

Research Paper

Predictors of Happiness: The Role of Sex, Stream of Study, Area of Residence and Religiosity

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ABSTRACT

This research paper is an attempt to explore the predictors of the happiness among undergraduate students. To fulfill the objectives of the study, a sample of 80 third-year undergraduate students of Arts and Science streams, comprising an equal number of male and female participants, was selected from Feroze Gandhi College, Rae Bareli. Data were collected using two standardized tools; (1) the Positive Psychotherapy Inventory (PPTI) by Tayyab Rashid (2008) and (2) Religiosity Scale by Bhushan (2009). Results were analyzed using Pearson's product-moment correlation and stepwise hierarchical multiple regression to identify significant predictors of each happiness dimension. Findings of the study revealed that the happiness among undergraduate students is influenced more strongly by personal and psychological factors such as sex and religiosity than by structural variables like stream of study or area of residence. Female students reported higher levels of pleasant, engaged and meaningful life compared to their male counterparts.

Keywords: *Happiness, Sex, Stream of Study, Area of Residence, Religiosity, Undergraduate Students*

Happiness is a multidimensional construct that has attracted considerable attention in Psychology now-a-days. Psychologists such as Seligman (2002) proposed that happiness comprises three elements: the pleasant life, the good life and the meaningful life. The pleasant life involves everyday pleasures that bring joy and excitement; the good life focuses on using one's talents and skills to achieve engagement and satisfaction; and the meaningful life centers on using those strengths to serve a greater purpose. People who balance all three experience the "full life". Thus, it is not only a subjective experience of pleasure and life satisfaction but also a vital indicator of psychological well-being and quality of life.

Schueller and Seligman (2010) observed that pleasure, engagement and meaning each predict well-being but engagement and meaning show stronger associations with both subjective and objective well-being than pleasure. Their findings suggest that meaningful and engaging activities contribute more to well-being than the pursuit of pleasure alone. Deci and Ryan (2000) proposed that human motivation and well-being depend on the fulfillment of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness.

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When these needs are supported, individuals show greater motivation, growth and mental health whereas unmet needs lead to poorer functioning and well-being.

Happiness is often described as an individual's emotional and cognitive evaluation of their life, encompassing overall life satisfaction, the presence of positive emotions and the absence of negative ones (Diener et al., 1999). Similarly, Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) define happiness as a subjective state shaped by life satisfaction and the balance of positive and negative effects.

Happiness is studied from two main perspectives: hedonism and eudaimonia. The hedonic approach defines well-being in terms of pleasure, life satisfaction, and the balance of positive and negative emotions. In contrast, the eudaimonic perspective emphasizes that genuine happiness arises from optimal psychological functioning, involving the realization of one's full potential and living in accordance with one's true self (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

The fast-paced and demanding nature of modern life has led to increased stress and social pressures, making it essential to examine the factors that contribute to happiness. Neto (2001) revealed that happiness was positively linked with life satisfaction, self-esteem and sociability, and negatively linked with embarrassability, loneliness, shyness and social anxiety. Additionally, four variables life satisfaction, shyness, loneliness and sociability were found to explain 58 percent of the total variance in happiness scores.

Individual characteristics such as sex, stream of study and area of residence may play a crucial role in shaping levels of happiness. Gender differences are often reported in the experience and expression of emotions while the choice of academic stream may expose students to varying degrees of stress, expectations and opportunities, influencing their overall well-being.

In a study of 286 adolescents Garaigordobil (2015) found that happiness decreases with age but does not differ by sex. Happier adolescents showed fewer psychological and behavior problems, higher self-esteem, better social skills and more cooperation. Five key predictors of happiness were high self-concept, high self-esteem, low depression, low psychoticism and cooperative behavior. Self-esteem partially mediated the link between happiness and psychopathological symptoms. Dubey, Chauhan and Pal (2024) also reported that male and female students experience similar levels of happiness and that happiness is positively associated with academic achievement for both groups.

