Family Factors in Influencing Happiness Quotient of Upper Secondary School Students in Malaysia

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Abstract - This study seeks to determine the factors of family in contributing to the upper secondary students’ happiness. A total of 1000 students in Malaysia were involved in the study with 365 males and 635 females. The instrument used was a research questionnaire regarding happiness of the students, a translated version of the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ). The Cronbach’s alpha value for this inventory was .75. T-test and one way Anova were carried out at the significance of .05 level to determine if there is any difference between happiness quotient mean and factor of family which include the number of siblings, family structure, parents’ marital status, parents’ education level, parents’ employment status and family income. There were significant differences in happiness quotient mean with family structure and parents’ marital status. However, there was no significant difference between happiness quotient mean with number of siblings, parents’ education level, parents’ employment status and family income.

Keywords- Family; Happiness Quotient; Secondary Students

I. INTRODUCTION

Happiness is an emotion in which one experience feelings ranging from contentment and satisfaction to bliss and intense joy. This definition is, however, not based on analytic evaluation, because of the varied and elusive nature of happiness. Happiness has been conceptualized as a positive inner experience, the highest good, and the ultimate motivator for all human behaviours[1], [2] and as “the degree to which an individual judges the overall quality of his or her life as a whole favourably” [3].

Rapid socioeconomic development over the past few decades has significantly transformed the physical, psychological and familial environment of Malaysian society[4]. It is important for us to understand how our adolescents cope with these changes. Malaysian secondary school students have grown in the period of globalization, which concentrates on economic and technological development. Students in Form 4, 5 and 6 are considered as upper secondary school students who are also adolescents. Apart from undergoing this development process they also have to cope with their daily life. Upper secondary school students must sit for their major examinations, such as SPM (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia) and STPM (Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia). After school, they need to cope with their parents and siblings at home.

Parents play an important role in secondary school students’ life. They have varied parenting styles, different ways of allowing their adolescents to socialize and restrict the types of relationships they have, and behaviours and emotions they show to their offspring. Families, in their structure and function, influence virtually all facets of youth psychological and social functioning[5]. Some parents always put high expectation on their children, hoping for their success in life. They take initiative to plan and arrange everything for their children. They ensure that their children attend the best schools in town; send them to various arts and hobby classes, tuition classes and music classes. Other parents are always busy with their career and do not even have time for their children. Some do not even bother what their children are up to in life.

Local researchers pay less attention to understanding upper secondary school students’ subjective well being (happiness). Very few studies have examined the association of happiness with upper secondary school students in Malaysia. Now, this is an opportunity to begin understanding their psychosocial condition. The research on happiness has received gradual attention. It has an enormous contribution towards our future generation.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Over 460 journal articles on happiness were published between 1960 and 2006[6]; much of the work in this area, which is empirical in nature, relied on either one-time or repeated cross-section datasets to find the determinants of subjective well-being, whether it is ‘happiness’, ‘life satisfaction’, ‘perceived quality of life’, or ‘mental well-being’[7], [8], [9].

Increasing interest, however, has been documented in the determinants, correlates and consequences of individual differences in the well-being of adolescents[10]. Subjective well being is often used interchangeably with each other and considered synonymous with the term ‘happiness’[11], [12]. For example, global life satisfaction reports of adolescents have been related to a variety of variables, including environmental variables[13], and demographic variables[14].
Huebner, Drane and Valois[15] found that 73% of 5,545 students sampled in grades 9–12 reported life satisfaction ratings in the ‘mostly satisfied’ to ‘delighted’ range. Similar findings of an overall positive level of life satisfaction among children and adolescents have been reported across various international studies[16], [17]. Research findings also show that global life satisfaction tends to decline slightly with the progression of adolescence and that these findings are similarly supported by international research, including those from: America[18], South Korea[19], and China[20]. No study has been done in Malaysia, one of the Asia’s fast developing countries regarding the happiness quotient among adolescents. Therefore, this research is significant in securing the findings in happiness quotient among the Malaysian upper secondary school students.

