participants stressed the need of emotional and psychological well-being.

- *"I can achieve happiness by doing things I like."* (S.I, 3)

Well-being

Our participants stressed upon the need of emotional and psychological well being. According to them, being happy requires positive emotions, having inner peace, taking part in activities and doing things that improve our personal well being.

Mindfulness

Although participants response to happiness varied, similar factors were included in order to attain happiness such as goal achievement, improving interpersonal relationships and engaging in mindfulness practices like meditation, positive thinking and self compassion.

- *"Inner peace and our well being plays a crucial role in being happy so I would focus on achieving these to make myself happy."* (S.I, 9)

Participant's Perspective on Happiness Measurability

Most participants said that they didn't think it was possible to quantify happiness. Happiness is difficult to measure due to its complexity and subjective character, even though it may be subjectively felt and observed. Participants underlined that conventional assessment techniques fall short of truly capturing happiness since it is a highly subjective and unique feeling. According to participants, happiness is an emotion that can't be measured though there were some who said that they can quantify their emotions.

- *"I don't think happiness can be measured."* (S.I, 5)

Happiness can be Measured

According to the data we collected from our research, happiness has a subjective nature. According to most of our participants, their happiness can't be measured. Happiness is a complex feeling, it can't be quantified.

- *"Emotions are not something that can be measured."* (S.I, 7)

Happiness Can't be Measured

Though most of the participants said that emotions can't be quantified. There were some who said that they can quantify their emotions. They said their emotions can be rated on a scale.

- *"I think emotions can be measured. I can rate my happiness."* (S.I, 1)

Social Impact on Happiness

Participants highlighted the satisfaction and contentment that come from spending time with loved ones, and relationships were shown to be a major source of happiness. Having deep relationships with friends and family was thought to be essential to happiness in general. According to the participants, their environment had a huge influence on their happiness. The emotions of people around them had a significant effect on their own emotion and determined their happiness.

- *"Spending time with my family makes me happy."* (O.E.Q, 4)
- *"When I am not feeling good internally, my emotions are messed up. If I spend time with people like my friends or family, it*

*eventually brings me
happiness.” (S.I, 1)*

Role of Interpersonal Relationship

Our participants stressed upon the fact how their happiness is affected by their interpersonal relationships. According to them interpersonal relationships play huge role in attaining happiness. Spending time with their loved ones especially with family gives them feelings like satisfaction and contentment.

- *“Being with my friends and family makes me the most happy.” (S.I, 5)*

Role of Environment

According to the data we collected, environment of people have huge influence on their feelings and emotions. The emotions of people around them had a significant impact on their happiness, Especially their family and friends. Seeing them happy made happy and seeing them sad made them sad.

- *“People around me have a huge influence on my emotions. There mood determine my mood.” (S.I, 4)*

According to our research, adolescent happiness is a complex and highly individualized experience. Several factors, like as one's accomplishments, relationships, and mindfulness exercises, have an impact on it. The main sources of happiness usually involve one's family, especially mothers, and the satisfaction that comes from achieving one's own objectives. Even though it's widely acknowledged that happiness is essential to wellbeing, its complexity makes it difficult to measure. In the end, the study emphasizes how important relationships and psychological wellness are to adolescents' happiness judgments.

Discussion

The phenomenology and dimensionality of happiness in university students have been studied, and the results provide fascinating new perspectives on how university students perceive and comprehend happiness. University students of different ages, genders, and socioeconomic backgrounds provide a wide spectrum of opinions for the study, which is conducted using semi-structured interviews and class open ended questionnaire. We collected our data through thematic analysis.

The first objective of our study was to explore the subjective nature and multifaceted components of happiness. According to our findings, Happiness is a complex yet highly individualized concept. Wide variations in responses suggest that everyone experiences and perceives happiness in various ways. According to our participants, wide range of factors contribute to their happiness such as goal attainment, achievements and pursuing their interests. Taking part in worthwhile activities and reaching goals were mentioned as significant factors in happiness. Many researchers have given their studies on subjective nature of happiness. The study “The crosscultural correlates of life satisfaction and self-esteem” by Diener and Diener [10] highlights the subjective nature of happiness across diverse culture context.

