Understanding what makes Singapore happy and how we can be happier
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We would also like to thank the rest of the Happiness Initiative team (both current and past) who played a part in making this happen: Priyanka Nair, Nicole Tan, Wen Shumin, Sabrina Noor, Faith Cheong, Cassandra Loh and Sameer Ehsaan.
The State of Happiness Study (SOHS) Report was inspired by the World Happiness Report (WHR).

The WHR is a report commissioned by the United Nations to examine how happy nations are and to suggest policies that can bring nations towards achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

While the WHR looks at national level factors that drive happiness, Happiness Initiative’s SOHS looks at individual level factors. We aim for the SOHS to be an annual attempt to examine Singapore Residents’ happiness level and factors that predict happiness.

We endeavour to answer three questions:

01 How happy are Singapore Residents?
02 What are the predictors of our happiness?
03 What recommendations can we offer?

Here are the answers to the above three questions.

01 From 1,230 Singapore Resident respondents surveyed between October to December 2020, the average Life Evaluation score (on the Cantril Ladder scale of 0 to 10) of our sample is 6.23.

02 The predictors were classified into socio-demographic factors and other more changeable factors. Two socio-demographic factors - Sexual Orientation and Household Income - stood out as strong predictors of happiness. We discovered three changeable psychological and social factors - Purpose, Perseverance, and People - that are strong predictors of happiness, even after controlling for socio-demographic factors.

03 We can create platforms or programmes to help our residents to proactively develop their purpose, cultivate skills to persevere, and learn people strategies to develop strong social support.

We will continue to look for other predictors in our next SOHS wave.

This report is organised into the following four parts:

01 Results & Analysis
02 Examining the 2 Key Socio-demographic Factors
03 Examining the 3 Changeable Psychological and Social Factors - The 3Ps
04 What Can We Start Doing Today to Improve our State of Well-being?
Results & Analysis
Written by: Simon Leow

The SOHS measured 4 different facets of happiness: Life Evaluation and Life Satisfaction (both commonly referred to as Cognitive Happiness), and Positive Affect and Negative Affect (both commonly referred to as Emotional Happiness).

The SOHS focused on Life Evaluation as the World Happiness Report (2020) also tracked similar data. Singapore Residents were asked to rate their response to the question, “How good is my life?”, on a scale of 0-10, with 0 being my “Worst Possible Life” and 10 being my “Best Possible Life” (also known as the Cantril Ladder) (Cantril, 1965). Over the course of three months, 1,230 respondents completed the full survey.

The average Life Evaluation score (on the Cantril Ladder) of our sample was 6.23. This is not statistically different from Singapore’s average score of 6.38 as reported by the World Happiness Report 2020. Singapore’s score is shown in Figure 1 (ranked 31st out of 153 countries).

Along with different facets of happiness, we also measured a number of socio-demographic factors listed below. Where data is available, we compare our distribution against the national distribution.

- Resident Status (Table 1a),
- Age (Table 1b),
- Gender (Table 1c),
- Ethnicity (Table 1d),
- Marital Status (Table 1e),
- Qualifications (Table 1f),
- Monthly Household Income (Table 1g),
- Monthly Personal Income (Table 1h),
- Sexual Orientation (Table 1i),
- Gender Identity (Table 1j).

It is important to note that it is not the aim of this project to find a sample that is similar to the distributions at national level for all socio-demographic factors. We recognise that socio-demographic factors are often not changeable or take time to change, such as household income.

Instead, this project aims to increase the number of responses over the years and find psychological

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1 We refer to two sources of national data from Department of Statistics (DOS) (https://www.singstat.gov.sg/) and from https://data.gov.sg/
and social factors that can predict happiness. Because psychological and social factors are changeable, and can be cultivated, it holds great promise for us to live out better versions of ourselves.

