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Factors promoting happiness among college students

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Abstract
The present study examined the level of happiness and the socio-psychological factors associated with happiness among young college students. Happiness is an important aspect of psychological well-being and is associated with academic performance and overall quality of life. A cross-sectional study was conducted among 248 male and female college students aged 18–25 years. Happiness was assessed using the Oxford Happiness Index developed by Argyle and Hills (2002) [5], a 29-item Likert-type scale measuring different aspects of personal and social well-being. The findings showed that male students reported a slightly higher mean happiness score (M = 3.92, SD = 0.68) than female students (M = 3.88, SD = 0.56). However, the difference was not statistically significant, t = 0.50, p > .05. Principal component analysis of the 29-item scale identified five factors associated with happiness. Among male students, the prominent factors were beauty, cheerfulness, mental alertness, and energy. Among female students, the factors included reward, laughter, attraction, beauty, and cheerfulness. Overall, the findings indicate that happiness among college students is influenced by a combination of socio-psychological and environmental factors rather than biological factors alone. The study highlights the importance of understanding students' emotional, social, and psychological experiences. The findings may help educators, counselors, and mental health professionals develop appropriate strategies and interventions to enhance psychological well-being and happiness among college students.

Keywords: Happiness, psychological well-being, quality of life, intervention, cheerfulness, Attraction

Introduction
Happiness is a positive emotional state that reflects an individual's overall satisfaction with life. It is considered one of the most important aspects of psychological well-being and mental health. Happiness varies from person to person and may also vary across different situations. It is generally characterized by feelings of joy, satisfaction, contentment, and fulfillment.

Happiness consists of two key components
1. Balance of Emotions
The balance of emotions refers to the experience of both positive and negative emotions and moods. Happiness does not imply the complete absence of negative emotions; rather, it is generally associated with experiencing more positive emotions than negative emotions. Individuals who frequently experience positive emotions such as joy, gratitude, contentment, and satisfaction are more likely to report higher levels of happiness.

2. Life Satisfaction
Life satisfaction refers to the extent to which individuals feel satisfied with different areas of their lives, including their relationships, work, achievements, and other aspects that they consider important. It represents an individual's overall cognitive evaluation of the quality and circumstances of their life.

Review of Literature
A review of the existing literature indicates that numerous socio-psychological and personal factors contribute to an individual's level of happiness. Social relationships, psychological well-being, personal characteristics, social support, and life circumstances may significantly influence happiness and life satisfaction. Agrawal and Khanna (2026) [1] reported that social expectations regarding happiness may sometimes reduce overall well-being, whereas strong social support may enhance life satisfaction and happiness. This suggests that the social environment plays an important role in shaping an individual's perception of happiness and psychological well-being. Similarly, Dixit, Rashmi, and Bhagat (2026) highlighted the importance of social and psychological factors in understanding happiness. Their findings suggest that happiness is influenced by multiple dimensions of an individual's personal and social life.
Beck, Cheung, and Jackson (2025) [2] further indicated that happiness is a highly individualized concept. Individuals may differ considerably in their sources and experiences of happiness depending upon their personal circumstances, social relationships, expectations, and psychological characteristics. Nair (2014) and Lakshmanan and colleagues also emphasized the multidimensional and individualized nature of happiness, suggesting that happiness should not be understood solely as the presence of positive emotions but also in terms of overall life satisfaction and psychological well-being. Furthermore, one research (2022) demonstrated that positive psychology can play an important role in promoting happiness among students in higher education. Their findings indicate that the application of positive psychological principles may contribute to students' psychological well-being and overall happiness. Kamthan *et al*. (2019) studied happiness among 115 second-year MBBS students in Meerut using the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire.
The study found that 60.8% of students were happy, with no significant gender difference. Happiness was associated

with factors such as sibling position, drug use, and belief in a higher power. Happiness Index of Medical Students (2023) examined 315 medical students in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands using the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire. 42.5% of students were found to be happy. Positive social relationships, physical exercise, and spiritual beliefs were positively associated with happiness, while stress was negatively associated with it.

Overall, the reviewed literature suggests that happiness is a multidimensional construct influenced by emotional, psychological, social, and personal factors. Positive emotions, life satisfaction, supportive social relationships, and psychological well-being appear to contribute significantly to happiness. At the same time, social expectations and individual differences may influence how happiness is experienced and perceived. Therefore, understanding happiness requires consideration of both individual and contextual factors.