The second objective of our study was to investigate the source of happiness. According to our participants, The primary source of happiness for our participants are their mothers. They emphasized that spending time with their mothers and seeing them happy is their greatest happiness, the social circle of the participants, their goals and interests, their achievements played the role of secondary source of happiness. There are numerous previous studies on this topic, Argyle [11] stresses upon the significance of interpersonal relationships, particularly with family members in attaining happiness.

The third objective of our study was to investigate the strategies and approaches employed by individuals to achieve happiness. While the participants' approaches to happiness varied, similar elements included goal-setting and achievement, cultivating deep connections, and engaging in mindfulness practices. Our participants stressed upon the need of emotional and psychological well being. There are previous literatures that align with our findings. Emmons [12] highlighted the personal goals centre's upon individual's identity and life purpose, contributing to attaining happiness. Locke and Latham [13] proposed that setting specific and challenging goals leads to higher performance and satisfaction leading to achieve happiness. Brown and Ryan [14] found that individuals who practice mindfulness tend to have higher level of well-being and reduce stress.

The fourth objective of our study was to assess the participant's perspective on measurability of happiness. Most participants said that they didn't think it was possible to quantify happiness. Happiness is difficult to measure due to its complexity and subjective character, even though it may be subjectively felt and observed. Participants underlined that conventional assessment techniques fall short of truly capturing happiness since it is a highly subjective and unique feeling. According to participants, happiness is an emotion that can't be measured though there were some who said that they can quantify their emotions. Diener (1984) emphasized that happiness varies significantly for individuals based on their personal experiences and perspectives that makes the quantification of happiness challenging. Lyobomirsky and Lipper [15] developed the Subjective Happiness Scale to measure subjective happiness globally but acknowledged its limitations.

The fifth objective of our study was to explore the impact of relationships and environment on happiness. Participants highlighted the satisfaction and contentment that come from spending time with loved ones, and relationships were shown to be a major source of happiness. Having deep relationships with friends and family was thought to be essential to happiness in general. According to the participants, their environment had a huge influence on their happiness. The emotions of people around them had a significant effect on their own emotion and determined their happiness. Diener and Seligman [16] highlighted that strong social bonds play huge role in attaining happiness and subjective well-being. Similarly, Barmiest and Leary [17] argued that forming meaningful bonds and the need to belong is a crucial human motivation which is essential for emotional well-being. Fowler and Christakis [18] discovered that happiness can spread through social networks, stressing that emotional state of others in one's environment can influence their happiness and emotional well-being. Happiness has cultural and religious bases [19].

Our study explores the Phenomenology and Dimensionality of happiness through thematic analysis among university students. We collected data from semi-structured interviews and open ended questionnaires. According to our findings, happiness is a complex concept, it has subjective nature which makes the quantification of happiness challenging. Relationship especially with family and the surroundings have huge impact on happiness.

Conclusion, Limitations and Recommendation

In conclusion, a thorough thematic analysis of this study has highlighted the intricate and varied aspects of university students' happiness. According to our research, happiness is a mixture of several emotions like joy, fullness, and contentment rather than a single, universal experience. The accomplishment of personal objectives and taking part in fun activities were found to be the main sources of happiness, with a strong focus on the importance of family bonds, especially those with mothers. The significance of relationships and supportive circumstances in augmenting individuals' sense of well-being was emphasized by the participants. This study's dependence on self-reported data, which could be biased since participants could modify their answers to reflect what they think is socially acceptable, is one of its limitations. Furthermore, even though the sample size was diverse, it was small and limited to a particular demographic, which might have limited how broadly the results could be applied. Subjectivity is introduced by the qualitative character of the interviews and the subjective interpretations that are part of the overall concept analysis, which may have an impact on the outcomes.

To improve the generalizability of the results, larger and more varied sample sizes should be the goal of future study. Long term studies might also be helpful in seeing how happiness varies over time and how multiple factors affect happiness over time. Furthermore, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches could offer a more thorough understanding of happiness and solve the difficulties associated with quantifying such a subjective emotion. Future research can help further understand the complexity of adolescent happiness and develop more potent interventions and techniques for fostering young people's well-being by pursuing these paths of inquiry.

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