

# Happiness and Risk Behaviours in Freshman Students of Khorramabad Universities

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## Abstract

**Background:** Happiness is one of the 6 important senses and is associated with stress, anxiety, depression, and life satisfaction. These elements relate to risk behaviours.

**Objectives:** This study aimed at investigating happiness and its correlation with risk behaviours and environmental factors in freshman students.

**Methods:** Overall, 1056 new students were selected randomly from Khorramabad universities in 2015. Oxford happiness questionnaire (OHQ) was completed by the students. Independent t test, chi-square, and correlation coefficient with a significance level of 5% were used.

**Results:** Happiness score was  $4.09 \pm 0.71$  with no significant difference between genders or universities ( $P \geq 0.05$ ). Among females, happiness was associated with physical activities ( $P = 0.001$ ). Hookah smoking was associated with decreased happiness in all students ( $P = 0.001$ ). Among males, smoking had an inverse relationship with happiness ( $P = 0.037$ ).

**Conclusions:** Although the happiness score among students of various universities was high and comparable at the beginning of their academic course, the current study will be continued to investigate changes in students' happiness and also affecting factors throughout their education.

**Keywords:** College Students, Happiness, Iran, Risk Behaviours

## 1. Background

Happiness was interpreted as inclusive life satisfaction, enjoyment, and subjective well-being (1). It has 3 dimensions, including; frequency and degree of positive affection, average level of satisfaction during a period of time, and the absence of negative emotions, such as depression and anxiety (2, 3). Happiness is one of the main components of quality of life at all ages; positive attitude towards life, positive self-concept, being hopeful, attempting to achieve goals, social relationships stability, feeling satisfaction in association with others, improving team collaboration, and generally mental health are the subjective consequences of happiness (4-10). Physical health and immune system were effected by happiness; besides, there was a positive correlation between happiness and academic and/or job achievement. Happiness reduces burnout, especially in stressful jobs (11-13).

Recently, studies have measured happiness and explored factors effecting it, in various groups. The main factors of happiness are personal traits and physiological elements, which are inherited, for instance introversion, extroversion, and neuroticism (14). However, physical health, religiousness, and environmental, demographic,

and socio-economic factors should not be ignored (2, 13, 15-17). In addition, amusement and physical activity increase the level of happiness (18, 19). Based on emotional theories, happiness is one of the 6 important senses and is associated with stress, anxiety, depression, and life satisfaction; these elements relate to risk behaviours such as smoking, alcohol, and drugs abuse (11, 14).

Happiness is momentous in the young generation, especially in Iran, where the population is relatively young. Community leisure and future generations welfare are affected by happiness in the currently young generation (16). Furthermore, the level of happiness in university students is very significant; students are in a stressful situation and face many challenges. As most of Iranian adolescents intend to enter university, it seems that the universities' newcomers are suitable representatives of Iranian youth. Students are at the beginning of adulthood; they are effected by mental, emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and environmental changes during their academic studies and this may overshadow their happiness. On the other hand, learning is a comprehensive process, including thinking, feeling, perception, and behaviour, and is intensely influenced by emotional intelligence and happiness (20).

Several studies have been conducted on different

groups of Iranian universities students. The happiness score of students in Arak and Iran University of Medical Sciences was high (21, 22), while it was average among students of Isfahan University (23). However, these studies were carried out at specific types of universities, thus generalization of the results is criticized. Furthermore, happiness scores have not been compared between different types of universities (i.e. Medical Sciences, Basic Science, Azad, Payame Noor, and Technical Universities). Additionally, no longitudinal study has been conducted to determine the impact of various factors on happiness, during the academic education in Iran. Besides, no study in Iranian universities has investigated the relationship between risky behaviours and happiness.

This study aimed at investigating happiness and its correlation with risk behaviours and environmental factors in freshman students. This study employed the Oxford happiness 29-item questionnaire (OHQ), one of the most reliable tools for measuring happiness, designed by Argyle et al. (2), as well as a researcher-made questionnaire for appraising students' behaviours and environment. The obtained information from this study will be used as the basic data for a longitudinal study to assess fluctuations in happiness score and explore probable influential factors throughout academic education.

