

Psychological Happiness among Sultan Qaboos University Students in Oman

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Abstract: The aim of this research was to investigate the relation of psychological happiness of Sultan Qaboos University students with some variables using a specific questionnaire that was designed for the purpose of this study. It consisted of 36 items that represent 3 dimensions (personal aspect, academic aspect, and social aspect). The sample included 490 male and female students from all the university colleges (2016–2017 academic year enrolments). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the questionnaire was .84. The findings show that the majority of the students expressed a medium level of happiness (69.8%). Significant relationships between the psychological happiness and gender and type of residence (on-campus, off campus) were found. However, age, college and region did not significantly correlate with students' psychological happiness.

Keywords: Psychological happiness, university students, gender, type of residence.

السعادة النفسية لدى طلبة جامعة السلطان قابوس في سلطنة عمان

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مستخلص: هدفت الدراسة الحالية للكشف عن علاقة السعادة النفسية لدى طلبة جامعة السلطان قابوس ببعض المتغيرات حيث تم تطبيق استبانة خاصة تكونت من 36 عبارة تشمل ثلاثة محاور (الجانب الشخصي، الجانب الأكاديمي، الجانب الاجتماعي) على عينة مقدارها (490) طالبا وطالبة من مختلف كليات الجامعة ممن يدرسون في العام الأكاديمي (2016/2017). وقد تم حساب صدق المقياس باستخدام صدق المحكمين. كما كانت قيمة معامل الثبات مرتفعة حيث بلغت 0.84 للمقياس ككل باستخدام الاتساق الداخلي بطريقة ألفا لكرونباخ. ولقد توصلت الدراسة الى أن الغالبية العظمى من طلبة جامعة السلطان قابوس لديهم مستوى متوسط من السعادة النفسية (69.8%). كذلك أن متغير النوع ومكان السكن كان لهما تأثير على مستوى السعادة أما العمر والكلية والمنطقة التي يعيش فيها الطلبة لم يكن لها أي دلالة احصائية في التأثير على السعادة النفسية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: السعادة النفسية، طلبة الجامعة، الجنس، نوع السكن.

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Psychological happiness has become a popular topic among scholars as it is an important construct in positive psychology. Since happiness differs across different cultures, genders, and ages, it does not have a unified definition. For instance, Alobidi (2015) defines happiness as feeling positive and acceptance of self and others. It also includes feelings of enjoyment and optimism, and the ability to impact positively on others. Another definition by Al-Jammal (2013) includes achieving high levels of self and life acceptance. Al-Jammal (2013) relies on Ruffy's description of happiness as it includes feelings of autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance.

The definition of happiness consists of three elements: emotional, social, and cognitive. The emotional component results in positive expression, the social aspect results in expanded positive relationships with others, and the cognitive component leads to positive thinking (Sheikhmoonesi, Zarghami, Khademloo, & Alimohammadi, 2013).

It has been argued that happiness is significant in our lives as it has great positive effects on people. For instance, Alobidi (2015) contends that happiness impacts on people's behavior, encourages positive and optimistic thinking, and enhances self-esteem, self-actualization, and self-efficacy. Happy people can also deal well with their problems, and provide help and assistance for others in society.

University is the most significant stage in the lives of many students because it helps shape their personalities and develop their values (Abecia et al., 2014). Many students begin their university experience with some form of anxiety or other psychological problems due to the stress of academic life and other difficulties (Yoldascan, Ozenli, Kutlu, Topal, & Bozkurt, 2009). Chan, Miller, and Tcha (2005) argue that university students juggle a heavy load of activities, responsibilities, and obligations as well as selecting courses, managing time, and forming good relationships with other students. Subsequently, all these factors may have an impact on students' psychological happiness and satisfaction (Chan, et al., 2005).

Problem

University students are future professionals who will eventually provide different services for people in society. Those students are more likely to face different academic challenges and personal difficulties during their studies, so addressing their needs is important (Al-Darmaki, 2003). One of the most fundamental needs is their psychological well-being, or happiness because knowing what makes university students happy gives us an indication that they are satisfied and can cope with their academic lives as well as their personal and social lives. AlJammal (2013) states that psychological well-being also increases the students' positive attitudes towards their studies as it plays a significant role in predicting the students' academic achievements at university. It has also been argued that psychological well-being increases the students' emotional intelligence because people who have a high level of emotional intelligence are happier than those who do not (Judeh, 2007).