Table 1a: Resident Status - Comparison between SOHS 2020 distribution and National distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SOHS, 2020</th>
<th>DOS*, 2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Singapore Citizens</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent Residents</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*DOS - Singapore Department of Statistics

Table 1b: Age - Comparison between SOHS 2020 distribution and National distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SOHS, 2020</th>
<th>DOS, 2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 15</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 to 19</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 34</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 49</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 to 69</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70 and above</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1c: Gender - Comparison between SOHS 2020 distribution and National distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SOHS, 2020</th>
<th>DOS, 2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1d: Ethnicity - Comparison between SOHS 2020 distribution and National distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SOHS, 2020</th>
<th>DOS, 2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1e: Marital Status - Comparison between SOHS 2020 distribution and National distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SOHS, 2020</th>
<th>DOS, 2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced/Separated</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Results & Analysis | Overview

### Table 1f: Qualifications - Comparison between SOHS 2020 distribution and National distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>SOHS, 2020</th>
<th>DOS, 2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma and Professional Qualification</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Secondary (Non-Tertiary)</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary or lower</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 1g: Monthly Household Income - Comparison between SOHS 2020 distribution and National distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monthly Household Income</th>
<th>SOHS, 2020</th>
<th>DOS, 2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than $1,000</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>15%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1,001 - $2,999</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$3,001 - $4,999</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$5,000 - $9,999</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$10,000 - $14,999</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$15,000 - $19,999</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20,000 &amp; Over</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Include household with no working person

### Table 1h: Monthly Personal Income - SOHS 2020 distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monthly Personal Income</th>
<th>SOHS, 2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I don't have an income.</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than $1,000</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1,001 - $3,000</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$3,001 - $5,000</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$5,001 - $7,000</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$7,001 - $9,000</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than $9,000</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 1i: Sexual Orientation - SOHS 2020 distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexual Orientation</th>
<th>SOHS, 2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asexual</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homosexual</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others and Prefer not to say</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Socio-demographic Factors

We conducted a hierarchical linear regression on Life Evaluation. We first entered our socio-demographics factors into our regression model to see what predicts Life Evaluation. We repeated the same process for other facets of happiness, namely Life Satisfaction, Positive Affect, and Negative Affect.

Two socio-demographic factors (Sexual Orientation and Household Income) consistently predict different facets of happiness (Life Evaluation, Life Satisfaction, Positive Affect, Negative Affect). Refer to Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of Regression Model Predicting Life Evaluation in Singapore Residents (Socio-demographic factors)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictors</th>
<th>Life Evaluation</th>
<th>Life Satisfaction</th>
<th>Positive Affect</th>
<th>Negative Affect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homosexual (vs Heterosexual)</td>
<td>-1.116***</td>
<td>-0.551**</td>
<td>-0.388**</td>
<td>0.460**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual (vs Heterosexual)</td>
<td>-1.190***</td>
<td>-0.858***</td>
<td>-0.301**</td>
<td>0.437***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ln (Household Income)</td>
<td>0.364***</td>
<td>0.225***</td>
<td>0.104**</td>
<td>-0.104***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p < 0.005 ***p < 0.001

Between the different facets of happiness, we focused our attention on Life Evaluation (as measured by the Cantril Ladder), as it is also used extensively by the World Happiness Report.

Sexual Orientation is a categorical data. Our survey measured sexual orientation based on the following categories: Heterosexual, Homosexual, Bisexual, and Asexual. Based on our analysis, we found that when compared against Heterosexual:

Homosexual is associated with a 1.116 units decrease in Life Evaluation on a 10-point Cantril Ladder scale, which translates to a 11% decrease in happiness.

Bisexual is associated with a 1.190 units decrease in Life Evaluation on a 10-point Cantril Ladder scale, which translates to a 12% decrease in happiness.

Being Homosexual or Bisexual is associated with an approximate 1.1 units decrease in Life Evaluation.

To put these numbers in the context of the World Happiness Report (WHR) 2021, if we reduce Singapore’s WHR average of 6.377 by an approximate of 1.1 units, we will have 5.277. This will push us from a ranking of 31st to 85th, just below Indonesia, a drop of 54 placings (refer to Figure 2).
Additionally, an increase in Household Income is also associated with an increase in Life Evaluation. Let’s take an example of a person with a monthly Household Income of $1,500. If that person experiences an increase of monthly Household Income to $2,500, it is associated with a 0.19 unit increase in Life Evaluation on a 10-point Cantril Ladder scale, which translates to a 1.9% increase in happiness.

In summary, Homosexual and Bisexual sexual orientations predict lower Life Evaluation while increase in Household Income predicts higher Life Evaluation. These trends are also consistent across other facets of happiness.

### Results & Analysis | Psychological and Social Factors

We identified three Psychological and Social factors - Purpose, Perseverance (Grit) and People. (Social Support) - making it the 3Ps.

The second step to our analysis is adding the 3Ps to our model to examine the increase in our model’s predictive ability.

