

The Psychological Tug of War: A Quantitative Study of Anxiety and Happiness among Students

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Happiness has long fascinated humankind, with philosophers pondering its true nature and writers reflecting on its transient quality. Psychologists focus on its role in mental health, linking happiness to positive well-being and anxiety to poor mental health. The present study investigates the relationship between Happiness and Anxiety among students of Wardha, Maharashtra. Two hundred students were participated. A survey-based Correlation and comparative design were employed. Beck Anxiety Inventory and Subjective Happiness Scale were used to collect data on Anxiety and Happiness among young adults. The findings revealed a significantly negative correlation between Anxiety ($M = 13.85$; $SD = 11.39$) and happiness ($M = 17.8$; $SD = 4.2$); hence higher levels of happiness were linked to lower levels of anxiety ($r = -.446^{**}$). Furthermore, the test for Anxiety mean score was significant, and results showed that Anxiety was higher in female students compared to male students ($t = -3.277$).

Keywords: Mental health, Anxiety, Happiness, Teenage Students, Young

Humankind has contemplated the nature of Happiness using diverse pathways ranging from spiritual and transpersonal to empirical and objective methods. Some people have tried to understand Happiness and how to pursue it throughout history. At the family and broader social levels, interpersonal relationships were the most common contextual definitions of Happiness across nations. According to Delle et al., (2016), Happiness is not a one-dimensional construct. People conceive it differently within and across cultures. It is due to this construct that a person carries good feelings about himself and others, rejects despair, accepts his weaknesses, never forgets learning, is always honest with himself and others, lives

in the present time and is stable against problems (Piroozi, 2003).

Happiness is defined as psychological well-being, satisfaction, realizing one's full potential, having some control over one's life, a feeling of purpose, and meaningful connections (Ruggeri, Garcia-Garzon, Maguire, Matz, & Huppert, 2020). Researchers have identified various factors affecting happiness. These include emotional intelligence (Francis, Ok & Robbins, 2017), self-awareness (Yang, 2016; Zessin, Dickhäuser, & Garbade, 2015), and hope (Cenkseven & Mukba, 2017).

Several perspectives have attempted to direct the research and theory-building in this

domain. For instance, the hedonic view of Happiness signifies humans' pleasure-seeking and pain-avoidance tendencies. However, with the rise of positive psychology, a more comprehensive view of Happiness evolved into Eudemonism. The eudemonic perspective highlights that Happiness is not merely about pleasure and materialism. Happiness comes from a sense of meaning that we seek in life.

Seligman (2011) propounds the PERMA model to delve deep into the concept of Happiness and well-being from the positive psychology perspective. The model presents five significant factors, namely Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and accomplishments that impact an individual's Happiness. Cohn, Fredrickson, Brown, Mikels, & Conway (2009) conclude a positive correlation between Happiness and satisfaction with the meditational role of resilience. On the other hand, Happiness has been negatively correlated with variables like stress (Schiffrin & Nelson, 2008) and depressive symptoms (Moghadam, Rezaei, Ghaderi, & Rostamian, 2016) that have deteriorating effects on the mental health of an individual.

The implications of happiness remain significant at all developmental levels in our lives. During student life, positive experiences and happiness help an individual to deal with ongoing transitions and maintain good mental and physical health (Pallini, et al., 2018). Tabbodi, Rahgozar, and Abadi (2015) studied how Happiness affects academic performance with a sample of 320 Iranian students. The study reveals a significant positive relationship between Happiness and academic achievement. Also, Happiness predicts the progress of students in terms of discipline. Therefore, it becomes essential to probe the trends related to happiness among students specifically in the Indian context and utilize its implications to enhance their quality of life and wellbeing.

Several factors impact the level of happiness experienced by an individual. One of those potential factors is *Anxiety* (Grandi, Dans, & Crespo, 2016). Anxiety is characterized by unrealistic and excessive fear, worry, and apprehension regarding an imminent event. At optimal level, it does carry an adaptive value of improving the performance. However, these feelings persist for individuals with anxiety disorders and can significantly impact their daily lives. Panic disorder, social anxiety disorder (SAD), generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), and specific phobias are a few of the several kinds of anxiety disorders.

Many different variables contribute to anxiety, such as psychological, environmental, and genetic factors (Stoewen, 2022). Individuals with a family history of anxiety or mood disorders may be more prone to developing Anxiety (Turner, Beidel, & Costello, 1987). Traumatic experiences can also contribute to developing anxiety disorders such as abuse or witnessing a traumatic event. Additionally, individuals with certain personality traits, such as perfectionism or a tendency to overthink, may be more susceptible to Anxiety (Burgess & DiBartolo, 2016). Anxiety symptoms can vary but commonly include restlessness, irritability, difficulty concentrating, and sleep disturbances. Physical manifestations like sweating, trembling, fast heartbeat, and shortness of breath are typical.