Different studies reveal that a variety of factors may affect the level of psychological well-being among university students. For instance, gender plays a significant role in happiness as the level of happiness differs from males and females (Al-Jammal, 2013; Judeh, 2007). The level of happiness is also affected by the age of the students; as the age of the students' increases, their level of happiness decreases (Chan et al., 2005). Other sources of happiness include money, good relationships with family and friends, stability of life, and good health (Al-Naggar et al, 2010). Since happiness differs from culture to culture, identifying the definition of happiness in Omani culture and the factors that are related to happiness would be significant as this study is the first of its kind in Oman. Due to the lack of studies in this area among university students in Oman and the dearth of knowledge about the factors related to happiness, it is important to address this topic among a sample of university students.

Significance of the study

The results of this study will add to our knowledge and understanding of happiness in Omani culture and the factors that are related to this topic. It will also add to existing research in this area. Moreover, knowing this information will help policymakers and service providers at universities to initiate the

best solutions and programs to help students deal with life and university demands. The findings will help in the development of the best learning environment to enhance the learning experience of university students. They will also provide a specific tool that will help to measure happiness among university students that suits Omani culture, especially since no existing measurements are available to assess happiness in Oman.

Objectives of the study

The purposes of the present study are to:

1. Identify the level of happiness among university sample.
2. Identify any significant differences between happiness and other factors such as gender, type of residence, college, age and region among university students.

Literature review

Addressing happiness among university students and its relationship to certain factors has gained great attention from researchers. Some of these factors were found to influence happiness while others were found not to be significant. For instance, in the Arab Gulf Countries, psychological happiness among university students was investigated by several researchers. For instance, Al-Jammal (2013) examined the relationship between happiness and its relation to attitudes towards university studies and academic achievement among 258 male and female students aged between 19 and 23 years at Tubook University in Saudi Arabia. This study revealed that gender was a significant factor that affected students' happiness as there were significant differences between male and female students in some dimensions of the happiness scale for female students, such as in positive relationships with others, and autonomy.

In Kuwait, Abdul-khalek (2006) tested for an association between, and gender differences in happiness, physical health, mental health, and religiosity using self-rating scales among 2,210 male ($n = 1,056$) and female ($n = 1,154$) volunteer Kuwaiti undergraduate students. Gender was a significant factor that affected students' happiness, mental health and religiosity. Males had a significantly higher self-rating mean score of happiness and mental health than females, while females had a significantly

higher religiosity mean score than their male counterparts.

In Oman, addressing happiness among women by identifying main areas where they can feel happy was carried out by Varghese (2016). The data was collected from a sample of 500 women using a qualitative structured questionnaire. The study found that Omani women are happier than other women and employment is the factor identified as a significant source of their happiness.

In Jordan, Al Mattarneh (2015) examined the relationship between happiness, social support and self-esteem among a sample of 907 of Mu'tah University students. This sample consisted of 470 male and 473 female students who were from different humanities and scientific colleges. Findings showed that the level of happiness among the students ranged from medium to high. Results also found that gender was a significant factor that affected the students' happiness. Females were happier than male students. Findings also showed no significant differences among the students due to the college as students from scientific and humanities colleges had the same level of happiness. This study also revealed positive interaction between happiness, social support and self-esteem.

Judeh (2007) explored emotional intelligence and its relationship with happiness and self-confidence among 231 male and female students of Al-Aqsa University in Gaza city. Results revealed that the majority of the students expressed a good level of happiness (63.1%). This study also found that emotional intelligence was positively related to happiness and self-confidence.

Jaisri (2015) addressed happiness and its relation to self-esteem among a random sample of 500 college students in India. Happiness was tested using Oxford happiness scale. Results of this study revealed that gender was a significant factor that affected students' happiness as male students were found to be happier than female students. This could be because of the traditional role of gender in the Indian society as women feel insecure regardless of the advancement and changes that have occurred. As such, this negatively impacted women's happiness and well-being.

