THE LEVEL OF HAPPINESS AMONG COUNSELLING STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract: This study examined the level of happiness among counselling students in seven public universities in Malaysia (N = 299). On therage, the counselling students' happiness score was 3.49 (SD = 0.502). This is a moderate score for happiness. The positive items most strongly agreed by participants were item 3 "I feel that life is very useful," endorsed by 22.4% of the participants, followed by item 9 "Life is good" by 21.7% and em 11 " I always laugh by 15.7% of the participants. On the other hand, the negative items strongly disagreed by participants were item 29 "I have no happy memories of the past," endorsed by 52.5% of the participants, followed by item 24 "I have no particular meaning and purpose in my life," endorsed by 43.5 of the participants and item 10 "I don't think that the world is a good place" endorsed by 42.5% of the participants. This showed that even though the level of happiness was only moderate, students still thought that life was good and meaningful. As for the difference of happiness between genders, the result showed that there was no significant difference of happiness between genders t(297)= 1.88, p>.05. This could be due to the equal opportunities given to all students; thus males and females shoulders the same responsibilities and burdens. The students went through the same Movement Control Orders and therefore had the same experiences in this hard time.

INTRODUCTION

Even though the meaning of happiness is different among people, it is an umbrella term for all that is good. It is often interchangeably with "wellbeing," "good quality of life," "subjective well-being," or "life satisfaction" (Galambos et al., 2015). According to Compton and Hoffman (2013), the area of subjective well-being covers happiness and satisfaction with life and neuroticism. It is said that subjective well-being

is found when people report that they are feeling happy, satisfied with life and have low levels of neuroticism.

Happiness is experienced very much related to our values (Wren-Lewis, 2010), where our values are considered by sentiments. Sentiments can be the feeling of love, sympathy, kindness, likes and dislikes, love and hatred. Thus, happiness can come from externally as well as internally.

Happiness is a positive emotion, and it serves as a marker for flourishing (Frederikson, 2009). For example, positive emotions can broaden an individual's thoughts, which will in turn build enduring personal resources. The emergence of happiness would help individuals face adversities better. Being happy is an effective way in building self towards life challenges. There are numerous great figures in the world like Nick Vujicic being born without limbs, being bullied in school, being low self-esteem, and even having attempted suicide but he found happiness and live a meaningful life later in life.

Flynn and MacLeod (2015) conducted a study on the 39 university students of Mindanao found that there were 5 top sources of happiness, i.e. family, health, academics, recognition, and extending help to others. Engagement in life makes people happy, as they can live a good living with family, work, friends, and hobbies.

Morgan et al. (2015) showed that happiness remains relatively stable across the life span only in the most affluent nations. While in poorer nations, there is either a fluctuating or steady age-associated decline. For those living in the least affluent nations, there is a linear decrease in happiness every decade of adulthood between ages 20-79.

As for happiness between genders, Martínez and Martínez (2019) reported a higher happiness in women, but some research indicated that men are happier than women (Khodarahimi, 2013; Steveson & Wolfers, 2009). Meanwhile, there were numerous studies showing no difference in happiness between males and females (Tkach & Lyubomirsky, 2006).

Happiness is an important component of well-being (Feldman, 2008). Much scientific evidence has proven that happiness affects one's immune system. Happiness helps to reduce a negative consequence of

feelings and cognition such as sadness (Michalak et al., 2011). Most researchers believed that happy people tend to function better in different areas of life and report being more active in the community than unhappy ones (Abdel-Khalek, 2006; Giannopoulos & Vella-Brodrick, 2011; Hoffman et al., 2009). A sample of youth from Chicago Public Schools also suggested that well-being and optimism were measures of protective factors that buffer adverse experiences and support more positive outcomes (Wollwage, 2008). Thus, happiness is an important element to combat tough times.

Counselling is a mental healthcare profession, and a counsellor requires intensive training to help people solve emotional, social, personal or interpersonal problems (Levitt & Jacques, 2005). Throughout the counselling process, the counsellor attends genuinely and empathically to produce a conducive environment for healing and growth. During the four years training, students are required to handle various cases using the skills that they learn from the classes. If the counsellors themselves are not happy, it will certainly affect the cases they handle. Compared to unhappy people, happy individuals are more energetic, healthier, more creative, more successful, and more sociable (Lyubomirsky & King, 2005). These characteristics help counsellors to conduct cases more effectively. Abolmaali et al. (2014) also suggested that a happy person will be more focused, and they may be more successful in almost all educational aspects, and may even be happier in their job after graduation. Absolutely university students, especially counselling students should possess such characteristics since they are the primary personnel in helping clients to solve their problems.

