

The Impact of Happiness on Health Promoting Behaviors: An Empirical Analysis

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Abstract

College life is a formative period marked by intense learning, self-discovery, and transition to independence. However, academic pressures, financial constraints, and social challenges can adversely affect students' mental health and health-related behaviors. Happiness, a core component of well-being, has been linked to healthier lifestyle choices, including balanced nutrition, regular physical activity, adequate sleep, and effective stress management. The present study aimed to examine differences in health-promoting behaviors between college students with high and low levels of happiness. A sample of 100 students aged 18–24 from colleges in Punjab was assessed using the Health Promoting Lifestyle Profile II (HPLP-II) and the Happiness Scale (HS-RHMJ). Independent t-test results revealed a significant difference in health-promoting behaviors between high-happiness ($M = 2.89$) and low-happiness ($M = 2.29$) groups, $t(198) = 6.06, p < .01$. Findings support existing research indicating that happiness functions as both a psychological resource and a motivator for adaptive lifestyle choices. These results underscore the importance of interventions that enhance happiness as a pathway to fostering sustainable health behaviors among college students.

Keywords: Happiness, Health Promoting Behaviors, College students.

INTRODUCTION

College life is described as a period of intense learning, self-discovery and personal growth. Students enthusiastically enter college but unfortunately most of them face adjustment problems because of transition from total dependence to independence and many changes due to biological transition. American College Health Association, 2022 reported college students face significant stressors—academic pressure, financial burdens, and social challenges—that can negatively impact their health behaviors. Studies also highlight an alarming rise in mental health problems among under graduates raising a concern to explore the conditions ideal for happiness and well-being of college students.

Happiness is a vital aspect of wellbeing that has an enormous effect on both physical and mental health, especially for college students who are dealing with stress from their studies, societal pressures, and changing lifestyles. In accordance to research, students who are happier are more likely to practice health-promoting habits including consistent exercise, a healthy diet, getting enough sleep, and managing stress well (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). These practices lower the risk of anxiety, depression, and chronic illnesses in addition to improving academic achievement.

The American College Health Association (2023) reports that over 60% of college students experience overwhelming anxiety, while 44% report symptoms of depression. Rates have been doubled in the last decade. Studies show that happier students perform better academically, form stronger social

connections and enjoy better long term health (Hirshberg et al., 2022). But what makes college students happy? While past researches linked happiness to exercise and diet (Pritchard, et. al., 2020) recent studies suggest sleep and stress management may now be more critical especially after Covid-19 (Lund et. al., 2023). Consider happiness a form of fuel. Feeling good gives us more energy to focus on the important things, such as cooking a nutritious dinner or taking a stroll rather than just crashing on the couch. This can be explained by the broaden-and-build theory (Fredrickson, B., 2001), which holds that feeling good broadens your viewpoint, fosters more creative thought, and motivates you to make long-term investments in your well-being rather than merely getting by each day.

The present paper in an attempt to explore how people differ in health promoting behaviors in relation to their level of happiness

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Happiness, often measured as subjective well-being (SWB), encompasses positive affect, life satisfaction, and low negative affect (Diener, 1984). Research suggests that happier individuals experience lower cortisol levels (Steptoe et al., 2005); reduced risk of cardiovascular disease over time (Boehm and Kubzansky, 2012); stronger immune function (Cohen et al., 2003). Lesinskiene, S., et al., (2024) found that the Internet addiction test score was higher in the group of students who felt less happy and healthy, had regular headaches or abdominal pain, and had difficulty sleeping. Further they observed that negative emotions, unhappiness, and poor emotion regulation have an association with internet addiction.

In a cross-sectional study on over 2,000 adults in the UK, Steptoe et al. (2005) discovered that those with higher positive affect were more likely to eat fruits and vegetables, avoid smoking, and participate in regular physical exercise. Even after adjusting for socioeconomic level, age, gender, and preexisting medical issues, this association remained significant. Similar studies were reported by Grant, et al., (2009). Schuch et al., (2016) found that happy individuals are 2.3 times more likely to meet WHO exercise guidelines.

Pressman and Cohen (2005) also reported similar results. They reviewed longitudinal and experimental studies, concluding that happier people had stronger immune function, lower levels of inflammatory markers, and healthier lifestyles, including better sleep and consistent exercise habits. Boehm and Kubzansky (2012) reported that positive psychological well-being, which includes happiness, predicted reduced risk of cardiovascular disease over time, partially mediated by healthier behaviors such as physical activity and smoking avoidance.

A meta-analysis found bidirectional effects: Exercise boosts happiness, and happiness increases exercise adherence (Schuch et al., 2016). Happier individuals have better sleep duration and quality (Steptoe et al., 2008), use adaptive coping strategies like problem-solving, social support (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000) whereas those who are low on happiness are more prone to are more prone to emotional eating (Macht, 2008). Poor sleep exacerbates stress, reducing happiness (Baglioni et al., 2010).

