
COMPLETED ERIC PROJECT SUMMARY

Experience and Consequences of Happiness: A Study of Happiness among School Students and Teachers*

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ABSTRACT

The pursuit of happiness is an ever continuing process in all societies. The experience of happiness affects the personal, socio-emotional, and task performance of the people. The societies, however, differ in their conceptualisation of happiness. In individualistic societies more importance is given to personal traits and achievements of the individuals in their conceptualisation. The collectivistic societies, in contrast, view happiness resulting from positive social relationships and task performance. The Indian sub-continent offers a pluralistic vision on knowledge and reflects diversity in viewing reality. The Indian way of thinking is characterised as context sensitive and operates with abstract generalisation and universal categories. The Indian perspective on reality and human functioning is holistic, recognises coherence and natural order across all life forms, emphasises self-discipline, and gives dharma as the sacred moral code. In particular, the study examined the Indian notion of happiness using multiple resources. Also, the perception of school students and teachers on happiness as well as strategies adopted by them to be happy in life and promote happiness in others were explored.

The Main Objectives of the Study are

- (a) To discern the nature of happiness by analysing Indian scholarly literature;
- (b) To explore the construal of happiness among the students and teachers; and

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- (c) To examine the experience and consequences of happiness in the sample of school students and teachers.

Research Questions

The study addressed the following research questions:

- (i) How is happiness conceptualised in the Indian tradition? Where does this view stand in the context of mainstream scholarship in psychological conceptualisation of happiness? In what way they complement each other? Are there different ways of understanding/experiencing happiness?
- (ii) What do school students understand by the construct of happiness? When and how do they experience happy and unhappy events? How happy are school students and teachers?
- (iii) What are the factors that promote happiness or a happy life as perceived by the students and teachers? How does happiness affect day-to-day life of students and teachers?

To achieve these objectives, a two-pronged strategy was adopted. First, an attempt was made to discern the notion of happiness as described in various Indian scholarly texts. Second, an empirical study was conducted to know the concept and determinants of happiness among school students and teachers.

Analysis of Ancient Textual Materials

This study attempted to discern the Indian notion of happiness by analysing Sanskrit *suktis*. The ancient Indian scholarly texts, which were written in Sanskrit language, contain knowledge in the form of *Suktis* or *Subhasitas* (good words). After analysing three Sanskrit dictionaries, 529 *suktis* related to happiness were collected and analysed. Results revealed that the *suktis* defined happiness in terms of personal characteristics of the people (such as contentment, control over desires, surrender, non-attachment, equanimity in opposites, freedom, hard work, perseverance, good health, and wisdom). Some of the social characteristics such as having wise friends, maintaining harmonious family relationship, charity and service to the needy, sacrifice, performing religious duties, and having good relationships at the work place also contribute to attaining happiness. Attainment of knowledge is another source of happiness. Viewed as one of the highest mental state, called *anand* or bliss, happiness comes by surrendering to the Almighty. The concept of sorrow or pain is interwoven in the Indian view of

well-being. Therefore, a happy person remains non-attached to the outcomes of his/her actions, maintains equanimity in opposite circumstances, and understands the cyclic nature of happiness and unhappiness. Happy people experience abundance of all basic requirements like food, money, friend's prestige etc. They gain respect for their self from both professional and social quarters. They are bestowed with the company of the wise, loved by close ones, remain free from debts and have certainty of livelihood. Like happiness, unhappiness is also an essential part of human life and helps in his/her growth. The analysis shows the relational nature of happiness in the Indian context.

The analysis revealed that happiness is derived from diverse range of activities/experiences and the duration of these experiences very considerably. Also, the source of happiness could be extrinsic or intrinsic. The presence of a physical object is not essential for the experience of happiness. A person's internal conditions could bring extreme happiness to him/her. Further, the value of an extrinsic object to bring happiness varies according to the context (*desh*), the time (*kaal*), and the person (*patra*). Also, a truly happy person remains unchanged in joy or sorrow.

Construal of Happiness among School Students and Teachers

To understand the notion and consequences of happiness among school students and teachers, a 26 item self-report measure was administered on 885 school students and 140 teachers. The student sample was drawn from three localities, namely Delhi, Gorakhpur urban and Gorakhpur rural. The teachers came from Delhi and Gorakhpur urban only. The 26 items were related to the five dimensions of happiness, namely (1) experience of happiness, (2) life satisfaction, (3) personal control, (4) emotional reactions, and (5) personal and social concerns, additionally, 135 students were interviewed to have in-depth understanding of their conceptualisation of happiness.

Analysis did not reveal much difference in the conceptualisation of happiness of the participants from three localities. Both teachers and students, in large numbers, reported that they were happy, experience happiness regularly, laugh regularly, have minimum health problems and motivate others to be happy and do good work. They are satisfied with the outcomes in life and consider life to be meaningful. The sources of their happiness lies in accomplishment of tasks (such as doing studies/teaching, success in examination,

goal attainment, doing things of their choice, and working honestly) and social relationships (such as being in the company of friends and family, serving parents/elders/needy, happiness of the family, etc.). It was reported by the students that they feel good and excited when they are happy. However, both students and teachers felt that situations governing the happiness are not in their control.

This research supports the argument that the nature of people's construal of social world determines their level of happiness and well-being. In the Western societies, characterised by individualism and de-contextualised nature of the self, the source of happiness and well-being lies in the external world. In contrast, the Indian context, characterised by collectivism with stress on contextualised worldview, considers happiness and well-being as emanating from the internal conditions of the individual. People derive happiness by relating to the others and successfully performing one's duties. The study argues for developing a deeper contextual understanding about the nature of happiness and well-being in diverse contexts. The results also show congruence in the ancient and contemporary Indian thought about the nature and effects of happiness.

The Study has Implications for Understanding the Goal of Education

In the Indian context, education is considered key to success as it empowers humans by realising human potentials and bringing in excellence in action. It is through education and learning- *sadhana* of *vidya*-that one may attain liberation and realise its true self. As narrated in one of the famous Sanskrit verses, education imparts intellectual culture; intellectual culture secures capacity and stability; capacity and stability enable to secure wealth; wealth so secured enables to perform dharma, which in turn secures happiness. Happy people typically feel empowered and remain in control of situations. Those who feel empowered rather than helpless would typically do better in school, cope with stress and live more happily. When people are deprived of control over one's life, they suffer lower morale and worse health. Therefore, the ultimate pursuit of education should be to make people happy.

The experience of happiness is not a one-shot affair; nor do all individuals feel happy by a particular object or event. The schools need to organise a series of happiness producing events throughout the year. Rather, it should be made a part of school routine. The

activities should be organised in a manner that the students feel themselves important and need to be related to their daily life.

It is important to develop an understanding about the relative nature of happiness and unhappiness among students. The students need to understand that the unhappiness or sorrow is not always undesirable; rather, it provides an opportunity to realise that happiness and unhappiness are two sides of the same coin. Pain or suffering teaches one to adjust in adverse circumstances and also helps in initiating the process of self-discovery. The students should be trained to treat happiness and unhappiness equally.