Cavalcanti, Guimarães and Nogueira (2009) examined the level of happiness in two coun-

tries among college students in America (Purdue University) and Brazil (Universidade Federal de Pernambuco) using 185 questionnaires. Results found that American students reported a higher level of happiness. Findings also found significant gender differences in both countries. Women were happier than men in America, while men were happier than women in Brazil.

A study by Shafiq, Naz, Ansar, Nasrulla, Bushra, and Imam (2015) investigated the relationship between happiness and a range of factors such as age, and area of residence among 100 students between the ages of 18 and 24 at the University of Gujrat in Pakistan. The result of this study found that age and region of residence (rural, urban) were not significant factors that influenced happiness. This is because, although the students came from different background they have experienced fair environment at the university.

Sheikhmoonesi et al. (2013) examined the level of happiness of 208 medical students at the Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences in Iran using the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire. The students were aged between 18 and 31 years. This study also investigated the relationship between happiness and various factors such as gender, marital status, and residential status (place of living). The findings suggested no relationship between happiness and three factors: gender, marital status, and residential status.

Generally, these studies address psychological happiness among samples of university students in different cultures. They differ in their findings; culture has its own significant factors that influence happiness. So, addressing happiness and the factors that might affect happiness among university students in Oman has not yet been addressed. The present study will focus on this topic.

Method

Sample

This study was carried out with the help of a Convenience sample consisting of 519 undergraduate students enrolled at Sultan Qaboos University from different colleges. Twenty nine questionnaires were not included in the sample because they were incomplete. So, 490 students participated in the actual study. Data

collection was conducted among the students during the Fall semester in 2016. All the students who attended classes during the data collection period agreed to participate in the study. They were asked to fill in the questionnaires at the beginning of the timetable session, which lasted between 15 and 20 minutes. Participants were given an introduction about the study, its goals, and what was requested from them.

Some missing data were reported; as such the sample consisted of 209 male students and 268 female students between the ages of 16 and 25 years. The students came from humanities colleges (151) and scientific colleges (337). Of those students, 305 were in their second and third year, whereas 191 were in their fourth and fifth year. They were from different regions in Oman: Muscat (60), North Alsharqayia (50), South Alsharqayia (39), North Albatinah (78), South Albatinah (67), Althahirah (51), and Aldakilia (122).

Instruments

In the present study, happiness is defined as a construct that consists of three dimensions: emotional, social, and cognitive. The first dimension is about personal aspects and it includes the signs and indicators that reflect a sense of the individual's positivity, satisfaction, and acceptance of self as well as achievement of life goals. The second component is about academic life and it reflects a sense of enjoyment in academic studies as well as with relationships with family and friends. The third dimension is about social life and it includes a sense of value of life and the ability to make good relationships with people in society as well as participating and volunteering in activities that serve the community and people. Happiness was measured in this study using a specific questionnaire that is designed for the purpose of this research based on studies by Al-Jammal (2013), Judeh (2007, and Kat-alo (2015).

This study used the quantitative approach, which means a broad survey was used to collect data for the study. The research included a survey designed by the current researcher to examine happiness. This questionnaire was designed for the purpose of this study considering the literature related to happiness and it consisted of 36 items using a 5-point Likert Scale of 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly dis-

gree). The questionnaire was designed based on some studies that reported a high reliability of the happiness' questionnaire using alpha coefficient that ranged between 0.67 and 0.93 (Al-Jammal, 2013; Judeh, 2007; Katalo, 2015).

To help design the questionnaire for this study, the researcher distributed an open question about the meaning of happiness for university students, including a sample from the College of Education. The students formed their understanding about happiness in regards to self, academic life, and social aspects. They provided varied and important ideas about their happiness and this information helped to develop the dimension and the items for happiness.

The demographic data that was collected at the beginning of the testing session included gender, age, name of college, year of study, type of residency, and name of the region.

The questionnaire includes three dimensions, as identified in the literature. The first dimension is about personal aspects and it is used to assess the students' satisfaction about self and their goals in life. This dimension is comprised of 15 items. Examples of the items are, "I feel positive about myself", "I have high self-confidence", and "I feel satisfied with what I have achieved in life". The second dimension is about academic aspects and it consists of 10 items to assess the students' satisfaction with their academic studies as well as their relationships with other students and friends. It also gauges their satisfaction with the university facilities. Examples are, "I feel proud about my academic achievement at the university", "I am enjoying my time with my friends at the university", and "I feel satisfied with the facilities at the university".