Socio-demographic factors can explain 15% of the variation in Life Evaluation. Beyond the socio-demographic factors, the 3Ps further explain another 17% of the variation in Life Evaluation. Refer to Figure 3 for a pie chart representation.

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**Figure 3. Representation of variation in Life Evaluation**

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2. *Purpose is measured using Claremont Purpose Scale (Bronk et al., 2018).*  
3. *Perseverance is measured by Grit Scale (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009).*  
4. *People (Social Support) is measured using this question: “When I have a problem or when I’m in need, there is someone I could turn to.” (0-Almost Never to 4-Almost Always)*  
5. *Special thanks to Minister of State (MOS) Alvin Tan for providing a suggestion to name Social Support as People during a panel on “Let’s Talk About Failure” on 6 Feb 2021, making it the 3Ps.*  
6. 15% of the variation in Life Evaluation due to socio-demographic factors ($R^2=0.152, p < 0.001$).  
7. 17% of the variation in Life Evaluation due to 3Ps over and above socio-demographic factors (Change in $R^2=0.171$, $p < 0.001$).
Table 3: Summary of Regression Model Predicting Life Evaluation in Singapore Residents (3Ps)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictors</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>0.466***</td>
<td>0.074</td>
<td>6.262</td>
<td>0.460**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perseverance</td>
<td>0.386***</td>
<td>0.083</td>
<td>4.633</td>
<td>0.437***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People (Social Support)</td>
<td>0.421***</td>
<td>0.041</td>
<td>10.284</td>
<td>-0.104***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 shows the predicted increase in Life Evaluation with increase in Purpose, Perseverance, or People, after controlling for socio-demographic factors.

Specifically, a 1 unit increase in Purpose is associated with a 0.466 unit increase in Life Evaluation on a 10-point Cantril Ladder scale (p < 0.001).

A 1 unit increase in Perseverance is associated with a 0.386 unit increase in Life Evaluation on a 10-point Cantril Ladder scale (p < 0.001).

A 1 unit increase in Social Support is associated with a 0.421 unit increase in Life Evaluation on a 10-point Cantril Ladder scale (p < 0.001).

The Average Person versus the Person Lacking 3Ps

The Happiness Score of a Person who Lacks 3Ps

The average person in our sample has a happiness score of 6.23 (Life Evaluation). The average person has average scores on all factors, including Purpose, Perseverance, and People.

We want to compare the happiness score of the average person against the happiness score of a hypothetical person with “no Purpose, no Perseverance, and no People to turn to in times of need,” while all the other factors are controlled at the same level as the average person.

Such a person with no Purpose, no Perseverance, and no People to turn to is also known as the Lacking-3Ps Person. Using our model, we predict the happiness score of our Lacking-3Ps person to be 3.36.

With reference to the World Happiness Report 2020 that ranks 153 countries on their happiness score, our Lacking-3Ps Person has a happiness score that coincides with Rwanda’s average happiness. Rwanda is ranked 4th from the bottom, above Zimbabwe, South Sudan, and Afghanistan (refer to Figure 4).

Figure 4. Our Lacking 3Ps Person has a similar happiness score to that of Rwanda, which is ranked 150th out of 153 countries. (Source: World Happiness Report 2021)
The Happiness Score of a Person who Has Abundance of 3Ps

On the other hand, if we have a hypothetical person who rated highest on Purpose, Perseverance, and People to turn to in times of need, while all the other factors are controlled at the same level as the average person, the person would have a happiness score of 8.46.

This would make our hypothetical person happier than the average person from the happiest country in the world - Finland.

How Much of Purpose, Perseverance, and People Contribute to Happiness

The average person, with average 3Ps, has a happiness score of 6.23. The person who lacks the 3Ps has a happiness score of 3.36.

The average person is 2.96 points happier than the person lacking 3Ps. We are interested to find out how much of this 2.96 points are due to Purpose, Perseverance, and People.

Table 4 breaks down the 2.96 points into the factors contributing to this increase. 35% of the 2.96 points increase in happiness is due to Purpose, 34% is due to Perseverance, and 31% is due to the support of People. Table 4 shows the break down of the increase in happiness between the average person and the person who lacks 3Ps.

Table 4: Decomposing the happiness difference between a hypothetical average person and a hypothetical person who lacks 3Ps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Average Person</th>
<th>Person lacking 3Ps</th>
<th>The Average Person is happier than the Person Lacking 3Ps by 2.96 units.</th>
<th>% of the increase in happiness that this due to the Factor:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.32</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>0.466</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perseverance</td>
<td>0.386</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People</td>
<td>0.421</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our research suggests that 3Ps, Sexual Orientation, and Household Income are strong and significant predictors of happiness. The next few sections explore existing research literature on their contributions to happiness.