## 2. Materials and Methods

To study happiness in new students in Khorramabad universities, including University of Medical Sciences, Lorestan University, and Azad University, a cross sectional study was conducted during the summer of 2015.

### 2.1. Target Population and Area

Khorramabad, the capital of Lorestan province, is located in central-western Iran. In this city, there are Universities of Medical Sciences, Lorestan, and Azad University, which accept students of different grades and both genders, on an annual basis.

### 2.2. Sample Size and Sampling

In this study, 1056 cases were selected using multistage random sampling. The sample size was calculated regarding 0.9 standard deviation for mean score of happiness, confidence coefficient of 99%, level of error (d) of 0.1, and design effect of 2. Sampling was in a way that various faculties of these 3 universities were scheduled as a strata, and fields of study were considered as clusters. Then, on a random basis, samples were selected proportionally, according to size of clusters.

Students accepted to Medical Sciences, Lorestan, and Azad University, in any field, in the first (Mehr) or second (Bahman) semester of 2014 were included in the study. However, guest or visiting students as well as withdrawal students were excluded.

### 2.3. Data Collection

The Oxford happiness questionnaire was used to measure happiness. The questionnaire contains 29 questions; the original version was produced by Argyle and Lu in 1989, and was translated to Persian in 1999 (24).

The answers of the questions were designed based on a Likert scale with 6 options (strongly disagree, moderately disagree, slightly disagree, slightly agree, moderately agree, and strongly agree). Respectively, Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.9 for original version and 0.93 for the Persian version was reported by Argyle and Noorbala, respectively. The researcher also added questions to the questionnaire about demographic information including age, gender, marital status, profession, place and type of residence, parental education, and certain health-related behaviors such as exercise, smoking, drugs, tobacco, and alcohol.

After selecting the students and explaining the purpose of the study, the confidentiality of their information, independency in answering the questions, and obtaining an informed consent, self-administrated questionnaires were completed by the students.

### 2.4. Data Analysis

After reviewing the questionnaires, the data were coded and entered in the Spss software version 20. According to the ranking of responses, each question was assigned a score between 1 and 6. Therefore, any of the options listed before, respectively, were scored from 1 to 6, albeit, scoring of 12 questions was vice versa. The average scores of the 29 questions were considered as the individual happiness score.

Happiness scores were classified in 3 groups based on the percentiles: percentile 25 was considered as low happiness, percentile between 25 and 75 was intermediate happiness, and percentile 75 indicated high happiness (25).

To estimate the descriptive results, frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were calculated. Chi-Square and independent t test were used to compare characteristics between males and females. To estimate the results of the relationship between the dependent variable (happiness) and independent variables (demographic variables and health-related variables), independent t test, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), and correlation coefficient were used. Also, a significance level of 5% was considered.

### 3. Results

In this study, 1056 new students were enrolled. Overall, 18.8% were from the University of Medical Sciences, 23.8% from Azad University, and 57.4% from Lorestan University. Their mean age was  $19.6 \pm 2.23$  years. In total, 37.5% of the students were male, 94.1% were single, and 62.1% were native.

Overall, the prevalence of health-related behaviors among subjects, including physical activity, smoking, alcohol, tobacco, and drugs, respectively, was 51.9%, 3.4%, 2%, 7.3%, and 2.3%; all the behaviors had significantly higher prevalence in males than females ( $P = 0.03$ ). Demographic variables and health-related variables are showed in [Table 1](#).

Mean happiness score was 4.09 with a standard deviation of 0.71. Males and females happiness scores were 4.10 and 4.08, respectively, with no significant difference ( $P = 0.641$ ). Generally, average happiness score of students was between percentile of 25 and 75, indicating intermediate happiness.

Happiness score between students of various universities was not significantly different ( $P = 0.63$ ).

The female's happiness score was significantly associated with their physical activities ( $P = 0.001$ ) while this relationship was not significant for boys ( $P > 0.05$ ).

Regarding hookah smoking in all students, male and female, happiness scores among those, who had a habit of use and those, who had tried only once was lower in comparison to those who did not try it at all ( $P = 0.001$ ).