Upper secondary schools students in Seremban, Malaysia, are within 16-19 years of age. They are considered as adolescents[21]. They grow up in a variety of social and physical environments including family, school, peer group and neighborhood. There are three features of adolescent development that gives the period its special significance: (a) the onset of puberty, (b) the emergence of more advanced thinking abilities; and (c) the transition into new roles in society[22]. Although all adolescents experience the transitions of the period, the effects of these changes are not uniform for all young people due to different contexts. Many pieces of evidence provide contexts of adolescent’s life that affect adolescent development[23], [24]. Steinberg[25] considered families, peers, leisure; while Santrock[26] added culture and achievement as the context to be considered.

In a study of urban African American adolescents living in either single-mother, stepparent, dual parent, mother with extended family (e.g., grandparents, aunt, uncle), or extended family only settings (e.g., only an aunt is present), the social support provided to these adolescents was generally the same across family types, with one exception: adolescents living with single mother families were given more support than the youth in the other four family types[27]. A relatively recent French study found that the average life satisfaction score for children living at home with their parents was 20 percent greater than peers who have been removed from their homes[28]. In one study[29], relationships between perceived life satisfaction and family structure were examined among 5021 public high school adolescents who answered the Brief Multidimensional Students’ Life Satisfaction Scale (BMSLSS). Several aspects of family structure were found to be negatively related with life satisfaction, including: (1) living with other relatives, non-relatives, and guardians \( (p < .01) \); (2) living with fathers only; and (3) living with mothers and other adults.

Based on literature review, it can be concluded that variables contributing to adolescents’ happiness include culture, family, and peers. Empirical findings are mixed, and there is a lack of studies on family factors in happiness during adolescence. Therefore, this study would examine the significant difference between upper secondary school students’ family factors and happiness.

**III. OBJECTIVES**

The objective of this study is to determine if there is any difference between the happiness quotient mean and factor of family included their number of siblings, family structure, parents marital status, parents’ education level, parents’ employment status and family income.

**IV. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

In this study, data were collected and analysed to answer the following research questions:

1. Is there any significant difference between the happiness quotient mean and number of siblings?
2. Is there any significant difference between the happiness quotient mean and family structure?
3. Is there any significant difference between the happiness quotient mean and parents’ marital status?
4. Is there any significant difference between the happiness quotient mean and parents’ education level?
5. Is there any significant difference between the happiness quotient mean and parents’ employment status?
6. Is there any significant difference between the happiness quotient mean and family income?

**V. METHODOLOGY**

In order to investigate the overall level of happiness and the factors which influence happiness among the upper secondary school respondents, a survey research design was employed to gather the necessary data and to answer the research questions formulated.

A. **Sample**

A total of 1000 students were asked to participate in this study with 365 males and 635 females. The sample consisted of 430 Form 4 students with 159 male and 271 female. There were approximately 130 male and 169 female Form 5 students in this study. Only 48 male and 129 female Lower 6 students took part in this study. Some 28 male and 66 female Upper 6 students participated in this study. Respondents were solicited from 12 government secondary schools in Malaysia.
B. Data Collection

Permission was solicited from the school principals to conduct the study in the respective schools. We obtained consent from the participating respondents and assured them of their anonymity and confidentiality as clearly stated in the questionnaire. The survey was administered during the replacement periods that had been agreed upon in a prior discussion with the school principals. The time taken for students to complete the demographic data and Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ) was approximately 25 to 30 minutes, depending on their level of understanding.

The OHQ takes about 25 to 30 minutes to complete.

VI. DATA ANALYSIS

To assess whether there is any significant difference in OHQ score mean and five independent variables: numbers of siblings, family structure, parents’ marital status, parents’ education level, parents’ employment status, and family income, One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and t-tests were used.