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the present research was to study the status of health promoting behaviors of college students in relation to their level of happiness

HYPOTHESIS

Individuals who are happier would engage in more health-promoting behaviors than people who are less happy.

SAMPLE

100 college students between the age range of 18-24 years were selected randomly from different colleges of Punjab.

MEASURES

1. Health Promoting Lifestyle Profile II (HPLP-II) (Susan Walker, 1995) is a measure of health promoting behavior patterns. The 52 item health promoting behavior scale consists of six sub scales to measure behaviors in the theorized dimensions of health promoting lifestyle: namely spiritual growth, interpersonal relations, nutrition, physical activity, health responsibility and stress management. Criterion related validity was indicated by significant correlations with concurrent measures of perceived health status and quality of life ($r=0.269$ to 0.491). The alpha coefficient of internal consistency for the total scale was 0.943 ; alpha coefficients for the subscales ranged from 0.793 to 0.872 . The 3-week test-retest stability coefficient for the total scale was 0.892 (Walker, Sechrist & Pender, 1987; Walker & Polerecky, 1996).
2. Happiness Scale: The Happiness Scale (HS-RHMJ) by Dr. Himanshi Rastogi and Dr. Janki Moorjani (2019) is a psychological assessment tool designed to measure an individual's overall happiness across multiple dimensions. It consists of 62 statements that evaluate five key factors of well-being: subjective well-being, social well-being, emotional well-being, career well-being, spiritual Well-Being. Split half reliability of the scale is 0.88 . Criterion related validity was determined by significant correlation ($r = 0.91$) with subjective happiness scale.

DESIGN

The differences in health-promoting behaviors between those who were happy and those who weren't were examined using the t-test.

RESULTS

Table 1: Showing means, and SDs of health promotion in relation to their happiness.

VARIABLES	LEVELS	N	MEANS	SD	SE _M	SE _D	df	t-value
Happiness	High	63	2.89	0.35	0.04	0.09	98	6.06**
	Low	37	2.29	0.64	0.11			

****p<.01**

The findings indicated a significant difference in health-promoting behaviors between those high on happiness and low on happiness. Mean comparison shows that individuals with high on happiness ($M=2.89$) exhibit more health promoting behaviors than individuals low on happiness ($M=2.29$).

DISCUSSION

The findings that individuals high on happiness are more likely to engage in health-promoting behaviors than those low on happiness align with a growing body of evidence in positive psychology, behavioral medicine, and health psychology. Happiness is often thought of as a combination of high life satisfaction, frequent positive affect, and low negative affect. The idea that happier people tend to take better care of themselves isn't just a feel-good assertion—it's something observed by the researchers for years. A person's outlook on life changes when they are truly happy. They are more driven to rise early, exercise, eat healthy, and take care of the minor things that contribute to their overall well-being. On the other hand, those who experience chronic stress or depression frequently find it difficult to stick to these routines—not because they don't care, but rather because their emotional supplies are depleting.

The findings are in line with the previous researches which reveal that happiness is positively associated to health behaviors. It appears to have a dual role in relation to health: it serves as a psychological resource as well as a catalyst for adaptive lifestyle choices. Happier individuals tend to set more health-related goals and persist in achieving them, possibly due to higher self-efficacy and optimism (Schwarzer, R., 1994). People who experienced more positive affect were more likely to eat fruits and vegetables, avoid smoking, and participate in regular physical activity (Grant, et al., 2009; Steptoe et al., 2005).

Pressman and Cohen (2005) also reported that happier people had healthier lifestyles, including better sleep and consistent exercise habits. Strong social networks, which can support and reinforce healthy lifestyle choices, are more common among happier people (Cohen, S., & Janicki-Deverts, D., 2009; Smith, K. P., & Christakis, N. A., 2008; Cohen, S., & Lemay, E. P., 2007). Individuals who are low on happiness may resort to harmful coping mechanisms like smoking, drinking, or being sedentary in order to deal with stress while happier people are more likely to employ adaptive coping mechanisms (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000).

CONCLUSION

The current study validates the growing evidence that happiness is a significant factor in leading a healthier lifestyle rather than just being a desirable emotional state. Happier individuals were found to participate more often in health-promoting activities, such as regular exercise, a healthy diet, getting enough sleep, and avoiding bad habits, compared to their less happy counterparts. These results are consistent with earlier studies indicating that motivation, resilience, and self-regulation are all enhanced by positive emotional well-being, and that these traits in turn promote proactive health promotion.

Furthermore, there seems to be a reciprocal relationship between happiness and health behaviors—happiness promotes healthy living, which can then increase happiness. This demonstrates the importance of integrated health interventions that target lifestyle choices as well as psychological well-being. To

establish causality and investigate the mechanisms that underlie this association, future studies using experimental and longitudinal methods are essential. Overall, promoting happiness may serve as a practical and effective strategy for encouraging sustainable health-promoting behaviors and improving overall quality of life.

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