We hope to be able to explore some plausible recommendations for consideration.

References


The concept of “sexual orientation” may not be as clearly defined. For this report, sexual orientation refers to whether one is primarily aroused by same-sex and/or opposite-sex stimuli, independent of the sexual behaviour engaged in by that individual (Gorman, 1994).

Our survey tries to measure sexual orientation based on the following categories: Heterosexual, Homsexual, Bisexual, and Asexual.

**Current Research**

To date, existing literature has two competing arguments in explaining sexual orientation. One argument suggests that homosexuality is linked to genetic factors (Bem, 1996; Votinov et al., 2021). Conversely, other papers argue that the scientific evidence is not compelling enough (Mayer & McHugh, 2016; Fausto-Sterling, 2019; Salomma & Matsick, 2019).

It is not the objective of this report to side with either view. Rather, this report aims to understand the effect of Sexual Orientation on happiness.

**Meta-analysis**

A random effects meta-analysis of 32 studies showed that compared with heterosexual men and women, there was significantly lower self-esteem in sexual minority men\(^8\) and women\(^9\) (Bridge et al., 2019).

A meta-analysis of 12 United Kingdom population health surveys, capturing 94,818 participants, showed that adults who identified as homosexual (lesbian/gay) and bisexual had higher prevalence of common mental disorders (i.e. mixed anxiety and depression\(^10\)) and lower wellbeing\(^11\) when compared to their heterosexual counterparts (Semlyen et al., 2016).

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\(^8\) Standardised Mean Difference, SMD = −0.33, 95% CI [−0.44, −0.23], \(p<0.00001\), with small to medium effect size (Bridge et al., 2019).

\(^9\) SMD = −0.20, 95% CI [−0.29, −0.11], \(p=0.001\), with small effect size (Bridge et al., 2019).

\(^10\) Generally, about 29.2% (\(p=0.09\)) of individuals who identified as homosexual (lesbian/gay) and 39.1% (\(p<0.001\)) of individuals who identified as bisexual was associated with increased risk of symptoms of common mental disorder (Semlyen et al., 2016).

\(^11\) About 29.7% (\(p=0.05\)) of individuals who identified as homosexual (lesbian/gay) and 36.7% (\(p<0.001\)) who identified as bisexual was associated with lower wellbeing score (Semlyen et al., 2016).
Our Study Findings

Our study wanted to identify various factors predictive of our happiness or unhappiness levels in Singapore Residents. Our findings showed that individuals with a minority sexual orientation in Singapore are overall less happy in all facets of happiness.

When compared against Heterosexual, individuals who identify as Homosexual experience an 11% decrease in happiness.

When compared against Heterosexual, individuals who identify as Bisexual experience a 12% decrease in happiness.

Discussion and Recommendations

LGBTQ+ individuals are valuable members of society. As such, society should put in active effort to “understand the causes of these diverse expressions of sexual humanity” (O’Hanlan et al. 2018).

Deepening Society’s Understanding

Many individuals who are part of the LGBTQ+ community face discrimination, both at home and in the community. As such, creating a safe space for them goes a long way (Cooper et al., 2020; Wilson & Cariola, 2020).

Giving Social Support

A social support network is crucial for individuals in the LGBTQ+ community (Frost et al., 2016). A concerted effort to challenge victimisation, discrimination, and stigmatisation surrounding the LGBTQ+ community would help build a more inclusive society (Redcay et al, 2019; Wilson & Cariola, 2020), hence improving the happiness of these individuals.
Examining the 2 Key Socio-demographic Factors | Sexual Orientation

References


In Singapore, household income is calculated by taking the sum of the salaries and business earnings of all members in the household. The median monthly household income (including CPF contributions) for the year of 2020 was $9,189 (Department of Statistics Singapore, 2020).12

Singapore does not have an official definition for low income. Instead, an unofficial definition can be inferred from the eligibility criteria for government assistance. To qualify for the ComCare Short-to-Medium-Term Assistance, households must have a monthly income of $1,900 and below or a per capita income of $650 and below. Hence, low income can be defined using this criteria as well.