Hori and Kamo (2017) examined happiness in China, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, and found that its predictors vary by gender. Marital status strongly predicts happiness, particularly for men while employment shows differing effects across countries. Social support is positively related to happiness, especially among women. Blanchflower and Bryson (2024) analyzed cross-national and longitudinal data and found that women consistently report poorer mental health than men across multiple indicators including anxiety, depression and sleep quality. Their findings also provide strong evidence that men report higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction than women in recent years including before the pandemic.

In a study Gharat (2023) reported that undergraduate arts students showed significantly higher levels of happiness and mental health than science students in colleges. The findings indicate that academic stream plays an important role in students' overall well-being.

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Tabbodi, Rahgozar and Abadi (2015) reported that female students outperform male students in both academic achievement and happiness although overall happiness levels remain below average for all students. A significant positive relationship exists between happiness and academic achievement for both boys and girls. Moreover, this positive association is evident across various academic disciplines including economics and management, humanities, engineering, fundamental sciences, and art and architecture.

But Hochschild Ovalle et al. (2024) revealed that students who feel happier at school generally achieve better academic results though this relationship differs by grade level and subject. In the early years, happiness helps reduce the negative impact of low socioeconomic status especially for disadvantaged students. By Grade 10, the positive link between happiness and achievement is stronger among wealthier students and boys, particularly in mathematics. The findings also highlight the importance of self-efficacy as students with higher confidence perform better and gain more from feeling happy at school.

Similarly, the area of residence urban or rural may determine access to resources, social support and lifestyle patterns which in turn contribute to happiness. Prati (2024) analyzed data from more than 507,000 individuals across 115 countries to examine the association between rural–urban residence and subjective well-being. Life satisfaction and happiness were used as indicators. Although statistically significant relationships emerged after controlling for key sociodemographic factors, the effect sizes were very small and displayed nonlinear patterns. These findings suggest that rural–urban residence alone has limited practical relevance for explaining subjective well-being.

Alongside these demographic and contextual factors, religiosity has emerged as a significant psychosocial variable linked with happiness. Religiosity provides individuals with meaning, purpose and a sense of belonging often acting as a buffer against stress and adversity. Prior research suggests that individuals with strong religious beliefs or practices tend to report higher levels of life satisfaction and subjective well-being.

David et al. (2022) examined how spirituality, gratitude and forgiveness contribute to students' academic performance through the role of happiness. Using data from 220 management students from various Indian universities, the study found that both gratitude and forgiveness were positively associated with students' happiness and academic success. Spirituality was found to strengthen the relationship between self-forgiveness and happiness while happiness acted as a mediator between gratitude and academic performance. The findings support a moderated–mediation model, highlighting that positive psychological traits and spiritual orientation play an important role in enhancing students' well-being and academic achievement.

Abdel-Khalek (2006) studied 2,210 Kuwaiti Muslim undergraduates and found that males reported higher happiness and mental health while females reported higher religiosity. Mental health emerged as the strongest predictor of happiness followed by religiosity indicating that more religious students tended to be happier. Gundlach and Opfinger (2013) examined the link between happiness and religiosity using cross-country panel dataset within a utility theory framework. Their findings suggest that religiosity can substitute for income in maintaining happiness. The result also confirms that happiness is positively related to both religiosity and income while religiosity is negatively related to income.

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Objectives:

1. To explore the relationship between happiness and selected demographic factors such as sex, stream of study, area of residence and religiosity.
2. To examine the predictive power of sex, stream of study, area of residence and religiosity in determining the level of happiness among undergraduate students.

Hypotheses:

1. Sex, stream of study, area of residence and religiosity will be significantly related to the three dimensions of happiness i.e. pleasant life, engaged life and meaningful life.
2. Sex, stream of study, area of residence and religiosity will significantly predict the three dimensions of happiness i.e. pleasant life, engaged life and meaningful life.