The third element is about social aspects and it consists of 11 items that include the students' relationships with others in society. Examples of the items include, "I have strong relationships with my family", "I am enjoying my time with my family", and "I cooperate with other people in society". The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, which was obtained from the sample data for the happiness questionnaire and its three dimensions. The reliability of the questionnaire was 0.84, with 0.73 for the personal aspects dimension, 0.65 for the academic dimension, and 0.69 for the social dimension,

which indicates a good reliability status for the questionnaire.

Results and Discussion

Data from the surveys was analyzed using the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Before the analysis, data was checked and cleaned to ensure that it had been entered correctly and that no values seemed outside the possible range of each scale. Also, data was screened to check for missing and extreme values. Data checking involved going through the data entries to ensure that there were no entry errors. Two statistical procedures were used for the data analysis: descriptive and inferential.

The current study examined happiness among university student sample considering some variables. To assess the level of happiness among the university sample, the normal distribution of the study sample was first approved as the data showed that mean and median are nearly equal (Mean=3.842, Median=3.844, SD= .372, Skewness=-.17).

We relied on standard deviation as a criterion based on a scale of (1 to 5), as such [one standard deviation above the mean = $(3.84+.370=4.21)$]. This means that those who scored above 4.21 were considered to be happy. And [one standard deviation below the mean = $(3.84-.370=3.47)$] means any score below 3.47 was considered as less happy. Therefore, the range of score between 4.21 and 3.47 was considered as medium level of happiness. Individuals who scored two standard deviation above the mean (≥ 4.58) were considered to be very happy. It should be noted that none of the students have scored more than 4.58.

So, the findings showed that the majority of the students expressed a medium level of happiness (69.8%). In regards to the dimensions of the questionnaire, the students were found to have a medium level of happiness in their social aspects (M= 3.98, SD=.451), personal aspects (M= 3.80, SD=.421), and their academic life (M= 3.73, SD=.494). These findings mean that students at Sultan Qaboos University are happy. This is a good indication that the university provides students with a good learning environment and that those students are happy in their social life, particularly their relationship with their families and other activities in society. They feel satisfied with themselves and their goals in life. Stu-

dents are coping well with academic life and feeling comfortable about their relationship with their friends. The result of this study is similar to that of Judeh (2007) who found that university students expressed a good level of happiness.

An independent dample t-test was conducted to examine differences in gender and type of residence among the university sample. Gender was found to be significant. This result showed that happiness was affected by gender as there were significant differences in the level of happiness between male and female students. Female students (M= 3.99, SD=.581) were happier than male students (M= 3.622, SD=.584). (See Table 1).

Similarly, there were significant differences among university students across the personal and academic dimensions, except for the social aspects. Female students (M=3.86, SD=.416) were happier than male students (M=3.72, SD=.424) in their personal aspects. Female students (M=3.83, SD= .457) were also happier than male students (M=3.61, SD=.508) in their academic aspects (See Table 1). From these findings, it could be interpreted that female students are goal-oriented and know how to achieve what they want. They are most likely to feel satisfied with what they want as they are well organized. Most of the girls at the university also stay on-campus so they enjoy the services that the university offer. This result is consistent with the result of other studies (Al-Jammal, 2013; Al Mattarneh, 2015; Judeh, 2007) in which the level of happiness was found to be affected by gender where female students were found to be happier than males.

The social aspect was not significant because university students spend most of their times at university, and they are most likely to be isolated from society and its activities, especially during the academic year. So, it is not surprising that the students do not engage a lot in the social life and, for this, they score low in the social dimension.

Type of residence (on-campus and off-campus) was also related to happiness as there were significant differences between the students who live on and off campus in their level of happiness. Students who live on-campus (M= 3.90, SD=.359) reported a higher level of

happiness than those who live off-campus (M= 3.78, SD=.372).