**Current Research**

There are two distinct aspects of happiness. First, a reflective evaluation of how one is doing in life (cognitive well-being). Second, how one is feeling (emotional well-being) (Lucas, Diener & Suh, 1996).

Both aspects of happiness are associated with household income. However, household income has a greater association with life evaluation (cognitive well-being) than emotional well-being (Diener, Kahneman, Tov & Arora, 2010).

A higher household income enables people to own luxury conveniences and also improve their satisfaction with their standard of living. This improves life evaluation (Diener, Ng, Harter & Aurora, 2010).

On the other hand, having a low household income affects life evaluation negatively. Kahneman & Deaton (2010) found that misfortunes in life, for instance, the process of going through a divorce, is exacerbated by having a low income. Low household income is also associated with the onset of mental disorders (Sareen et al., 2011).

**Our Findings**

Our findings also show that increase in household income corresponds to an increase in both aspects of happiness - cognitive and emotional well-being.

Let’s take an example of a person with a monthly household income of $1,500. If the person’s household income increases to $2,500, it will correspond to a 1.9% increase in life evaluation and a 1.3% increase in positive emotions.

To put this in the context of the World Happiness Report 2021, an increase of 1.9% of our life evaluation will bring us from rank 31st to rank 24th, just below France.

**Discussion and Recommendations**

It was found that people with low household income report lower life evaluation and poorer emotional well-being. They are also more susceptible to and negatively affected by adverse life events such as mental disorders. Hence, it is important that they are sufficiently supported.

Helping people from low-income backgrounds is complex. A one-size-fits-all approach might not be particularly effective. To address this, the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) (2018) has outlined some strategies to improve the lives of these individuals.
**Education**

Increased access to quality early childhood education can aid social mobility. Programs such as KidSTART provide opportunities for learning and language acquisition among children from low-income households. We recommend that these initiatives be extended for older children, so that they are supported throughout their educational journey.

**Financial Knowledge**

Currently, Polytechnic and ITE students can undergo a Financial Education curriculum to learn how to manage their finances. These lessons can be extended to the larger community.

**Community-Based Approach**

MSF seeks to enable community efforts that help lower income families. They envision forging partnerships with the community to build a stronger culture of volunteerism and giving. A community-based approach would be a good step towards providing greater care to lower income families.

**References**


Purpose is often defined as a central, self-organizing life aim (Kashdan & Mcknight, 2009). It provides a sense of direction for individuals, in which efforts and behaviors are a result of intrinsic motivation. Purpose also serves as a form of support for individuals to be more resilient to obstacles, stress and strains (Cohen et al., 2016).

Current Research

Psychologists believe that Purpose can be developed through 3 different manners; Proactive, Reactive and through Social Learning (Kashdan & Mcknight, 2009). Firstly, proactive purpose comes from an effortful and deliberate search through exploration of new experiences (Silvia, 2001).

Reactive purpose results from a series of transformative life events (such as near death situations), traumatic events as well as stressful events. These events may trigger the re-evaluation of one’s life priorities (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Lastly, purpose comes from Social Learning, which is anchored by the Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977). This implies that developing purpose comes from observing the behaviors of others and how it is associated with certain outcomes. Given the outcomes are positive, individuals are more likely to take similar actions to reach the same goal.

Meta-Analysis

Research has shown that individual factors such as strengths (for example, optimism and gratitude), as well as social factors (for example, having a supportive environment and close knitted relationships) are associated with overall well-being. Past research has classified these factors as ‘low-level constructs’ (Kashdan & Mcknight, 2009).

In this case, ‘low-level constructs’ refer to personality traits and positive states, which highly differ from individual to individual. On the other hand, there are higher-level constructs which focus on things an individual can strive towards in the long run (Kashdan & Mcknight, 2009).

Purpose in life is one of the proposed higher-level constructs. A meta-analysis conducted by Cohen et al. (2016) analysed ten prospective studies with a total of 136,265 participants. A significant association was observed between having a higher purpose in life and reduced risk for all causes of mortality and cardiovascular events.

These studies also sought to propose various mechanisms towards purpose and its contributions towards our overall well-being.

Firstly, purpose serves as an emotional buffer against negative life events (Feder et al, 2013).

Secondly, purpose in life is associated with behavior mechanisms, such as commitments to a healthy lifestyle, which is associated with positive psychological factors such as optimism (Steptoe et al, 2006).
**Our Findings**

Our findings also illustrated similar findings; Purpose is a significant predictor of Life Evaluation. A 1 unit increase in Purpose is associated with a 0.466 unit increase in Life Evaluation on a 10-point Cantril Ladder Scale (p < 0.001).