A. Results

Number of Siblings and Happiness Quotient Mean of Upper Secondary School Student

Table 1 presents the mean of Happiness Quotient according to the number of siblings of the adolescents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Siblings</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 to 3</td>
<td>523</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.349</td>
<td>0.727</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 and more</td>
<td>477</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B. Instrument

An improved instrument introduced by Hills and Argyle[30], the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ), has been derived from the Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI, [31] Argyle, Martin, & Crossland, 1989). For this study, the OHQ had been translated into the national language, Bahasa Melayu The OHQ consisted of two components: Respondent’s profile and Oxford Happiness Questionnaire.

The OHQ comprises 29 items and there are both positive and negative items. Each is presented as a single statement which can be endorsed on a uniform 6 point Likert Scale. The items used a Likert scale of 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = moderately disagree; 3 = slightly disagree; 4 = slightly agree; 5 = moderately agree, 6 = strongly agree. This Oxford Happiness Questionnaire Bahasa Melayu version was tested for internal consistency. There were seven items (item 1, item 6, item 10, item 24, item 27, item 28 and item 29) taken out to yield an internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha) of .75.

Happiness quotient mean is analyzed based on the respondents’ number of siblings. Upper secondary school students who have one to three siblings at home ($M = 4.05, SD = 0.55$) have a higher happiness quotient mean compared to those who have four or more siblings at home ($M = 4.03, SD = 0.56$). T-test is used to analyze this factor. The result showed that the difference is not significant statistically, $t (998) = 0.349, p = .727$ as stated in Table 1. We can conclude that there is no significant difference between the number of siblings group and the happiness quotient mean of upper secondary school students at $p = < 0.05$.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Structure</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stays with both parents</td>
<td>858</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>2.788</td>
<td>0.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stays with father, mother or guardian</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next, according to the family structure, upper secondary school students who live with both parents ($M = 4.06, SD = 0.54$) have a higher happiness quotient mean compared to those who live either with their father, mother or guardian only ($M = 3.92, SD = 0.59$). T-test is used in seeking the difference. The result, as shown in Table 2, is statistically significant, $t (998) = 2.788, p = .005$. Therefore, there is significance difference between family structure group and the happiness quotient mean of upper secondary school students at $p = < 0.05$. 
Other than family structure, parents’ marital status is also taken into consideration in this research. Upper secondary school students whose parents are married ($M = 4.06, SD = 0.55$) have a higher happiness quotient mean compared to those whose parents are divorced or widowed ($M = 3.93, SD = 0.60$). The $t$-test is also used for this variable. Based on Table 3, the result is statistically significant, $t(990) = 2.204, p = .028$. In conclusion, there is a significant difference between parents’ marital status and the happiness quotient mean of upper secondary school students at $p = < 0.05$.

**TABLE 4 – WAY ANOVA BY FATHER’S HIGHEST EDUCATION AND HAPPINESS QUOTIENT MEAN OF UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS (N = 889)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Square</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>.936</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.468</td>
<td>1.554</td>
<td>0.212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>266.774</td>
<td>886</td>
<td>0.301</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>267.710</td>
<td>888</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Father’s education level is divided into three groups which ranges from primary, secondary and post secondary. The mean for each group is 4.05, 4.08 and 3.97 respectively. One way Anova is used to test the difference in the father’s education level and Happiness quotient mean. The result in Table 4 clearly show there is no significant relationship between father’s education level and the happiness quotient mean of upper secondary school students, $F(2, 886) = 1.554, p > 0.05$.

**TABLE 5 – WAY ANOVA BY MOTHER’S EDUCATION LEVEL AND HAPPINESS QUOTIENT MEAN OF UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS (N = 929)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Square</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>1.28</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.640</td>
<td>2.127</td>
<td>0.120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>278.621</td>
<td>926</td>
<td>0.301</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>279.900</td>
<td>928</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mother’s education level is also divided into three groups which ranges from primary, secondary and post secondary. The mean for each level is 4.07, 4.07 and 3.97 respectively. One way Anova is used to determine the significance of the difference. The result in Table 5 showed no significant difference between mother’s education level and the happiness quotient mean of upper secondary school students, $F(2, 926) = 2.127, p > 0.05$.