Table 1
T-tests Results for Differences between Male and Female Students in the Aspects of Happiness

Dimensions	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t
Personal Aspects	male	209	3.72	.424	3.58**
	female	268	3.86	.416	
Academic Aspects	male	209	3.61	.508	4.95**
	female	268	3.83	.457	
Total	male	209	3.62	.584	3.95**
	female	268	3.99	.581	

**p<.01

Similarly, there were significant differences among university students across the personal and academic happiness dimensions with regards to the type of residence, except the social element. Students who live on-campus were happier (M=3.86, SD=.426) than those who live off-campus (M= 3.75, SD= .407) in their personal aspects. Similarly, students who live on-campus (M=3.85, SD=.461) were also happier than those who live off-campus (M=3.63, SD=.500) in their academic aspects. (See Table 2)

Table 2
T-tests Results for Differences between On-Campus and Off Campus Students in the aspects of Happiness

Aspects	Residences	N	Mean	SD	t
Personal Aspects	On Campus	231	3.86	.426	2.79**
	Off Campus	251	3.75	.407	
Academic Aspects	On Campus	231	3.85	.461	4.87**
	Off Campus	251	3.63	.500	
Total	On Campus	231	3.90	.359	3.53**
	Off Campus	251	3.78	.372	

**p<.01

From these findings, it could be interpreted that students who live off campus tend to share rooms with other students, so this could add pressure on how they deal with their friends with regards to studying and living. This will have a negative effect on their relationships with others. Since those students rent apartments and houses outside the university, they feel unsettled as they must do their own housework and cooking. This adds more responsibilities and pressure to those students. They might feel unsatisfied with themselves and their goals. Some of them also might face difficulties in studying and managing their time. Therefore, they face some difficulties at the university. Such pressures could negatively impact students' satisfaction and well-being.

However, those students who live on-campus enjoy all the facilities that are provided to

them by the university. Food and other services are offered by the university for free. They also have the convenience of traveling and moving around the campus by walking or sometimes using university buses. They are most likely able to manage their time and academic studies, which positively impacts their achievements at the university and their life goals.

It is also significant to note that independent samples t-test were also conducted on age, college, and region. Surprisingly, no significant difference between students of all different ages was found. This means that all the students at the university are happy regardless of their age. This result is consistent with the findings of the study by Shafiq et al. (2015) and it contradicts the findings of the study of Chan, et al. (2005) and Sheikhmoonesi et al. (2013), who found that the level of happiness was affected by age. As the age of the students increases, the level of happiness decreases.

Moreover, the colleges attended by the students did not affect their happiness as there were no significant differences between students from the scientific and the humanities colleges. This means that students from all the colleges have the same level of happiness and they are happy students. This could be interpreted as the students of both scientific and humanities colleges feel satisfied about themselves, cope well with their academic studies and as well as feel happy about their academic studies. This also means that field or type of studies does not play any role in happiness. This finding is consistent with a study by Al Mattarneh (2015) who revealed that the psychological happiness of the students was not affected by college.

Region was also not found to be significant, which indicates that all students from all the regions share the same level of happiness. This could be because all the students from all areas in Oman share similar life styles and ways of living, as such their level of being satisfied about themselves, academic studies and social life. This finding is consistent with the studies by Shafiq et al. (2015) and Sheikhmoonesi et al. (2013) who revealed that the psychological happiness of the students was not affected by where they came from.

Conclusion

The present study investigated the relationship between psychological happiness and other variables. It found that the students at Sultan Qaboos University are generally happy. This is a good indication that the university provides its students with a good learning environment. Happiness was influenced by gender and type of residency, which were found to be significant factors. Age, college, and region were not correlated with happiness.

Recommendations and Limitations

This study recommends that service providers at the university address the needs of male students and students who live off-campus so they can investigate factors and obstacles that might affect their happiness. Individual and group counseling might also be helpful in dealing with students who are in need. More research is needed to examine other factors that might affect happiness. Moreover, the mixed method approach is needed to strengthen the quantitative data. The qualitative research approach would be beneficial as it might add depth to the questionnaire findings. However, there are some limitations to this study. Since this study involved a convenient sample, it is difficult to generalize the results of this study to all university students or to the wider population as the sample covered only a specific population of university students. Another limitation is that, this study relies on the students' self-report data; as such this might not reflect their actual or real response to the questions.

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