**Discussion and Recommendations**

Given these findings, individuals can proactively develop their purpose to strengthen their well-being. We can achieve that by targeting Proactive and Social Learning approaches in developing our purpose.

Schools can provide more avenues for individuals to explore and gain new experiences at a younger age. Additionally, we can be more aware of our role models and learn from their specific behaviors.

**References**


Perseverance, a common term to many, refers to the attitude of not giving up and sustained effort towards long-term goals even when faced with obstacles (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Duckworth et al. (2007), however, coined the term Grit, which combines perseverance and passion. Grit, similar to purpose, is a higher-order construct which can be defined as the combination of the perseverance of effort and the consistency of interests towards long-term goals (Crede et al., 2016).

Current Research

Past research has shown that grit is positively associated with life satisfaction, happiness, positive affect and overall lower stress (Kwon, 2021). A research done by Singh & Duggal (2008) examined grit as a predictor of happiness and life satisfaction. For happiness, grit itself accounted for 7% of the variance.15

One explanation for this could be based on Hill and Jackson’s (2016) invest-and-accrue model. This model explains the relationship between conscientiousness and positive outcomes. It also posits that grittier people are more likely to engage in more behaviors associated with their goals, which in turn lead them to feel more satisfied with their lives.

Our Findings

For the State of Happiness Survey, our results showed similar findings. For Life Evaluation, 1 unit increase in perseverance is associated with 0.386 unit increase in Life Evaluation (p < 0.001).

Discussion and Recommendations

As perseverance (grit) significantly predicts happiness, individuals can focus on developing the necessary skills to persevere. One suggestion is to practise Implementation Intentions (Gollwitzer & Sheeran, 2006). Implementation Intentions enhance goal attainment by preparing for obstacles and coming up with solutions for these obstacles. This will help in persevering towards our long-term goals even in the face of obstacles.

15 $R^2 = 0.07, p < 0.001$
References


Social support has been defined as an individual’s perception that they are cared for in times of crisis (Cohen, 2004). Results have shown that greater perceived social support is associated with increased psychological health (Cohen, 2004).

It is important to note that perceived social support refers to one’s subjective evaluation of supportive transactional activities. This is unique from the actual social support received. For instance, even when an individual may be given an ample amount of social support, they may not experience the benefits of receiving social support. This could be due to them perceiving that they are not receiving their ideal form of social support.

**Current Research**

Research has shown that one’s perception of social support they receive is a better predictor of their well-being, than the actual social network size (Nezlek, 2001). For example, one’s perceived social support is negatively related to neurotic symptoms, depression, anxiety, and hostility, and is positively related to self-esteem (Henderson, 1981; Lakey & Cassidy, 1990; Raikkonen & Keltikangas-Jarvinen, 1992; Sarason et al., 1983).

Additionally, perceived social support has also been consistently linked to happiness, which includes life satisfaction, high positive affect, and low negative affect (Diener et al., 1999).

More specifically, perceived social support is observed to have a significant small to medium positive effect on life satisfaction16 (Lakey, 2013). This is consistent across extensive research conducted with various populations, across age groups (Diener & Fujita, 1995) and different countries including Australia, Germany, Pakistan and the USA (Lakey, 2013).

Likewise, perceived social support is also positively linked to positive affect17 (Lakey, 2013). This is also observed across different populations and age groups (Diener & Fujita, 1995; Pakenham et al., 2008).

Thus, this extensive research into social support has shown that individuals with high perceived support are happier than individuals with low perceived support. This further suggests the importance of social support in predicting our happiness and the need to build on what we perceive as good social support.

**Our Findings**

Similarly, in our study, we sought to find out if Social Support was predictive of Singaporeans’ happiness levels. Our findings corroborated with current research findings for Social Support.

For Life Evaluation, 1 unit increase in Social Support is associated with a 0.421 unit increase in Life Evaluation on a 10-point Cantril Ladder Scale (p < .001).

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16 The link between perceived social support and life satisfaction is typically in the range of r=0.20 to r=0.40.
17 Similarly, the correlation between perceived social support and positive affect is also found to be in the range of r=0.20 to r=0.40.
Discussion and Recommendations

Current research literature and our study findings highlight the fact that the effect of our Social Support on our happiness is significant. Therefore, it is imperative to focus on how we can build stronger and more meaningful relationships in our daily lives, to improve perceptions of the social support we need.