Among boys, smoking had an inverse significant relationship with the happiness score ( $P = 0.037$ ). In both genders, there was no significant correlation between happiness score and family size ( $r = -0.03$  and  $P = 0.321$ ) or age ( $r = 0.034$  and  $P = 0.277$ ). Happiness score in the other subgroups showed no significant difference ( $P > 0.05$ ) ([Table 2](#)).

### 4. Discussion

The results of this study, conducted on Khorramabad new students from different universities, showed that average happiness score of students was intermediate. However, another study showed that about one-fifth of Lorestan University students of Medical Sciences had a low happiness score ([24](#)). While in the other universities of medical sciences, Arak, Kashan, and Iran, the average happiness score was high ([21](#), [22](#), [26](#)). In students of Isfahan universities, the average happiness score was moderate ([27](#)). Another study showed that about two-thirds of the Isfahan graduate students had upper limit of happiness score and about a third of them had moderate happiness score ([28](#)).

It seems that one of the main reasons for the difference between levels of happiness in various studies is discrepancy in categorizing happiness scores, thus, attention to this matter is very important.

Results revealed that, happiness grades in students studied in various universities were not significantly different. Although the field of study was not considered in the current study, yet, results of studies among students of Medical Sciences in Khorramabad, and Iran universities showed that happiness score was not significantly correlated with the educational program ([22](#), [29](#)). Sharifi et al. could not show a meaningful relationship between the type of college and the happiness score ([26](#)). Nevertheless, some of academic fields may have stressful careers in the future, therefore assessment of happiness and its variations during education, regarding level and major of education, is proposed for the second phase of the current study in the future.

Based on the results, average happiness score had no significant difference in male and female students. There was no significant relationship between happiness and gender in the study on the students of Iran Medical Science University ([22](#)). While the results of another study showed that happiness score among students in Khorramabad Medical Sciences University had a significant relationship with gender ([29](#)). In a study done by Sharifi et al., the average happiness score in males was higher than females ([26](#)). Results of the study showed that among Petroleum college students in Abadan, happiness score among females was significantly more than males ([23](#)). As there was not concurrence between results of studies, performing more research on gender differences in students' happiness score and effective factors are recommended.

Results of the current study showed that physical activity has a direct relationship with happiness of students, especially in female students. Malekian et al. showed that happiness score in athletic students was higher than non-athletic students ([18](#)). However, the question that still remains is whether people, who have higher happiness, will turn more towards physical activity, or people, who are more physically active, have a happier life. Although several studies have shown the impact of physical activity on increasing the level of an individual's happiness ([30](#)), further investigation on the impact of physical activity on the level of students' happiness, as well as the happiness level among students that tend to do more physical activity, is proposed in the second phase of this study, in future.

The results showed that the use of hookah in both genders, and smoking among male students was inversely related to the level of happiness of people. The results showed that nonsmoking students had a happier life than smoking students. Also, the smokers, who consumed

**Table 1.** Demographic and Health-Related Characteristics of Participants<sup>a</sup>

Demographic and Health-Related Variables		Male	Female	P Value
Marital status	Married	12 (3)	48 (7.3)	0.004
	Single	382 (97)	612 (92.7)	
University type	Lorestan	174 (43.9)	432 (65.5)	< 0.001
	Azad	157 (39.6)	94 (14.2)	
Habitat	Indigenous	272 (69.4)	384 (58.7)	0.001
	Non-indigenous	120 (30.6)	270 (41.3)	
Living	With parents	215 (55)	256 (39)	< 0.001
	In government dormitory	37 (9.5)	233 (35.5)	
	In private dormitory	106 (27.1)	141 (21.5)	
Employed	Yes	51 (13)	7 (1.1)	< 0.001
	No	342 (83)	648 (98.9)	
Education level (Mother)	Illiterate	74 (19)	108 (16.5)	< 0.001
	Elementary	69 (17.7)	191 (29.2)	
	Incomplete diploma	59 (15.2)	95 (14.5)	
	Diploma	114 (29.3)	198 (30.2)	
Education level (Father)	Graduated	73 (18.8)	63 (9.6)	< 0.001
	Illiterate	40 (10.4)	76 (11.6)	
	Elementary	52 (13.5)	150 (23)	
	Incomplete diploma	42 (10.9)	90 (13.8)	
Physical activity	Diploma	111 (28.8)	167 (25.6)	< 0.001
	Graduated	140 (36.4)	170 (26)	
Smoking	No	136 (34.3)	372 (56.4)	< 0.001
	Yes	260 (65.7)	288 (43.6)	
Drugs using	No	370 (93.4)	648 (98.5)	< 0.001
	Yes	26 (6.6)	10 (1.5)	
Alcohol using	No	379 (95.7)	653 (98.9)	0.001
	Yes	17 (4.3)	7 (1.1)	
Trying hookah smoking	No	379 (95.7)	656 (99.4)	< 0.001
	Yes	17 (4.3)	4 (0.6)	
Trying hookah smoking	No	289 (73)	546 (82.7)	< 0.001
	Only once	57 (14.4)	87 (13.2)	
	Yes	50 (12.6)	27 (4.1)	