Studies have shown the deteriorating effect of Anxiety on health conditions and quality of life. Sevim et al. (2004) studied Anxiety and depressive symptoms in 103 individuals suffering from restless leg syndrome and found worsening effects of both Anxiety and depression on the prognosis of the disorder. Also, during comorbidity, the symptoms of Anxiety have been recorded as a precedent of depression (Kessler & Wang, 2008). Understanding the causes, symptoms, and practical treatment

approaches is crucial for accurate diagnosis and successful management of anxiety disorders. Further research and efforts to destigmatize mental health conditions are essential to provide better support and resources for individuals coping with Anxiety.

Anxiety and Happiness are complex and interconnected. While Anxiety and Happiness are two distinct emotional states, they can significantly influence each other. Understanding this relationship is essential for identifying factors contributing to overall well-being and promoting mental health.

Anxiety can negatively impact Happiness. Individuals with anxiety disorders often experience excessive worry, fear, and apprehension, which can dampen their overall enjoyment of life and impede their ability to experience Happiness. It can lead to various symptoms and behaviours that limit a person's engagement in fulfilling activities, strain relationships, and hinder personal growth. Constant feelings of unease and heightened stress associated with Anxiety can make it challenging for individuals to experience genuine Happiness and maintain a positive outlook. Baroun (2006) in his study on Kuwaiti adolescents reports a significantly negative correlation between Happiness and Anxiety. Besides, the study also reveals a clear gender difference in Anxiety. Compared to men, women reported much higher levels of anxiety.

Abdel-Khalek (2007) also establishes a significantly negative relationship between Happiness and anxiety representing the deteriorating influence of anxiety on the well-being of individuals. Moreover, the study also presents significantly higher Happiness among males and significantly higher Anxiety and depression among females, therefore drawing attention to gender-based understanding of positive and negative affect.

Mehrzad et al. (2019) in their descriptive-analytical study on three hundred medical

students conclude that Happiness has a significantly negative relationship with stress and Anxiety. Cohen-Louck and Levy (2023) investigated the predictors of Happiness in mass trauma situations like COVID-19. The analysis shows a negative correlation of Happiness with stress and Anxiety. Also, the study concludes that Anxiety, stress, emotion-focused coping, and function are predictors of Happiness in mass trauma.

However, on the other hand, Happiness can serve as a protective factor against Anxiety. Positive emotions and experiences associated with Happiness, such as joy, contentment, and satisfaction, can counteract the adverse effects of Anxiety. Rathschlag and Memmert (2014) in their experimental study explored sprinting time and asked participants to recall a happiness-provoking, Anxiety-provoking, and neutral incident before sprinting, and the experiment results showed better performance when a happy incident was recalled.

Building resilience, positive coping mechanisms, and a robust support system can contribute to increased happiness levels, which can help individuals manage Anxiety more effectively. Engaging in activities that bring pleasure, fostering positive relationships, and finding meaning and purpose in one's life can all contribute to mental well-being and reduce anxiety symptoms.

In conclusion, Anxiety and Happiness are intertwined in a complex relationship. While Anxiety can impede Happiness, Happiness can be a protective factor against Anxiety. Promoting mental health and well-being involves addressing Anxiety and Happiness, utilizing appropriate interventions to manage anxiety symptoms and cultivating positive emotions and experiences that contribute to overall life satisfaction. Park et al. (2023) explored the rates of Anxiety and depressive symptoms in Indian adolescents. The results

show that 37% of the adolescent population shows symptoms of depression, and 30.6 % shows symptoms of anxiety. Moreover, adolescence and early adulthood are marked by demanding student life which can act as a major stressor at times. To develop effective interventions, it is quintessential for us to understand the nuances of happiness and well-being in Indian adolescents and early adult population. Therefore, the current study aims to investigate the relationship between happiness and anxiety in young students.

Objectives:

1. To assess the level of subjective happiness and anxiety among students of Wardha, Maharashtra.
2. To explore the relationship between anxiety and subjective happiness in students.
3. To develop an understanding of significant factors that contribute to ascending anxiety levels in students.
4. To compare the level of anxiety and subjective happiness in male and female students.

Hypotheses:

- H1 There would be a significantly negative relationship between happiness and anxiety among students.
- H2 There would be a significant difference between the level of anxiety among male and female students.
- H3 There would be a significant difference between the level of subjective happiness among male and female students.

Method

Research Design

The present study utilized comparative and correlational design to probe the

research question. The correlational design was used to assess the relationship between anxiety and subjective happiness. Pearson product-moment was used to explore the degree and direction of the relationship. Moreover, for the comparative analysis, a t-test was used to assess whether a significant difference exists between the level of anxiety and subjective happiness among male and female students.