**TABLE 6 – T- TEST BY FATHER’S EMPLOYMENT STATUS AND HAPPINESS QUOTIENT MEAN OF UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS (N = 930)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment Status</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>780</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>-1.514</td>
<td>0.130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Besides parents’ education level, parents’ employment status of the upper secondary school students was also looked into. Students whose fathers are unemployed ($M = 3.99, SD = 0.56$) have a lower happiness quotient mean compared to those with fathers who are employed ($M = 4.06, SD = 0.55$). On seeking the significance of this difference, $t$ – test is used and the result showed that there is no statistically significant, $t(928) = -1.514, p = 0.130$. Therefore, there is no significant difference between father’s employment status and the happiness quotient mean of upper secondary school students at $p = < 0.05$.

**TABLE 7 – T- TEST BY MOTHER’S EMPLOYMENT STATUS AND HAPPINESS QUOTIENT MEAN OF UPPER OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS (N = 986)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment Status</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.546</td>
<td>0.585</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>663</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Next, upper secondary school students whose mothers are unemployed ($M = 4.05, SD = 0.54$) have a higher happiness quotient mean compared to those whose mothers are employed ($M = 4.03, SD = 0.57$). The result where $t$-test is used shown in Table 7 and where the result is not statistically significant, $t(984) = 0.546$, $p = 0.585$. As a result, there is no significant difference between mother’s employment status and the happiness quotient mean of upper secondary school students at $p < 0.05$.

Table 8 – One-Way ANOVA by Family Income and Happiness Quotient Mean of Upper Secondary School Students ($N = 1000$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Square</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td>0.985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>305.115</td>
<td>997</td>
<td>0.306</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>305.124</td>
<td>999</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Upper secondary school students’ family income is categorized into three groups. They are family with an income lower than RM1000 per month, income between RM1001 to RM2999 and those with more than RM3000. The mean for each of this level of family income are almost the same, there are 4.04, 4.04 and 4.05. The result of one way Anova stated in Table 8 showed there is no significant difference between family income and the happiness quotient mean of upper secondary school students, $F(2, 997) = 0.015, p > 0.05$.

VII. DISCUSSION

This study found that family structure and parents’ marital status are the happiness indicators among the upper secondary school students in Malaysia. The results also indicated that number of siblings, parents’ education level, parents’ employment status and family income do not contribute toward their happiness.

A. Number of Siblings and Happiness

The result in this study showed that the number of siblings of upper secondary school students does not affect their happiness. The quality of sibling relationship determined adolescents’ well-being[32]. It might be more important than the number of siblings in the family that influences their well-being. Although siblings grow up in the same family, they may have very different family experiences; the adolescents might then perceive and acknowledge their emotion changes differently due to different treatment instead of how many siblings share the family home. This might be able to explain why the number of siblings does not affect the upper secondary school students’ happiness.

B. Family Structure and Happiness

Upper secondary school students’ family structure is one of the factors affecting their happiness as shown in the outcome of this study. This notion is supported by Sastre and Ferriere[33]. One major specific finding of our study is that living with other relatives, non-relatives, or guardians appears to be a risk factor for life dissatisfaction for most adolescents. A possible explanation for this finding could be that many adolescents living with other relatives, non-relatives or guardians may be living with their grandparents, who often accept the parenting role due to family crises resulting from divorce, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, parental abuse, neglect or abandonment[34]. This might affect their subjective well-being while they are staying with their father, mother or guardians.