Rationale of the Study

In recent years, college students have increasingly experienced academic pressure, career uncertainty, social expectations, and emotional stress. These challenges may adversely affect their psychological well-being and overall happiness. Keeping these concerns in mind, the present study was undertaken to examine happiness among college students and to understand the factors associated with their psychological well-being. The rationale for conducting the present study is as follows: A review of the existing literature indicates that relatively few studies have examined happiness specifically among young adult college students. The present study may contribute to a better understanding of the psychological well-being and happiness of college students. The findings may assist in developing appropriate psychological intervention strategies and well-being programmes to enhance happiness among college students

Methodology

Objective of the study

The present study was conducted with the following objectives

To compare level of happiness among college male and female students.

To identify the components of happiness that contribute to the happiness of college students.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated:

- There will be a significant difference in the level of happiness between male and female college students.
- Male and female college students will differ significantly on various components of happiness.

Sample

The sample consisted of 243 college students, including both male and female students. The participants were randomly selected from the college student population. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 25 years.

Inclusion Criteria: Participants were included in the study if they were enrolled:

- As students at Meerut College.
- Were between 18 and 25 years of age.
- Were willing to participate voluntarily in the study.

Exclusion Criteria: Participants were excluded from the study if they:

- Were above 25 years of age.
- Belonged to faculties other than the faculty specified for the study.
- Were unwilling to participate voluntarily in the study.

Note: The second exclusion criterion in the handwritten page is not completely clear. I have therefore, kept it general rather than incorrectly specifying a faculty.

Research Tool

- **Oxford Happiness Questionnaire:** The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ) was used to assess happiness in the present investigation. The questionnaire was developed by Hills and Argyle (2002) [5]. It consists of 29 items designed to assess various psychological components of happiness. The items are rated on a 6-point Likert-type scale. The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire provides an overall measure of an individual's level of happiness and has been widely used in psychological research to assess subjective happiness and psychological well-being.

Statistical Analysis

The data obtained from the participants were subjected to appropriate statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics, including the mean and standard deviation, were calculated to summarize the data. To examine the differences in happiness between male and female college students, an appropriate test of significance was employed. The t-test for independent samples was used to determine whether the differences between the two groups were statistically significant. The statistical analysis therefore included: Mean, Standard deviation, Independent-samples t test, Tests of significance between male and female students.

Results and Discussion

The results obtained from the statistical analysis are presented and discussed in the following section. The findings are interpreted in relation to the objectives and hypotheses of the study and are compared with findings from previous research. Comparison of Happiness Scores Between Male and Female College Students to examine whether male and female college students differed significantly in their overall happiness scores, an independent-samples t test was conducted. In addition, descriptive statistics, including the mean and standard deviation, were calculated for both groups.

Table 1: Comparison of Happiness Scores Between Male and Female College Students

Group	Number	Mean	Df	SD	t	Significance
Female	157	3.88	156	0.57	0.61	None Significant
Male	86	3.93	85	0.62		

Note. df = degrees of freedom; M = mean; SD = standard deviation. The t value was not statistically significant at the .05 level.

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that there was no statistically significant difference in happiness scores between male and female college students. Female students obtained a mean happiness score of 3.88 (SD = 0.57), whereas male students obtained a slightly higher mean score

of 3.93 (SD = 0.62). The obtained t value of 0.61 was not statistically significant at the .05 level. Although male students demonstrated a slightly higher mean happiness score than female students, the difference was too small to be considered statistically significant. Therefore, the finding suggests that gender did not have a significant effect on the overall happiness of the college students included in the present study.

Accordingly, Hypothesis 1, which stated that there would be a significant difference in the level of happiness between male and female college students, was not supported. The small difference in mean scores may be attributable to individual variation within the groups rather than to gender differences. Both male and female students may experience similar academic, social, interpersonal, and developmental challenges during college life, which may contribute to comparable levels of happiness.

Analysis of Happiness Components

In addition to the overall happiness score, the individual components/items of the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ) were examined to determine whether particular dimensions of happiness differed between male and female college students. The questionnaire consists of 29 items, with each item rated on a 6-point response scale. The individual items were examined to identify the components that were particularly relevant to the happiness of male and female college students.