METHODOLOGY

Participants:

The study was carried out on a sample of 80 third-year undergraduate students of Arts and Science streams from Feroze Gandhi College, Rae Bareilly. The sample consisted of an equal number of males (40) and females (40). In addition, stream of study and area of residence were also taken into consideration, with 47 students from the Arts stream and 33 from the Science stream as well as 37 students from urban areas and 43 from rural areas.

Tools:

Two measures were employed to assess the happiness and religiosity of the participants:

1. **The Positive Psychotherapy Inventory (PPTI):** To examine the participants' approaches to happiness and overall well-being the Positive Psychotherapy Inventory (PPTI) developed by Tayyab Rashid (2008) was used. The inventory consists of 21 items and divided equally into three subscales: pleasant life, engaged life and meaningful life. Each subscale containing seven items. Participants respond to each item using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 0 to 3, indicating the extent to which each statement reflects their experiences, feelings or behaviors. Higher scores indicate stronger experiences in each dimension, reflecting greater levels of happiness and well-being.
2. **Religiosity Scale (RS):** To assess the religiosity level of the participants Religiosity Scale developed and standardized by Bhushan (2009) was used. The scale consists of 36 items and each item has to rate on five-point Likert scale i.e. Totally Agree, Agree, Can't Say, Disagree and Totally Disagree. For each item five numbers are given in order so that 5 indicate the response "Totally Agree" and similarly 1 represents "Totally Disagree". Participants have to circle the number that best reflects their response to each statement. The reliability of the scale was assessed using the split-half and test-retest methods, yielding reliability coefficients of 0.69 and 0.78, respectively. A higher score on this scale reflects higher level of religiosity.

Procedure:

After obtaining consent, randomly selected participants were briefed about the purpose of the research and assured of confidentiality. Before administering the tests, a good rapport was established and clear instructions were provided to all participants. They were also asked to complete all required details such as sex, stream of study, area of residence etc. on the front page of both tests. Both questionnaires were administered under controlled conditions and responses were collected systematically. Scoring was conducted in accordance with the procedures outlined in the both tests manual. The data were then

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compiled and statistically analyzed to examine the relationships among the selected variables.

RESULTS

The collected data was analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation), Pearson's product-moment correlation and stepwise hierarchical multiple regression were computed. The findings are presented below:

Table-1: Mean, SD & Intervariable Correlations (N=80)

Sl. No.	Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.	Sex	1.50	.50	-						
2.	Stream of study	1.41	.50	-.18	-					
3.	Area of residence	1.54	.50	.23*	-.04	-				
4.	Religiosity	112.89	26.60	.21	-.18	.06	-			
5.	Pleasant life	12.29	3.81	.33**	-.21	-.10	.29**	-		
6.	Engaged life	12.32	3.67	.32**	-.35**	.00	.26*	.62**	-	
7.	Meaningful life	11.39	4.00	.33**	-.27*	-.03	.28*	.58**	.48*	-

* P <.05 ** P <.01

Table-1 shows the mean, standard deviation and intercorrelation of the variables for the sample of 80 participants. The mean values indicate that the sample was fairly balanced across sex (M=1.50, SD=0.50), stream of study (M=1.41, SD=0.50), and area of residence (M=1.54, SD=0.50). Religiosity showed a relatively high average score (M=112.89, SD=26.60) while the three dimensions of happiness—pleasant (M=12.29, SD=3.81), engaged (M=12.32, SD=3.67) and meaningful (M=11.39, SD=4.00) also displayed moderate mean levels.