<sup>a</sup>Value are expressed as N, (%).

hookah more, had lower levels of happiness. The other students, who had no experience of cigarette or/and hookah use, had higher level of happiness than experienced students. Tavakolizadeh et al. mentioned no significant relationship between self-confidence and smoking among students (31). There was no study on the association of smoking and happiness among Iranian students, although some studies in other countries have found that there is a significant association between happiness of students and lack of or less cigarette use (32). According to the results, it appears that people, who have lower levels of happiness, are more prone towards smoking and hookah to obtain

happiness. This can indicate the significant role of happiness in students' tendency to hookah, cigarettes, drugs or other high-risk behaviors. Although in this study the relationship between happiness score with high-risk behaviors, such as alcohol and drugs was not found, assessing the prevalence of risky behaviors and their impacts on happiness of students score is recommended in the second phase of this study.

In this study, no significant relationship was found between the students' happiness and marital status, which is consistent with the study of Sharifi et al. (26). However, Kobau et al. in their study showed that happiness scores

**Table 2.** Mean Happiness Scores Among Students Based on Demographic and Health-Related Characteristics<sup>a</sup>

Demographic and Health-Related Variables		Happiness Score					
		Total	P Value	Male	P Value	Female	P Value
Marital status	Married	4.08 (0.71)	0.121	4.28 (0.76)	0.323	4.09 (0.71)	0.227
	Single	4.23 (0.73)		4.07 (0.70)		4.22 (0.73)	
University type	Lorestan	4.08 (0.75)	0.631	4.03 (0.67)	0.333	4.05 (0.69)	0.526
	Azad	4.11 (0.69)		4.14 (0.70)		4.10 (0.71)	
habitat	Indigenous	4.10 (0.71)	0.738	4.09 (0.72)	0.839	4.11 (0.70)	0.752
	Non-indigenous	4.08 (0.71)		4.07 (0.66)		4.09 (0.73)	
Living	With parents	4.08 (0.71)	0.299	4.09 (0.74)	0.818	4.06 (0.68)	0.418
	In government dormitory	4.15 (0.74)		4.13 (0.77)		4.16 (0.73)	
	In private dormitory	4.05 (0.68)		4.04 (0.64)		4.05 (0.72)	
Employed	Having private house	4.03 (0.58)	0.360	4.00 (0.58)	0.824	4.51 ( )	0.071
	Others	4.23 (0.84)		4.23 (0.81)		4.23 (0.87)	
	Yes	4.01 (0.80)		4.06 (0.82)		3.61 (0.55)	
Education level (Mother)	No	4.09 (0.71)	0.142	4.08 (0.69)	0.642	4.10 (0.71)	0.277
	Illiterate	3.98 (0.64)		4.00 (0.66)		3.97 (0.63)	
	Elementary	4.10 (0.73)		4.04 (0.59)		4.12 (0.76)	
	Incomplete diploma	4.08 (0.68)		4.08 (0.64)		4.08 (0.69)	
Education level (Father)	Diploma	4.17 (0.69)	0.331	4.16 (0.73)	0.534	4.17 (0.68)	0.162
	Graduated	4.10 (0.83)		4.09 (0.89)		4.13 (0.81)	
	Illiterate	4.09 (0.66)		3.93 (0.61)		4.18 (0.67)	
	Elementary	4.01 (0.71)		4.10 (0.66)		3.98 (0.72)	
Physical activity	Incomplete diploma	4.09 (0.58)	0.001	4.05 (0.59)	0.092	4.12 (0.57)	< 0.001
	Diploma	4.11 (0.75)		4.06 (0.72)		4.14 (0.77)	
Smoking	Graduated	4.15 (0.74)	0.198	4.14 (0.75)	0.037	4.15 (0.72)	0.525
	No	3.98 (0.76)		4.00 (0.76)		3.98 (0.76)	
Drug use	Yes	4.17 (0.63)	0.339	4.12 (0.67)	0.207	4.26 (0.62)	0.644
	No	4.08 (0.71)		4.10 (0.69)		4.10 (0.72)	
Alcohol using	Yes	3.81 (0.56)	0.11	3.80 (0.85)	0.136	3.96 (0.66)	0.105
	No	4.08 (0.71)		4.09 (0.69)		4.10 (0.72)	
Trying hookah smoking	Yes	3.85 (0.58)	< 0.001	3.87 (0.86)	0.001	3.98 (0.68)	0.002
	No	4.08 (0.71)		4.09 (0.71)		4.11 (0.72)	
Trying hookah smoking	Yes	3.71 (0.32)	0.001	3.83 (0.51)	0.001	3.52 (0.57)	0.002
	No	4.13 (0.72)		4.15 (0.71)		4.14 (0.72)	
Trying hookah smoking	Only once	3.87 (0.56)	< 0.001	3.98 (0.68)	0.001	3.99 (0.63)	0.002
	Yes	3.72 (0.54)		3.77 (0.59)		3.68 (0.62)	