Participants

The study was conducted on a sample of 200 young adults randomly recruited from Wardha, Maharashtra. The mean age of the sample is 20.23. 115 females (57%) and 85 males (42%) participated in the study through an online survey. Among the participants, 129 (64.5%) were undergraduate students, 29 (14.5%) were post-graduate, 22 were higher secondary students (11%) and 8 (4%) were PhD students.

Tools used

The Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI): Spanish version, was used (Beltrán et al., 2012) to measure the level of anxiety among students. BAI is a four-point Likert scale that consists of 21 items for teenagers and adults. The items describe emotional, physiological, and cognitive symptoms of Anxiety. The maximum attainable Score is 63 and the scoring ranges from very low Anxiety (0–21 points), moderate (22–35 points) to severe Anxiety (36 points and above). The estimated time for test completion is about 5 to 10 minutes. The internal consistency of BAI is 0.92 and test-retest reliability is 0.75 (Beck, Epstein, Brown, & Steer, 1988). For convergent validity, BAI was correlated with the Hamilton Anxiety Scale ($r = .51$) and Hamilton Depression rating scale ($r = .25$).

Subjective Happiness Scale: (Lyubomirsky and Lepper, 1999) was used to measure the level of subjective happiness

among students. The scale is a four-item 7-point Likert ('1'- I am not happy at all and '7'- I am thrilled). The internal consistency and test-retest reliability of the scale are 0.86 and 0.72 respectively. For convergent validity, the scale was correlated with existing measures of happiness. The resultant correlation ranges from 0.52-0.72 (M = 0.62), therefore indicating satisfactory construct validity.

Results

The present study aimed to explore the relationship between happiness and anxiety among young adults. Based on existing literature, it was hypothesized that there would be a significantly negative relationship between anxiety and happiness. Therefore, quantitative data on the Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky and Lepper, 1999) and Beck anxiety inventory were collected. The collected data was analyzed with the help of both descriptive and inferential statistics to gain insights into the results. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for both Happiness and Anxiety. The

Mean for Happiness is 17.89 and the Standard Deviation is 4.22. On the other hand, The Mean for Anxiety is 13.85 and the Standard Deviation is 11.39.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	SD	N
Happiness	17.89	4.22	200
Anxiety	13.85	11.39	200
Age	20.23	2.77	200

Table 2. shows independent sample t-test to compare the level of anxiety and happiness among both genders. The results show significant difference between anxiety levels of males and females (t = -3.277). The level of anxiety in females is significantly higher than males which indicate females experience significantly more anxiety than males. However, there is no significant difference between happiness level of males and females (t value = 0.229). This indicates that level of happiness does not significantly differ in young male adults and young female adults.

Table 2. Independent Sample t-test

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	df	t-value	p
Happiness	Male	85	17.96	4.230	.459	198	.229	.819
	Female	115	17.83	4.225	.394			
Anxiety	Male	85	10.85	10.643	1.154	198	-3.277	.001
	Female	115	16.06	11.466	1.069			

Table 3 presents the coefficient of correlation between the variables. The results indicate a significantly negative correlation between anxiety and perceived happiness (r = -0.446**). Therefore, anxiety is inversely proportional to the subjective happiness experienced by a student. This relationship further infers that as the level of happiness increases, the level of anxiety decreases and vice versa. Moreover, there is a significantly negative relationship between age and anxiety (r = -.153*), which indicates that

anxiety decreases as the age of an individual increases.

Table 3. Pearson's Correlation

	Happiness	Anxiety	Age
Happiness	1		
Anxiety	-.446**	1	
Age	.075	-.153*	1

N = 200, *p < .05. **p < .01.

Therefore, the study concludes that there is a significantly negative correlation between Happiness and Anxiety among young adults and a significantly negative relationship between age and anxiety. Moreover, there is a significant difference between anxiety among male and female young adults.

Discussion

“Happiness is a possession to be prized, it is a quality of thought, a state of mind” says the famous novelist, Daphne du Maurier. Hereby, it is highlighted that happiness is an essential component to achieving a healthy and optimally functioning state of mind. Several factors promote subjective happiness among individuals like emotional intelligence (Francis, Ok & Robbins, 2017), self-awareness (Yang, 2016; Zessin, Dickhäuser, & Garbade, 2015), and hope (Cenkseven & Mukba, 2017). However, some factors may also interfere with our ability to experience the full range of happiness as a human emotion. Therefore, it becomes essential to explore the relationship between happiness and the factors that might be correlated with it to understand the differing levels of happiness in different populations and plan better interventions.

