

# Promoting Student Happiness: An Overview of Determinants and Strategies

DR. RUPAN DHILLON Dr. Rupan Dhillon, Head and Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar 143001, Punjab. DR. AMANDEEP SINGH Dr. Amandeep Singh, Associate Professor, Psychologist, Department of Psychiatry, Sri Guru Ram Das Institute of Medical Sciences & Research, Vallah, Sri Amritsar, Punjab.

## Abstract:

Attaining Happiness is a fundamental objective of Human existence. The way we perceive the world is more important to happiness than objective circumstances in our environment. Happiness is a composite of satisfaction, coping skills and positive emotions. It is considered as a component of mental health as it is holistic in nature and consists of emotions of contentment, joy, pleasant mood. Happiness in the students can be predicted by a number of variables, like attachment, social support, school environment, academics and personality. Therefore, in this article, systematic review will be presented on the theoretical models of happiness, the correlates or the determinants of happiness during the adolescent years of vulnerability and transition and the strategies that can enable to boost happiness in them.

Keywords: Happiness, Parenting, Teacher Support, Cognitive therapy

# 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Theoretical Formulations of Happiness

With the emergence of Positive Psychology, happiness has gained prominence and is used widely as a psychological construct in literature. The role of Positive Psychology has become increasingly dominant especially in the current situation. There are many concepts like hope, well-being, and optimism that are being researched, documented and discussed since 2000, yet the contribution of Positive Psychology also includes an important concept and that is Happiness.

Buddha's search for meaningful existence is the biggest example we have of a person giving up worldly pleasures and seeking happiness.

Mental health has been conceived and related with positive feelings and functioning in life. This state is called as subjective emotional well-being and is termed as Hedonia. It focuses on happiness, defining well-being in terms of pleasure attainment and pain avoidance. It also constitutes of a cognitive component and evaluates life satisfaction. The affective component is concerned with positive emotions. Aristotle talked about Eudaimonia which characterizes human flourishing. It is a life where a person seeks meaning and purpose. Eudamonic approach is more concerned with psychological well-being. It studies self-realization, and well-being of a fully functioning person. Focus is directed on purposefulness, authenticity and life meaning. Hedonia is concerned with immediate subjective experience and Eudaimonia is associated with personal excellence and striving to achieve it.

Theorists have varying views on happiness: some see it as an emotion, others link it to well-being or achievements (Waterman et al., 2010). Broadly, happiness equates to 'quality of life' but does not specify what is good about life. Wessman and Ricks (1966) define happiness as a long-term balance of positive

feelings, while Fordyce (1988) describes it as one's overall evaluation of past experiences. Bentham (1789) sees happiness as the sum of pleasures and pains, and Kahneman (2000) introduces 'objective happiness' as the raw affective experience of a person's life.

The cognitive viewpoint says that happiness comes from how we think and judge our own lives. McDowel and Newell (1987) said that life satisfaction is when someone looks at their life and compares it to what they want or to some outside standard. Shin and Johnson (1978) described life satisfaction as a general judgment of how good someone's life is, based on their own standards. When people reach their life goals (Annas, 2004), they can feel happiness. Some believe happiness is simply having no unmet wishes or desires (Schmitz, 1930). This means being satisfied with what you have. Cognitively, happiness is having a positive view of your life, while affectively, it means feeling good and content.

Many psychologists think happiness should be seen as a person's attitude. Happiness can also be seen as a generally positive outlook on life. Lieberman (1970) said that before turning eighteen, people develop a certain level of satisfaction that usually stays the same throughout their life.

Some definitions focus on how consistent our positive feelings are, while others focus on what we believe. According to Diener (2000), happiness is about what people actually feel. Diener, a leading psychologist, defined happiness as "Subjective Well-Being" (SWB), which means being pleased with your life (attitude) and feeling positive emotions (affect). So, a person with high well-being feels satisfied with life and happy most of the time, with only a few negative emotions like sadness or anger. On the other hand, someone with low well-being feels unhappy with life, rarely feels joy, and often experiences negative emotions like anger or anxiety.