Correlational analysis revealed several significant relationships (Table-1). Sex is positively correlated with area of residence ($r = .23, p <.05$) and all three dimensions of happiness: pleasant ($r = .33, p <.01$), engaged ($r = .32, p <.01$) and meaningful ($r = .33, p <.01$), suggesting that sex plays an influential role in happiness. Stream of study shows negative correlations with engaged ($r = -.35, p <.01$) and meaningful ($r = -.27, p <.05$), indicating that students from Science streams reported lower engagement and meaning in life. Religiosity is significantly and positively associated with pleasant ($r = .29, p <.01$), engaged ($r = .26, p <.05$) and meaningful ($r = .28, p <.05$), highlighting its role in enhancing happiness. Among the dimensions of happiness, pleasant, engaged and meaningful are strongly intercorrelated. The highest association found between pleasant and engaged ($r = .62, p <.01$) followed by pleasant and meaningful ($r = .58, p <.01$). Overall, the results suggest that sex and religiosity are important predictors of happiness dimensions while stream of study shows a negative association with engagement and meaning. Thus, the findings partially support the hypothesis no.1 demonstrating that sex and religiosity are positively related with happiness but stream of study is negatively associated with engagement and meaning in life while area of residence do not emerge as a significant correlate of happiness dimensions.

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Table-2: Results of Stepwise Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Pleasant life (N=80)

Predictors	R ²	β	t = (2,77)
1. Sex	.11	.28	2.59**
2. Religiosity	.16	.23	2.18 *
*p <.05 **p <.01 ***p <.001			

R = .40, R²= .16, F (2, 77) = 7.27 ***
 {R = .33, R²= .11, F (1, 78) = 9.33 **}

Note:

1. R, R²& F values given under parenthesis are the first predictor viz; Sex.
2. Two predictors (Stream of study and Area of residence) could not be entered into the regression equation.

Table-3: Results of Stepwise Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Engaged life (N=80)

Predictors	R ²	β	t = (2,77)
1. Stream of study	.13	-.31	- 2.94 **
2. Sex	.20	.27	2.58 **
p <.01 *p <.001			

R = .44, R²= .20, F (2, 77) = 9.31 ***
 {R = .35, R² = .13, F (1, 78) = 11.15 ***}

Note:

1. R, R²& F values given under parenthesis are the first predictor viz; Stream of Study.
2. Two predictors (Area of residence and Religiosity) could not be entered into the regression equation.

Table-4: Results of Stepwise Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Meaningful life (N=80)

Predictors	R ²	β	t = (2,77)
1. Sex	.11	.28	2.64 **
2. Religiosity	.16	.22	2.07 *
* p <.05 ** p <.01			

R = .40, R²= .16, F (2, 77) = 7.11 ***
 {R = .33, R²= .11, F (1, 78) = 9.54 **}

Note:

1. R, R² & F values given under parenthesis are the first predictor viz; Sex.
2. Two predictors (Stream of study and Area of residence) could not be entered into the regression equation.

The stepwise hierarchical multiple regression analysis presented in Table-2 to Table-4. The criterion variables in this study were three viz., pleasant life, engaged life and meaningful life. The results reveal that sex emerged as the first significant predictor of pleasant life (Table-2). It alone explained 11 percent variance out of the total 16 percent. The positive beta value (β = .28) indicates that female students are more meaningfully associated with

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pleasant life. Religiosity is the second important predictor. It explained 5 percent of the total variance and beta value is positive ($\beta = .23$, Table-2). It means that student with higher religiosity reported greater pleasant life. But other two variables, namely stream of study and area of residence do not explain any variance at all.

But in the case of engaged life, a different pattern emerges (Table-3). Stream of study alone explained 13 percent variance out of the total 20 percent variance. The negative beta value ($\beta = -.31$) indicates that students of science stream being associated with lower engagement. Sex is the second important predictor and explained 7 percent of the total variance. The positive beta value ($\beta = .27$, Table-3) indicates that female students reported higher levels of engagement in life. Two predictors area of residence and religiosity do not explain any variance.

In predicting meaningful life, the findings turned out to be the same as those for pleasant life (Table-4). Sex emerged as the first significant predictor which explained 11 percent variance out of the total 16 percent variance. The positive beta value ($\beta = .28$) indicates that female students experience a higher level of meaningful life compared to male students. Religiosity emerged as a second significant predictor. It explained 5 percent of the total variance and beta value is positive ($\beta = .22$, Table-4). It means that students with higher religiosity experienced greater meaningful life. Thus, similar to pleasant life, stream of study and area of residence do not explain any variance at all.