The current research aims to investigate the relationship between subjective and anxiety among the students of Wardha, Maharashtra. The study utilized comparative and correlational design to probe the research question. The correlational design was used to assess the relationship between anxiety and subjective happiness. Pearson product-moment was used to explore the degree and direction of the relationship. Moreover, for the comparative analysis, t-test was used to assess whether a significant difference exists between the level of anxiety and subjective happiness among male and female students. The results indicate a significantly negative correlation between

anxiety and perceived happiness ($r = -.446^{**}$). Therefore, anxiety is inversely proportional to the subjective happiness experienced by a student. As the level of happiness increases, the level of anxiety decreases. The independent t-test indicates a significant difference between the anxiety levels of males and females ($t = -3.277$). The level of anxiety in females is significantly higher than in males. However, there is no significant difference between the happiness level of males and females (t value = 0.229).

In the current literature, fewer studies have tried to probe the association between happiness and anxiety specifically in the student population. Some studies show no relationship between Happiness and Anxiety, but few studies stand with the connection between the variables that Happiness and Anxiety are interconnected (Mahinay, Rollan, Punzalan, Reyes, & Tus, 2022). Therefore, to bridge this gap and obtain findings from a sample of Indian students, the current study explored the relationship between the two variables. A significantly negative correlation concludes that anxiety may impede individuals from experiencing happiness. Hence, it implies that Anxiety negatively impacts Happiness. The result from the current study is in line with previously conducted studies that tried to establish a relationship between anxiety and happiness. Baroun (2006) in his study on Kuwaiti adolescents reports a significantly negative correlation between Happiness and Anxiety. Abdel-Khalek (2007) also establishes a significantly negative relationship between Happiness and anxiety representing the deteriorating influence of anxiety on the wellbeing of individuals.

This can be due to several discomforting symptoms that accompany anxiety. Individuals with anxiety disorders often experience excessive worry, fear, and apprehension. It

can further lead to limitations in a person's engagement in fulfilling activities, strain relationships, and hinder personal growth. Constant feelings of unease and heightened stress associated with Anxiety can make it challenging for individuals to experience genuine Happiness and maintain a positive outlook.

The comparative analysis of the study reveals no significant difference in the level of subjective happiness among males and females. However, there is an evident gender difference in the level of anxiety as females report significantly higher anxiety levels. The given finding is crucial to understanding the gender-related nuances related to anxiety. There have been studies which report similar findings (Baroun, 2006; Abdel-Khalek, 2007). Hereby, such exploration makes us more aware of the vulnerability of gender to experience negative emotion and thus helps us in catering to their requirement. Such gender differences can be analysed through two perspectives. The first is the biological perspective. Ask, Torgersen, Seglem, & Waaktaar, (2014) report higher levels of anxiety in females are a consequence of genetic factors where 74% of variance could be attributed to heritability in girls. The second lens to understand the gender gap is the socio-cultural perspective. Women's higher rates of anxiety socio-culturally stem from partner support, assumption of multiple roles, relationship stress etc. (Curran, Rosato, Ferry, & Leavey, 2020). Therefore, the study aims to sensitize the mental health community towards the vulnerability carried by different populations and to look at it from several perspectives.

Conclusion

The present study aimed to explore the relationship between Happiness and Anxiety among students. The present study's findings are that Happiness and Anxiety are

negatively correlated among students, and age and Anxiety are negatively related. As a consequence, there are numerous choices for extracurricular activities that students may pursue. It indicates that activities and creating environments where they can engage in social relationships are essential. Students should also receive group psychological therapy, psycho-educational activities, and group activities.

Furthermore, as a source of negative feelings and low life satisfaction, the desire for social acceptability can be addressed by individual psychological therapy activities. We advise that students receive psychological support from psychological counselling services to overcome their social anxiety difficulties. Our results may provide some rationale for intervention approaches that include training happiness programs and happiness skills for reducing Anxiety in daily life.

Implication of the Study

In the present time, after the pandemic, mental health become a significant priority for the individual (Mahinay et al., 2022). Only a few studies are finding the relationship between Happiness and Anxiety. Some studies show no relationship between Happiness and Anxiety, but few studies stand with the connection between the variables that Happiness and Anxiety are interconnected (Mahinay et al., 2022). Finally, as expected, Happiness was negatively and statistically significantly associated with Anxiety (Crego et al., 2021). The present study found that those feeling anxious are less happy. The major implication of the study lies in presenting an understanding of complex reciprocal dynamics between anxiety and happiness among the student population. To improve the well-being of students, happiness can be a catalyst. However, to achieve such goals, mental health

professionals need to focus on planning interventions that target factors that are negatively associated with happiness. Building resilience, positive coping mechanisms, and a robust support system can contribute to increased happiness levels, which can help individuals manage Anxiety more effectively.

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