This suggests that we should capitalise on nudges that any individual can take to improve their relationships. Some simple nudges can include expressing gratitude to others around us and practising active-constructive responding when others share news with us.

References


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What Can We Start Doing Today to Improve our State of Well-being?

Written by: Simon Leow

The State of Well-being has two meanings - how much well-being are we experiencing and reminding us that we can be a country that values well-being.

Many things in our life are often not within our control. Looking back at 2020, no one could have predicted the COVID pandemic, let alone how long it could have lasted. At this point of writing in August 2021, Singapore continues to adapt to an ever-changing “new normal” brought about by the pandemic.

While there are things in life that we cannot change so readily or even at all, what matters can we take into our own hands? This quest for better versions of ourselves is what drives us at Happiness Initiative and the motivation behind the State of Happiness Report.

Through this report, we found three things that significantly predict our happiness - having a sense of purpose, having perseverance, and having people whom we can turn to in times of need.

The sections earlier have explored what we can do to cultivate purpose, perseverance, and people to turn to.

We hope to pen off this report by exploring how we can shift ourselves to a nation that values well-being.

We will structure this discussion by visiting the three missions we endeavour to achieve at Happiness Initiative - Awareness, Applications, and Advocates. We believe that these three missions may offer us a paradigm shift towards a state of well-being.

Awareness

Well-being begins from within. It is an introspective experience. Only we can truly know if we are happy or not. We can start giving ourselves the space to reach within - the ugly, the pretty, and the in-betweens.

When we give ourselves the space to explore the whole spectrum of the human experience, we begin to discover that we can build better versions of ourselves.

We can start by being aware of where we stand on the well-being spectrum. On one end of the spectrum, are we suffering? On the other end, are we flourishing? Or perhaps, we are on neither ends, we could be languishing.

Adam Grant, a Wharton professor, described this as “the void between depression and flourishing — the absence of well-being.”

Once we are more aware of our well-being and its consequences, then we can be willing to channel the resources to cultivate it. The past two decades of research have endowed us with many strategies that can improve our well-being.

We are not short of evidence-based strategies
What Can We Start Doing Today to Improve our State of Well-being?

that work, we only need to start taking notice that our well-being and that of the people around us matters.

Applications

Well-being takes effort.

At Happiness Initiative, we are shaped by three beliefs:

- We all have issues.
- We can build better versions of ourselves
- We can be part of something bigger than ourselves.

Being aware of our issues and the actions we can take to be better is the first step. Next, we need to put these actions to practice and have the resolve to persevere through these new ways of thinking, doing, and feeling when old habits are hard to shirk off.

We need to put in efforts if we want to live out better versions of ourselves. And we need to think of ways to help us to sustain these efforts.

If what we do benefits others and involves others, there is a better chance of us keeping up with these well-being interventions.

As you decide to try out some of the newly discovered well-being strategies, use them to benefit others or involve someone in activity. Try some of these strategies at home, in your workplace, or at school.

If more people take actions that benefit their own well-being, while benefitting and involving others, then we will begin to have a growing number of people who will value well-being. It will not be long until a family, a school, an organisation, or even a community begins to flourish.

Advocates

We started off by stating that well-being begins from within. But it does not stop there. It has an outward expanding influence over our family, loved ones, friends, colleagues, and the community.

We all have issues. And this is the common theme that connects humans together. We all have experienced pain in one form or another, and this pain continues to be replayed in our lives and continues to shape our limiting responses.

Yet, we also have the capacity to transcend our pain, our suffering, and our self-centredness, to be part of a cause that is greater than ourselves.

We can find that purpose and meaning that makes life worth living, even in the harshest of conditions. In the words of Friedrich Nietzsche:

“If you know the why, you can live any how.”

If we want greater well-being, shift the focus away from self and help someone. Countless documentations of human experience have noted this phenomenon. If we are suffering, when we help someone, we almost immediately forget that we are in pain.

Our upcoming 10/10 Community Well-being Programme is inspired by this phenomenon. Helping others can alleviate our own pain and suffering. It can be a source of inspiration to others and can offer social support to people who may feel that they are all alone.

Your well-being journey can start off the well-being journey for so many others.

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18 The 10/10 Community Programme is currently in development and slated to launch in 2022. It is a long-term public programme that aims to improve the well-being of individuals, and comes at no cost to the participants.