Chekola (2007) defines happiness as fulfilling a life plan without significant dissatisfaction, emphasizing the importance of setting and achieving meaningful goals. In contrast, Sumner (1996) describes happiness as having a positive attitude toward one's life, highlighting the role of subjective evaluation and personal perception. Both perspectives suggest that happiness involves more than fleeting emotions, encompassing long-term satisfaction and outlook.

Happiness has been theorized with more clarity with the help of these theoretical foundations. Need goal satisfaction theories initiated by Maslow and Freud preferred this category as they described happiness as reduction of tension or the satisfaction of needs. So, if a person attains his goal there is a satisfaction experienced and thus happiness. Happiness emerges when one has striven to achieve one's goals and has met one's fundamental needs. Ryan and Deci (2000) proposed Self-determination Theory, which states that for a person to attain wellbeing, he needs to meet with his basic human needs which are autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Process/activity theorists posit that engaging in life activities generates happiness. People who engage in flow, challenging activities, and interesting activities in daily life tend to be happy. Csikszentmihalyi (2000) states that engagement in activity produces happiness. Genetic personality disposition (Diener et al., 2009) theorists see happiness as a stable personality trait. There are multiple set points which exist for individuals and these set points may be changed under some conditions. Some psychologists believe the Happiness Set Point suggests happiness cannot be significantly increased (Norrish & Vella-Brodrick, 2008), viewing happiness as a fixed personal trait or general tendency. According to research by Lucas and Fujita (2000), two key personality traits from the Big Five model—extroversion (being outgoing) and neuroticism (experiencing negative emotions)—are strongly connected to how happy people feel. Lyubomirsky and colleagues (2005) suggest that a person's long-term happiness is influenced by a combination of three main factors: their genetics, life circumstances (such as health or income), and the activities they do that relate to happiness. This means that while some parts of happiness may be stable, there are still things people can do or experience that affect how happy they are over time.

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Attachment theory is an Evolutionary Psychological approach applied in the context of happiness and good well-being and focuses on the role of early caregivers. The attachment patterns that develop in a child will impact on the child's emotional, cognitive and social skills and competencies in adulthood. Repeated generational patterns, abusive patterns, and poor parenting in childhood have been found to be a risk factor for mental illness and devoid a person from being happy and fulfilled. Avoidant and neglectful parenting must be avoided as it has negative effects on the personality development of the children. If parenting patterns are dysfunctional or the families are breaking up because of divorces, children will develop patterns that are antisocial and they will have no happy feelings. They may have conduct disorders and may have increased rule breaking behavior. They may also be aggressive and spend a lot of their time on social media platforms. These dysfunctional behaviors will deplete them from happiness and positivity and thus reduce mental health.

# 2. Research Objective

In this paper, an effort has been made to understand the meaning and theoretical formulations of happiness. Apart from that, this article also discusses the various factors that can promote happiness. One factor can be the kind of home environment a child is raised in or the level of social support he receives from his community and school environment. The personality of a person also influences his happy mindset. The different variables are elucidated along with the review of literature/ supporting studies.

# 2.1 Home Environment

Studies indicate a strong link between home environment and happiness. Children raised in supportive homes with secure attachment styles tend to be happier, while those with insecure attachments report lower happiness. Satisfying home conditions and frequent positive emotions are associated with higher well-being, which in turn benefits health, appetite, sleep, memory, relationships, and mental health (Kawamoto et al., 1999). Furthermore, individuals' happiness in romantic relationships, life satisfaction and also subjective wellbeing level change according to their attachment to their parents. All these studies support the idea that attachment styles are the strongest correlations of happiness. Being in a home environment where there is cohesiveness, active recreational orientations and less conflict will increase the well-being of the individuals. This will further influence the quality of a student's life and their relationships with peers in the school environment. They will thus feel that they are able to express easily their needs and emotions in their relationships with the others and will talk without restraints and will have more harmony in relationships. This all contributes to the feelings of happiness.