There were studies about happiness being done for teacher trainees (Joseph & Joseph, 2013), medical students (Kulkarni, & Chincholikar, 2019), nursing students (Yusof et al., 2021), dental students (Alam el al, 2001), tourism students (Toker & Bahadır,2021), social work students (Kaya et al, 2016) and athletes' students (Julis el al., 2021). Counselling students, despite being future professional mental health practitioners, have very limited studies about the level of their happiness, especially in the

Malaysian context. Herein lies the root of the research problem. The outcome of this study certainly highlights the importance of the psychological state of these students, and it would certainly add into the literature review in the local context. Thus, it is important to look into the level of happiness among counselling students in this study.

This study relates happiness to a state of mind that is the experience of joy, contentment, or positive well-being, combined with a sense that one's life is good, meaningful, and worthwhile (Lyubomirsky, 2001).

Research Objective
- To identify the level of happiness among counselling students.
- To identify positive items most agreed by counselling students.
- To identify negative items most disagreed by counselling students.
- To investigate the difference of happiness between genders among
- counselling students.

METHODOLOGY
The methodology parts include instrumentation, selection of samples and research procedures.

Instrumentation
Happiness was measured by the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ, Hills & Argyle, 2002). It is a self-evaluation questionnaire. The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire items can be easily included in a larger questionnaire in random order and with reversed items. This can reduce the possibility of context and adaptive response and improve the reliability of data. Compared with other subjective well-being indicators such as Satisfaction with Life Scale which has weaker correlation with emotion (Dieber et al.,1985), the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire has stronger correlation with emotion. Cruise et al. (2006) also evaluated the internal consistency and test re-test reliability of the OHQ and suggested good to excellent reliability. Therefore, the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire was used to gather data related to happiness.

These 29 items questionnaire with a 6-point Likert scale (from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree). The OHQ appears to measure an

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amalgamation of subjective well-being, various human strengths, cognitive characteristics, and physical fitness. OHQ was operationalized as the degree to which individuals are interested in other people (item 2), have warm feelings toward others (item 4), find things amusing (item 7), find beauty in things (item 16), and feel like they look attractive (item 13). Up to date, there are still less instruments that include these qualities as defining components of happiness. Rather, these positive qualities and outcomes have been examined as antecedents, correlates, and/or consequences of happiness (Hill & Argyle, 2002).

Table 1 shows the items consist of 17 positive items and 12 negative items. As it is a 6-point Likert Scale, the score range lies between 29 and 174, with a higher score indicates greater happiness. The negative items were reverse scored.

Table 1: Oxford Happiness Questionnaire with Positive and Negative Item

Value	Item	Total
Positive	2,3,4,7,8,9,11,12,15,16,17,18,20,21,22,25,26	17
Negative	1,5,6,10,13,14,19,23,24,27,28,29	12

A Cronbach's alpha of .70 in the present study shows that the scale has an acceptable level of internal consistency.

Population and Sample of The Study
The population of this study is the seven public universities which offer the Bachelor of Counselling programme in Malaysia. They are registered with Malaysia Qualification Agency (MQA) accreditation.

Sample participants for this study were first to fourth year undergraduate counselling students as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Totals Population and Samples

University	Year one	Year two	Year three	Year four	population	Sample
A	22	30	49	42	121	28
B	50	32	43	25	150	35
C	52	63	55	58	228	53
D	53	71	59	80	263	61
E	20	20	20	20	80	18

F	33	42	73	39	187	43
G	47	80	70	57	254	59
Total					1283	297

Sources: student's representative council/ counselling club from each university on semester 2/2020

As the population was 1283, to meet the minimum 95% level of confidence, this study required at least 297 samples (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). However, 299 questionnaires were filled.

Procedure

Before collecting the data, written permission was extended to the Dean of each Faculty explaining the purpose of the study and requesting approval to collect the data. Since the data was collected during the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers invited participants to fill up the Google Form. This Google form could be completed in approximately 20 minutes. The student's representative council or counselling club of each university helped to send the forms to the students. Before starting to answer the questionnaire, participants would need to read the introduction on the first page about the purpose and the confidentiality of the study. To maintain the anonymity of students, the questionnaire did not require participants to put their names, matric numbers or identification numbers on the survey instrument. The survey was completely voluntary in nature and no incentives will be offered to complete the questionnaire. The gender comprises 20.74% (62) of males and 79.26% (237) of females.