<sup>a</sup>Value are expressed as Mean (sd).

are significantly higher in married individuals than single cases (33). However, in the current study, the frequency of students made no significant difference between married and single cases. Due to increasing frequency of marital status among students, a more subtle and closer study is recommended in the future. Also comparing the happiness score before and after marriage in the second phase of the study is suggested.

In this study, there was no significant and meaningful relationship between other variables such as being indigenous or non-indigenous, lifestyles, employment status, ed-

ucation level of parents, and the level of students' happiness. In the study on students of Iran Medical Science University, there was no significant relationship between happiness and being native or non-native (22). In Kashan University of Medical Sciences, the relationship between place of residence and happiness was not significant (26). The results of the study of Bonab et al. showed a relationship between happiness and family income level, education level of father, and the students' extroversion (4). Nami et al. showed that happiness of females was influenced by socioeconomic level (16). Due to the possibility of further em-



ployment in future academic years, in the second phase of the study, the effect of employment and economic status on happiness among students can be better studied.

As various studies have shown that there is a significant relationship between happiness and self-efficacy (2, 13, 34), it appears that attention to happiness of students at the beginning and its changes over time and causes of these changes are important. By training the students about life skills (16) during the course, especially in areas that are stressful, can greatly increase the level of happiness of students. It is important to note that alongside physical and environmental factors affecting happiness, cognitive and emotional factors affecting happiness should also be considered. The perception dimension is associated with life satisfaction, emotional intelligence (25), and personality traits (4, 11, 15); these factors are considered as predictors of the students' academic performances. Emotional dimension has a strong relationship with mood and creates a balance between positive and negative emotions of people, which can greatly effect students' happiness.

The limitation of the present study was the use of self-administered questionnaires that can cause bias in the information, including different perceptions of the questions.

The current study was conducted only on new students, and it is possible that the results of this study have differences with other studies that were conducted on older students, in which happiness is effected by environmental conditions and factors related to living and studying (20). However, it is hoped to continue the second phase of the study and continue working with the students throughout their education to accurately investigate changes in their happiness and also factors affecting these changes.

#### 4.1. Conclusion

Although the happiness score among students of various universities is high and comparable at the beginning of the schooling duration, we will continue the second phase of the study to investigate changes in students' happiness and also influential factors throughout their education.

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#### Footnotes

**Authors' Contribution:** Mohammad Javad Tarrahi designed the study, analysed, and interpreted the data.

Maryam Nasirian drafted the manuscript. Both authors revised the manuscript critically and approved the final version.

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