To put it simply, the way our home feels can make a big difference in how happy we are. If a child grows up feeling loved and safe at home, they often feel better about themselves and life in general. Homes where people support one another and show kindness help children—and even adults—feel calm, confident, and able to handle tough times. When families spend time together, laugh, and talk about their feelings, it helps everyone's mood and makes the house a nicer place to live. On the other hand, if there isn't much trust, warmth, or safety at home, people may find it harder to feel happy or relaxed. A good home environment doesn't just affect our feelings; it can also help us eat better, sleep well, remember things more easily, make friends, and stay mentally strong.

Extensive research has demonstrated that the atmosphere at home plays a crucial role in shaping overall happiness and emotional stability. Children who grow up in nurturing households where they feel safe and securely attached to their caregivers are much more likely to experience elevated levels of life satisfaction. In contrast, when attachment within the home is unstable or insecure, children often show signs of decreased happiness and greater emotional difficulties. A pleasant and fulfilling domestic environment not only fosters regular experiences of positive emotion but also contributes significantly to numerous aspects of well-being—including physical health, healthy eating patterns, restful sleep, cognitive functions such as memory, the quality of interpersonal relationships, and psychological resilience. These findings are supported by empirical evidence from Kawamoto and colleagues (1999),

affirming the profound impact that a supportive home setting can have on both immediate mood and long-term mental and physical health outcomes.

Simply put, the home is like the foundation for a person's happiness. When children feel cared for and protected by their parents or guardians, they are more likely to be joyful and emotionally steady. Making sure that the home is comforting and offers plenty of love builds habits that help people throughout their lives. For example, when a family eats together, shares stories, or even just listens to each other, it teaches children how to express themselves and connect with others. But if the home feels stressful or uncaring, kids might struggle with sadness or worry and could have trouble getting along with others. Having a warm and loving home can also help people stay physically healthy, keep good routines like eating and sleeping well, and bounce back after hard times. Research, including the study by Kawamoto and colleagues in 1999, shows just how important a caring home can be for our minds and bodies, both now and later in life.

## 2.2 Social support

Research has shown that having good social support—meaning friends, family, and others you can count on—makes people feel happier, more satisfied with life, and even healthier (Helgeson, 2003; Janevic et al., 2004). For students, strong social support is linked to higher self-esteem and a more positive outlook, as well as better ways of dealing with problems. This is true not only for most students, but also for those with challenges like visual impairment (Sarason et al., 1983; Kef, 2002).

Social support helps people handle stress, such as living with a long-term illness or disability (Reinhardt, 2001a; Schwarzer & Buchwald, 2004), and keeps students motivated, especially when they connect with others who share their interests and experiences. Teachers also play an important role: when they offer encouragement and understanding, it helps students trust them more, stay interested in learning, and feel less like giving up on school.

According to Self Determination Theory, classrooms where students feel supported by both teachers and classmates lead to greater motivation, stronger feelings of competence, and better self-esteem. In simple terms, feeling supported by the people around you—both at home and at school—can make a big difference to your happiness and success.

#### 2.3 Personality

Argyle and Lu (1990a) concluded in their study that extraverts are happier than others because of social skills and assertiveness. They are more cooperative, use a more positive non-verbal style as well as a verbal style, which lead them to expect that social encounters will go as they planned, and enable them to take part in and enjoy a range of social situations. Temperamentally, extraverts may be predisposed to experience positive emotions more intensely than those low in extraversion. They are also happier because they have better social skills and experience greater social support. Studies have reported a link in personality of a person and happiness or life satisfaction, yet this link is moderated by culture (Pavot and Diener, 2008). Culture plays an important role in determining the strength of relationship between personality and happiness. In recent years, researchers have found that whether a culture values group connections or individual independence plays a big role in how happy people are. For example, Western cultures often link happiness to being independent and making personal choices, while Eastern cultures focus more on the importance of relationships and community. Studies by DeNeve and Cooper (1998) and Steel et al. (2008) show that personality is one of the biggest factors affecting happiness. Traits from the Big Five personality model are closely tied to how people feel about their lives. Simply put, students who are positive and optimistic tend to be happier in general.