Thus, hypothesis no.2 is partially supported. Sex emerged as a consistent and significant predictor across all three dimensions of happiness. Religiosity significantly predicted pleasant and meaningful life but not engaged life. Stream of study significantly predicted only engaged life while area of residence did not significantly predict any dimension of happiness.

DISCUSSION

The present study sought to examine how sex, academic stream, area of residence and religiosity influence the happiness among undergraduate students. The results clearly indicate that sex plays a significant role in shaping all three dimensions of happiness. Female students reported higher levels of pleasant, engaged and meaningful life compared to male students. These findings aligns with previous research suggesting that women tend to experience and express emotions more openly and maintain stronger interpersonal connections which contribute to higher subjective well-being (Tabbodi, Rahgozar & Abadi, 2015; Garaigordobil, 2015). The present results also support studies showing that females often demonstrate higher emotional awareness, empathy and relational engagement which contribute to greater psychological well-being.

Although studies such as Blanchflower and Bryson (2024) have shown poorer mental health among women. The present results suggest that within a college context, women may experience greater emotional engagement and meaning in life. This could be attributed to the supportive academic and peer environment which may buffer stress and foster well-being among female students. Thus, gender differences in happiness appear to be context-dependent rather than universal.

Stream of study emerged as a significant predictor only for the engaged life dimension. Students from science streams reported lower engagement compared to those from arts streams. This finding supports earlier research suggesting that science education often

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involves rigid structures, heavy workloads and performance pressure which may reduce intrinsic motivation and emotional involvement (Gharat, 2023). In contrast, arts disciplines often encourage creativity, self-expression and reflective thinking which may foster deeper engagement and personal involvement in learning.

However, stream of study do not significantly predict pleasant and meaningful life. This indicates that disciplinary differences alone do not shape overall happiness. This supports the notion that happiness is not merely determined by academic specialization but is influenced by broader psychological and social experiences within the educational environment.

The absence of a significant relationship between area of residence and any dimension of happiness suggests that rural and urban background may have limited relevance in determining well-being among college students. This finding is consistent with Prati's (2024) which reported minimal practical effects of residence after controlling for socio-demographic variables.

Religiosity emerged as a significant predictor of both pleasant and meaningful life which highlights its importance as a psychological and emotional resource. Students with higher religiosity reported greater happiness, particularly in terms of life meaning and positive emotional experiences. Consistent with earlier research, the findings suggest that religiosity enhances individuals' sense of meaning, moral framework, and emotional well-being (Abdel-Khalek, 2006; Gundlach & Opfinger, 2013).

The strong association between religiosity and meaningful life supports the eudaimonic perspective of well-being which emphasizes purpose and self-realization. Religiosity may foster resilience, hope and coping strategies that help individuals navigate stress and adversity, thereby enhancing overall well-being. Consistent with David et al. (2022), the present findings suggest that spiritual orientation strengthens positive psychological functioning and contributes indirectly to academic and personal success.

The strong intercorrelations among pleasant, engaged and meaningful life support Seligman's (2002) conceptualization of happiness as a multidimensional yet integrated construct. While each dimension represents a distinct aspect of well-being but they are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Students who experience positive emotions are more likely to feel engaged and perceive meaning in their lives and vice versa.

CONCLUSION

The present study demonstrates that happiness is a multidimensional construct shaped by a complex interplay of personal, psychological and contextual factors. Female students and those with higher religiosity reported greater levels of pleasant and meaningful life while stream of study influenced engagement but not overall happiness. These findings underscore the importance of fostering supportive academic environments and strengthening students' internal psychological resources to promote holistic well-being. Future research may further explore longitudinal patterns and include additional psychosocial variables such as resilience, self-efficacy and social support to deepen understanding of happiness among young adults.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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