C. Parents’ Marital Status and Happiness

Parents’ marital status is one of upper secondary school students’ happiness indicators as shown in this study. This finding is consistent with Demo and Acock[35] and Grossman and Rowat[36]. Divorce has been associated with lower self-reported well-being in adolescents[37] and psychological distress. The effects of marital discord and divorce on offspring’s well-being appear to interact[38]. More conflicts and difficulties occur among those single parents and divorced parents with their children. The divorced parents need to cope with both jobs and children; thus they might neglect adolescents’ emotional needs. As such in this study, it can be said that parents’ marital status is one of the factors contributing to upper secondary school students’ happiness.

D. Parents’ Education Level and Happiness

In this study, father’s education level does not show any significant relationship with happiness among Malaysian upper secondary school students. Happiness is also not influenced by the mother’s education level. This is inconsistent with the study carried out by Ritu, Thind, and Jaswal[39]. Parents’ marital status and family structure were among the factors contributing to adolescents’ happiness in this study. These two factors were related to the parents’ or guardians’ relationship with the adolescents. It is not the adolescents’ concern how educated their parents were, instead they emphasized on the
quality of their relationship with the adults which contribute toward their happiness. This might be able to explain why parents’ education level did not affect the children’s happiness in this study.

E. Parents’ Employment Status and Happiness

This study found no significant relationship between the father’s employment status and happiness among upper secondary school students in Seremban. Similarly, the mother’s employment status also does not show any significant difference. This is consistent with the findings of Ritu, Thind, and Jaswal[40] which stated that whether mothers work or not has no effect on their children which eventually affect the children’s life satisfaction. Studies indicate far more similarities than differences in the daily experiences of adolescents with employed versus unemployed parents[41], [42]. Experts believe that the most important factor may be how the family perceives the parents’ employment, rather than their employment status per se[43].

F. Family Income and Happiness

Associations between income and happiness may be rather different for youth than for adults. Differences could arise, for example, because youth typically have limited information about family finances; poor parents may attempt to shelter their children from financial hardship; rich parents may limit child consumption to avoid “spoiling” children. In conclusion, income may be less a personal “measure of happiness” for youth than for parents [44].

VIII. COUNSELING IMPLICATIONS

The information gained in this study is able to help parents and educators to gain general information about upper secondary school students’ happiness and how it relates to family. Parents should be aware that their relationship influences their children’s well-being. Parents should not focus only in providing enough money for the family and children’s expenses. They should pay more attention to their relationship with their partners and the quality of their relationship with other family members. They can participate in parenting training or workshops to improve their relationship with their children.

Parent should also consider attending individual counseling sessions to solve their personal issues which might unconsciously affect their family and marriage relationship. Parents play an important role in helping their children to develop social skills. This will greatly help their children in maintaining a good relationship with their close friends.

Besides that, parents need to be aware of their children’s needs. They have to be patient and listen when their children share about daily life happenings. This helps them to express their negative feelings and improve their positive feelings. By having a close relationship, the children will eventually feel happier with themselves. School counsellors can conduct workshops instilling proper communication skills and social skills. This is an opportunity for students to develop their interpersonal skills which can help to enhance their happiness.

The findings of this study suggest that counsellors need to pay particular attention to adolescents’ family structure in relation to family structure effects on the adolescents’ happiness.

IX. CONCLUSION

Happiness is one important component in one’s life. As the future generation, adolescents have an important role in nation building. In conclusion, the upper secondary school students show an average level of happiness. The findings of this study show several family factors which influence adolescents’ happiness. Family structure and parents’ marital status gives impact on adolescents’ happiness.

It would be devastating if the younger generation is unhappy with their lives. We need to promote the importance of happiness among the adolescents in our society. When they are happy, they will be able to contribute to our country. It is the nation’s challenge to enhance the adolescents’ happiness. Parents also need to be aware of their children’s needs. They have to be patient and listen when their children share happenings in their daily lives. This helps them to express their negative feelings and improve their positive feelings. By having a close relationship, the children will eventually feel happier with themselves.
Advances in Sociology


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