# 2.4 Gratitude

Gratitude is a key idea in Positive Psychology and is closely connected to trust, hope, and thankfulness. It's not just a feeling, but a helpful tool for improving mental health by easing stress and lowering 86 Online & Print International, Peer reviewed, Referred & Indexed Monthly Journal www.raijmr.com RET Academy for International Journals of Multidisciplinary Research (RAIJMR) negative emotions. Practicing gratitude can truly change lives, leading to better relationships and more positive experiences. When people notice and appreciate the good things around them—big or small—they build a stronger foundation for happiness and wellbeing.

Researchers see gratitude as a strength of character and a building block for a flourishing life. It motivates people to be kind and to help others. When students practice gratitude, they tend to have better experiences at school, get along more easily with others, and feel more hopeful and optimistic about what's ahead. Gratitude doesn't just make you feel good in the moment; it can also boost your emotional and mental health, help you close the door on bad feelings, and encourage a brighter outlook for the future.

A newer idea, called "dispositional gratitude," is about how naturally thankful a person is in general not just for one moment, but as an ongoing attitude. People who are naturally more grateful are usually better at noticing the ways others help or support them, and they respond with genuine appreciation. Recent research, like a large review by Ekema-Agbaw and colleagues in 2020, found that people who have higher levels of gratitude also have better well-being, with gratitude playing a significant role in their happiness.

Gratitude research has grown a lot in recent years. Studies show that people who are grateful tend to have stronger social support, cope with problems in healthier ways, and enjoy more positive emotions. For example, a study by Chih-Che in 2015 found that gratitude helps people find better ways to deal with challenges, builds good psychological habits, and reduces negative feelings and physical stress. Gratitude can even spark other positive emotions, creating a cycle of well-being.

Another study by Gelibolu and colleagues in 2019 looked at how gratitude, hope, optimism, and life satisfaction work together to affect psychological health. They found that gratitude alone explained about one-third of the difference in people's well-being. When combined with hope, optimism, and life satisfaction, these four traits explained over half of the differences in people's happiness levels. This shows just how important gratitude can be for mental health, and why practicing gratitude can make a real difference—especially for students dealing with stress or emotional challenges.

One simple but powerful way for students to build gratitude is by keeping a Gratitude Journal, where they write down things they are thankful for each day. This habit can help train the mind to focus on the positive and build emotional strength. Students who are spiritual or value kindness and compassion often experience even greater benefits from practicing gratitude.

In summary, gratitude isn't just about saying thank you—it's a tool that can help students, and anyone, feel happier, more supported, and better able to handle life's ups and downs. Practicing gratitude regularly, especially through simple actions like journaling or reflecting on positive experiences, can have a lasting impact on mental health and overall well-being.

Niemiec (2018) has stated that being aware and being thankful to all the things happening in life is what gratitude means. It means taking time to say thanks. With regular practice, if inculcated in students, Gratitude can help reduce complaining and can also reduce rumination of negative thoughts. Context is important in Gratitude as forcing the students to do something they don't want to will create more unhealthy behaviors.

# 3. Other variables

Apart from these variables, happiness is also dependent on a student's self-esteem and the school environment he is part of. His positive relationship with the peers can boost happiness. In a study conducted by Costa et al. (1985), quantity and quality of friendships correlated with happiness at the value of .29. Happiness can be produced by friends and the frequency of enjoyable contact with peers.

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Relationships with peers in the school environment are rewarding and promote positive emotion and satisfaction. Close friends are considered as a big source of happiness as supported by a study conducted by Wheeler (1983) who suggested that instead of having a larger group of friends, it's better to have close-knit friendships. Students still feel lonely in larger groups as there are fewer intimate topics discussed in these friendships.

