



GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS INDEX: A NATION'S PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

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Abstract

"Happiness is a positive emotional state" (Snyder & Lopex, 2007, p.128), which all humans strive for. "Happiness is the experience of joy, contentment, or positive well-being, combined with a sense that one's life is good, meaningful, and worthwhile" (Lyubormisky, 2007, p.32). The terms happiness and subjective well-being are used synonymously. Achieving happiness is the primary goal of humans. People are intrinsically motivated by nature to achieve complete and lasting happiness. Human actions and goals are thereby constantly directed towards enhancing their current level of happiness. The term "Gross National Happiness" was forwarded by the fourth king of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, in the 1970's (Allison, 2012). Gross National Happiness is "the degree to which citizens in a country enjoy the life they live" and can be regarded as the "average of individual happiness in the country" (Veenhoven, 2004, p.8). Bhutan realized the importance of happiness in an individual's life and adopted Gross National Happiness as a formal pursuit towards collective happiness for the nation. The economic and social policies of government of Bhutan are centered around promotion of holistic happiness for its citizens. Gross National Happiness Index is based on the four pillars of "good governance", "sustainable socio-economic development", "cultural preservation" and "environmental

conservation". It has nine domains and thirty three indicators (Gross National Happiness Centre, Bhutan). This research paper is an attempt to review the interdisciplinary work done by various researchers on the domains of Gross National Happiness Index.

Keywords: Happiness, Gross National Happiness Index and Lifestyle.

Introduction

"Happiness is a positive emotional state" (Snyder & Lopex, 2007, p.128) and is described as an "experience of joy, contentment, or positive well-being, combined with a sense that one's life is good, meaningful, and worthwhile" (Lyubormisky, 2007, p.32). "Overall happiness is the degree to which an individual judges the overall quality of his/her own life-as-a-whole favorably". It refers to how much an individual likes his/her life (Veenhoven, 2007, p.8). The terms "happiness", "subjective well-being", "quality of life", "life satisfaction" have been used interchangeably in the body of literature (Fave, Brdar, Freire, Vella-Brodrick, & Wissing, 2011).

Great philosopher and thinker Aristotle contended that attainment of happiness is the goal of life in humans (Younkins, 2003). Bhutan realized the importance of happiness in an individual's life and adopted Gross National Happiness as a formal pursuit towards collective happiness for the nation.



The term Gross National Happiness was first used by the fourth king of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck in early 1970's when he expressed that "Gross National Happiness" is relatively more crucial and significant than "Gross National Product" (Allison, 2012). Gross National Happiness refers to "the degree to which citizens in a country enjoy the life they live" and is "the average of individual happiness in the country" (Veenhoven, 2004, p.8). The economic and social policies of government of Bhutan are therefore centered on promotion of holistic happiness for its citizens.

Gross National Happiness Index

Gross national happiness is a multidimensional measure based on four pillars viz., "good governance", "sustainable socio-economic development", "cultural preservation" and "environmental conservation". Gross national happiness index has nine domains of "psychological wellbeing", "living standards", "good governance", "health", "education", "community vitality", "cultural resilience and promotion", "time-use" and "environment" (Gross National Happiness Centre Bhutan). Psychological wellbeing is measured through the components of "life satisfaction", "emotional balance" and "spirituality". Health is measured through the indicators of number of "healthy days" in a month, "self-reported health status", activity limitation (indicating "long-term disability") and "mental health". Education includes four indicators viz, "literacy", "educational qualifications", "knowledge" (gained from formal and informal institutions) and "values". Culture is assessed through indicators of "language", "artisan skills", "socio-cultural participation" and the "Way of Harmony" i.e.

shared way of life in terms of dressing, consumption patterns etc. Time use is assessed through indicators of "working hours" and "sleeping hours". Good governance is measured through indicators of "political freedom", "service delivery", "government performance" and "political participation". Community vitality is assessed through indicators of "social support" (i.e. the civic contributions made), "community relationship", "family" relationships and "victim of crime". Ecological diversity assesses perceptions of people over environment related matters and has indicators of "pollution", "environmental responsibility", "wildlife" and "urban issues". Standard of living is assessed through the indicators of "household income", "assets" and "housing quality" (Ura, Alkire, Zangmo, & Wangdi, 2012). Based on the responses obtained on these indicators a person is categorized as "deeply happy", "extensively happy", "narrowly happy", "unhappy" or "not-yet-happy" (Bergink, 2015). Review of the interdisciplinary work done cross-culturally on the different domains of Gross National Happiness Index is relevant in light of the significance of happiness in people's lives and its formal recognition by the Bhutanese government.

Psychological Well Being and Happiness

Happiness is the central component of well-being (Henriques, 2013). Psychological solutions such as spirituality can cause happiness in people (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). Diener, Sandvik and Pavot (2009) conducted a study on happiness and positive and negative affect. Global Happiness Scale (Fordyce, 1977), Affect Balance Scale (Bradburn, 1969) and Delighted-Terrible Scale (Andrews & Withey, 1976) were used for the purpose of



the study. Frequency and intensity of positive and negative affect as experienced by the participants in 6-8 weeks were recorded. The regression equation obtained revealed that "frequency of positive affect" was a relatively better indicator of happiness than "intensity of positive affect". The researchers concluded that "frequent positive affect is necessary and sufficient" for the experience of happiness while "intense positive affect is neither necessary nor sufficient" for the experience of happiness.

Standard of Living and Happiness

Veenhoven (2007) proposed a livability theory where he maintained that improvement in living conditions of institutional settings like schools and work organizations can enhance happiness levels in people. Ensuring a decent of standard of living to people can prove beneficial in promoting their current level of happiness.