Happiness-Related Factors Among Male College Students

The following factors/items were identified from the handwritten analysis as relevant to happiness among male college students: Finding beauty in something. Always having a cheerful outlook. Feeling mentally alert. Feeling that there is a great deal of energy available. These factors indicate that positive outlook, appreciation of beauty, mental alertness, and perceived energy/vitality may contribute to happiness among male college students.

Happiness-Related Factors Among Female College Students

The following factors/items were identified as important among female college students: An aesthetic or positive outlook. Social cheerfulness. Cognitive vitality. Physical vigour/energy. These factors suggest that happiness among female students may be associated with positive perceptions, social engagement, cognitive vitality, and physical energy.

The findings indicate that although male students had a slightly higher overall mean happiness score (M = 3.93) than female students (M = 3.88), the difference was not statistically significant. Thus, the present findings suggest that gender alone may not be a determining factor in the overall happiness of college students. However, the analysis of individual components provides a more nuanced understanding of happiness. Male students appeared to emphasize aspects such as a cheerful outlook, appreciation of beauty, mental alertness, and energy, whereas female students demonstrated factors related to positive outlook, social cheerfulness, cognitive vitality, and physical vigor. These findings suggest that while the overall level of happiness may be similar across genders, the particular experiences or psychological characteristics associated with happiness may differ between male and female students. Happiness is a multidimensional construct and may be influenced by emotional, cognitive, social, and physical factors.

The second hypothesis stated that male and female college students would differ significantly on various components of happiness. The component-level findings should be interpreted according to the statistical significance of each individual item. If the component-wise tests show statistically significant gender differences, Hypothesis 2 may be supported for those specific components; otherwise, it should be rejected.

Gender Differences in the Components of Happiness. The analysis of the individual components of happiness revealed several factors that appeared to be important for both male and female college students. The findings indicate that although the overall level of happiness did not differ significantly between the two groups, some components of happiness were particularly prominent among male and female students. Positive Outlook and Aesthetic Appreciation The factor “finding beauty in some things” was ranked second among male students and first among female students. The high ranking of this factor indicates a strong appreciation for the environment, beauty, and positive experiences among college students.

The findings suggest that maintaining a positive outlook and appreciating beauty in everyday life may be important aspects of happiness. Such an orientation may contribute to positive emotional experiences and psychological well-being among young adults. Social Connection and Cheerfulness Both male and female students appeared to place importance on the factor represented by the statement “I always have a cheerful effect on others.” This finding highlights the importance of positive social interactions and interpersonal relationships in students' experiences of happiness. Social contentedness provides opportunities for emotional support, positive interaction, and a sense of belonging. Therefore, maintaining positive relationships and contributing to a cheerful social environment may represent important components of subjective happiness du

The findings also indicate the importance of self-perception and physical well-being. The relevant items reflect students' perceptions of their physical vitality, energy, and general well-being. Physical and psychological well-being are closely interconnected. Feeling physically energetic and mentally alert may facilitate engagement in academic, social, and recreational activities. Consequently, positive self-perception and perceived physical vitality may contribute to students' overall happiness.

Another important component identified in the analysis was purpose and fulfillment. The relevant item reflects the perception that life has meaning and purpose and that one's activities are worthwhile. A sense of purpose may contribute to psychological well-being by providing individuals with direction, motivation, and a feeling of personal significance. For college students, having meaningful goals and a sense of fulfillment may therefore be an important aspect of happiness.

Overall, the component-wise analysis suggests that happiness among college students is multidimensional. It is not determined solely by the overall level of positive emotion but also involves several psychological and social dimensions, including: Positive outlook and aesthetic appreciation, Social connection and cheerfulness, Self-

perception and physical well-being, Mental alertness and vitality, Purpose and fulfillment, The ranking of “finding beauty in some things” as first among female students and second among male students suggests that appreciation of positive experiences and the surrounding environment is an important component of happiness for both groups. Similarly, the prominence of social cheerfulness indicates the importance of interpersonal relationships and social connectedness. These findings further suggest that gender may not significantly influence overall happiness, but the specific components through which happiness is experienced may vary in their relative importance between male and female students.

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