Lastly, it is important to point out that students have good mental health when they have clarity in their goals and have higher self-esteem. Part of the satisfaction may come from external rewards like higher academic achievement, or good ranking in sports. Attaining any sort of goal at home and school can lead to happiness. Happiness is enhanced by commitment to goals that are attainable and valued and give self-esteem.

## 4. Research Outcome

The purpose of this review is that we have been trying to understand how happiness can be promoted and enhanced. The family environment is an important variable which can promote happiness right from the adolescent period. Depressive and anxiety tendencies should be reduced in adolescents. Their self-esteem should be promoted. A happy personality should be the aim of the parents for their children. Children should be empowered so that they can have good well-being at an early age. Social support should be given to individuals at any age so that they can build good relationships and form better bonds. They can share their problems and can boost their happiness and well-being by staying in the company of friends. Apart from that, individuals should be directed toward the path of prayer and hope. Religious and spiritual practices can also enable them to develop sound mental health. Therefore, as mental health professionals, we need to find strategies to build our own resources to treat mental illness and these goals should be achievable goals. The identification of mental problems should be done at an earlier stage so that the necessary skills can be inculcated. Psychologists should focus on identification of low well-being and aim to foster mental health. They should promote positive adaptation and enhance well-being.

What are the strategies that can prove to be effective and can help students? There are some studies that suggest that effective strategies can boost happiness in the students. Sport and exercise are positive mood enhancers when done regularly and the effect may last to the next day. Students also feel happy in social encounters and moving out with friends who produce companionship and enjoyment in the social relations. Religious practices and music therapy can also elevate the life condition of the individuals, especially if they are involved frequently and the groups are supportive. It is also important to have leisure groups or holidays with friends where there is more social interaction and stimulation in newer places. A few field experiments show that regular running or jogging for a few weeks have led to positive effects on mental health. There is variability in students and because of that students need to find the right activity for themselves for positive mood induction.

Therapies that can promote happiness are social skills training, self-control therapy, self –reinforcement, problem solving therapy and relaxation training. Though meditation is advised, it's difficult for youngsters to involve themselves in this practice at this young age. Teenagers should also be taught to keep realistic goals and to take smaller steps to achieve these goals. This method is most apt for depressed students. Happiness must be created by the youth themselves, and they must decide their own strategies to build happiness. In certain communities, there are happiness building programmes as well and they promote more socializing, developing an outgoing social personality, becoming more active, being involved in meaningful work and to be a better friend. The students are told to take each element at a time and focus cognitively and become happier.

Lastly, cognitive therapy can also teach students to think rationally. A few sessions spaced out in 2 to 4 weeks can help adolescents to understand realistic thoughts and interpretations. They are asked to identify self-defeating thoughts so that they can be converted to affirmations. Students can also keep diaries of

positive thoughts and journal their behavior and this is the most efficient tool for reducing negative thinking.

Nations are now discussing Happiness and Subjective well-being. The concept of well-being was first discussed by the Bhutan Gross National Happiness initiative which referred to subjective well-being as central to sustainable development (Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2014). It pointed to the social and economic pillars of sustainable development, the social and economic environment we grew up in, which influences our well-being. This is how awareness can spread from one nation to another. The sustainable happiness model maps activities and situations on two axes—benefits to individual's personal and subjective wellbeing and secondly costs to the environment thus enabling individuals of the most environmentally sustainable way to pursue happiness. In fact, the Happiness Research Institute (2015) suggests that it is no longer possible to imagine a future where happiness is not pursued or is somehow not connected to sustainability. Happiness and well-being will have to be discussed at all levels. Positive Psychology interventions need to be extended and more systematically integrated into schools for happiness and well-being of students. 21st century Education Movement for schools must incorporate students' happiness and well-being as a focus of learning.

**Conclusively**, apart from career readiness, students must be reeducated, and they need to have a vision of flourishing life as well, where they are happy and can create value too with their humanitarian values. Positive Psychology can bring this shift in the traditional paradigm, and can healthy students build Gratitude, Empathy, Compassion, Mindfulness, Emotional and Social skills so that they can be resilient in face of conditions and challenges of life.

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