Mixed results have been obtained by research experts who looked at the relationship of happiness with unemployment. Clark and Oswald (1994) in an empirical study conjectured that unemployment is related to unhappiness. Unemployment has a negative impact on happiness was reported by Diener, Suh, Lucas, and Smith (1999). Peiro (2006) aimed to study the relationship of happiness with unemployment and income in 15 countries. Although, unemployment was found to have a negative association with financial and life satisfaction in almost six of the countries but in no country an association of happiness with unemployment was reported. A non-linear relationship between happiness and income was found by the researchers. After people of a country were found to reach an average or high income level, income stopped

having a strong effect on the happiness of the people.

Good Governance and Happiness

Dissatisfaction with government and its institutions are negatively related to happiness (Lane, 2000). Helliwell and Huang (2008) performed an international analysis and documented a positive relationship between good governance and happiness. Inglehart, Foa, Peterson, and Welzel (2008) examined development, freedom, and rising happiness globally. Economic development, democratization and social liberalization determined an increase in sense of freedom in an individual. This increased sense of freedom emerged as a strong predictor of increased subjective well-being/happiness in the sample. Ott (2011) conducted a cross national study on happiness, *inequality* in happiness, *quality of government* and *size of government*. A good technical government was found to be related to high level of happiness in its citizens. Similarly, good democratic governance was associated to greater happiness in people. A big government fostered happiness in citizens provided it was a good government. Inequality of happiness in medium quality governments was greater as compared to high and low quality governments.

Worker participation and citizen participation are determinants of happiness.

Health and Happiness

Mental health status of an individual as a determinant of his/her degree of happiness can be traced back to research work carried out in 60's. Mentally ill individuals were found to experience less happiness as compared to mentally fit people (Phillips, 1967). Hellevik (2003) in an empirical study reported that



subjective evaluations of health are strongly related to degree of happiness in people. Individuals who regard themselves to be in good health are much happier than ones who do not. Objective indicator of health as assessed through frequency of visits to doctors was also found moderately related to happiness in the sample. Peiro (2006) examined the relationship of happiness and health in 15 countries. Twelve countries showed that having a bad health was associated with unhappiness. In the remaining nations no significant relationship emerged between the two variables.

Education and Happiness

Holistic education which involves going beyond formal education and focusing on traditional knowledge, values, skills and creativity is essential for the overall personality development of individuals (Ura et al., 2012). Cunado and De Gracia (2012) proposed that an increase in knowledge through education enhances an individual's self-confidence and self-perception thus having a direct influence on his happiness level. Education also indirectly determines happiness as it is associated with greater chances of getting employed, good job quality and salary. Chen (2012) proposed that education makes it possible for an individual to have good social networking, better and greater connectivity with the outside world which consequently enhances his happiness.

Community Vitality and Happiness

Davidson and Cotter (1991) found a significant positive relationship between sense of community and happiness. An investigation done by Cramm et al. (2012) examined the importance of neighbourhood social cohesion

and social capital in the well being of older adults of a community. "Social capital of individuals", "neighbourhood security", "neighbourhood services", "neighbourhood social capital", and "neighbourhood social cohesion" were significantly and positively linked to the well being of the sample. Single adults were reported as less happy than those who were married. Krueger, Hicks, and McGue (2001) reported a relationship between happiness and altruism. People who perform acts of kindness and engage in volunteerism are happier, healthier and live a longer life (Post, 2005).

Cultural Diversity and Happiness

Social participation is a determinant of the extent of happiness experienced by an individual. In an analysis done by Phillips (1967) frequency of get togethers with friends, number of neighbors known well enough to visit and participation in religious, social and civic organizations all influenced happiness levels in the sample. Cultural participation and participation in arts have a positive effect on people in general (Jeannotte, 2003; Matarasso, 2000). Barker and Martin (2011) opined that social participation gives a meaning to one's life thus influencing his experience of happiness.

Time Use and Happiness

Time use domain of Gross National Happiness refers to maintaining a healthy work-life balance between professional work, domestic work, leisure, sleep, personal care etc. (Ura et al., 2012). Myers (1993) suggested that proper sleep can enhance happiness level of an individual. Galay (2009) studied work hour duration with happiness. Duration of work hours was found to be related to happiness



levels. Participants who worked for longer durations were found to be less happy and showed stress symptoms.

Ecological Diversity and Happiness

Happiness is linked to sustainable behaviour (Brown & Kasser, 2005). Sustainable behaviour refers to practices aimed at protection and preservation of one's environment. Altruistic actions, pro-ecological behavior, equity are related to happiness. Altruistic actions, pro-ecological behavior, frugality and equity are indicative of a higher order construct of "sustainable behavior" which influences and enhances happiness (Corral-Verdugo et al., 2011).

Conclusions

There exists a positive relationship of "psychological well-being", "good governance", "good health", "community vitality", "cultural diversity", "ecological diversity" (including sustainable behaviours and practices of people) with happiness. While studies examining the relationship between education and happiness are largely indicative of a positive association between the two, studies suggest an inverse relationship of working overtime with happiness. Studies determining the relationship of standard of living with happiness are equivocal. While majority suggest an increase in standard of living related to an increase in happiness, some have found an opposite link and yet few have reported an insignificant relationship between the two. Governments and institutions across the world are joining the political happiness movement initiated by Bhutan. The survey of the state of happiness of people i.e., "The World Happiness Report" is published annually by the Sustainable Development

Solutions Network since 2012. Acknowledging the importance of happiness in people's lives, United Nations declared 20th March as "International Day of Happiness" in the year 2013 ("International Day Of Happiness", United Nations). In 2016, the first happiness department of India was set up by the state government of Madhya Pradesh (Biswas, 2017). Andhra Pradesh established its happiness department in 2017 (Apparasu, 2018) and now Maharashtra government is also keen to follow suit (Shaikh, 2017).

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