RESULTS

Based on the Likert Scale, 1 representing strongly disagree and 6 representing strongly agree, after reversing the negative scores, Table 3 indicated that on average, the counselling students' happiness score is 3.49 (SD = 0.502). This is a moderate score for happiness.

Table 3 Level of Happiness Among Counselling Students

Happiness	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Total	299 (100%)	3.49	.50

Table 4 indicated that the positive items strongly agreed by students were item 3 "I feel that life is very useful" endorsed by 22.4% of the participants, followed by item 9 "Life is good." Item 11 "I always laugh" was also strongly agreed by 15.7% of the participants. On the other hand, the most

negative item strongly disagreed by participants was item 29 "I have no happy memories of the past" endorsed by 52.5% of the participants, followed by item 24, "I have no particular meaning and purpose in my life," endorsed by 43.5% of the participants and item 10 "I don't think that the world is a good place" endorsed by 42.5% of the participants.

Table 4: Items of Happiness

Statements	Strongly disagree	Moderately disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Moderately Agree	Strongly agree
1. I'm not happy the way I am	15.7	9.4	35.8	27.1	8	4
2. I'm interested in other people	3.7	3	25.1	32.4	23.4	12.4
3. I feel that life is very useful	1.3	1.3	15.1	26.1	33.8	22.4
4. I have affectionate feelings towards almost everyone	5.7	10.4	20.7	33.1	20.7	9.4
5. I rarely wake up feeling well rested	13.7	15.7	35.5	17.7	11	6.4
6. I'm not optimistic about the future	30.4	19.7	26.8	11.4	9	2.7
7. I find most things are fun	2	5	21.7	35.8	24.1	11.4
8. I am always committed and involved	3.3	9.4	21.1	37.1	21.4	7.7
9. Life is good	1.7	1.7	13.4	30.8	30.8	21.7
10. I don't think that the world is a good place	42.5	11.4	24.7	10.4	8.4	2.7
11. I always laugh	2.7	8.4	18.4	26.8	28.1	15.7
12. I am satisfied with everything in my life	5.4	11.4	23.1	30.1	20.7	9.4
13. I don't think that I am an attractive person	26.4	16.1	28.8	15.7	8.7	4.3
14.There is a gap between what I want to do and what I have done	8.7	13.7	33.8	26.8	11.4	5.7
15.I'm very happy	3	5.4	21.4	35.8	22.1	12.4
16. I find beauty in some things	0.7	3	12	35.5	33.4	15.4
17. I always give joy to others	2.7	5.4	21.4	31.8	24.7	14
18. I can adjust (find time for) everything I want	4	6.4	20.1	38.8	22.4	8.4
19.I feel like I'm not really in control of my life	7	12.4	31.4	29.4	14.4	5.4
20. I feel able to take anything	4.3	12	30.1	32.8	16.1	4.7
21. I feel completely sensitive mentally	5	6.7	27.4	37.5	18.4	5
22. I often experience joy and joy	0.7	8.4	24.1	39.1	21.7	6
23. I'm not easy to make decisions	15.7	14.4	28.8	20.7	13.7	6.7
24. I have no particular meaning and purpose in my life	43.5	21.4	16.1	12.4	6	0.7
25. I feel I have a lot of energy	7	10.7	27.4	32.4	15.4	7
26. I usually have a good influence on an event	3	9.4	28.1	32.1	19.4	8
27. I don't have fun with other people	31.8	21.7	27.1	14.4	4.3	0.7
28. I don't feel well	36.5	17.4	25.1	10.7	9.4	1
29. I have no happy memories of the past	52.5	13.7	16.7	9.4	5.7	2

As for difference of happiness between genders, Table 5 showed that there was no significant difference in scores for males (M= 3.88, SD= .69), and females (M=3.70, SD=.66; t (297)= 1.88, p>.05.

Table 5: Happiness between Genders

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p (2-tailed)
Male	62	3.88	.69			.
				1.88	297	06
Female	237	3.70	.66			

DISCUSSION

The results showed that the happiness for counselling students in Malaysia was moderate only with a mean value of 3.49 out of 6. This is probably during data collection, only essential sectors were opened and most of the classes were still online. The closure of non-essential sectors including the universities, as well as prohibition of social events has greatly disrupted the daily lives and profoundly impacted student happiness.

This study was in line with the study of Guan et. al. (2022) regarding online learning and happiness index during COVID-19 pandemic in a public university in East Malaysia. The result of their study also showed that the level of happiness was moderate only. Hopefully with the reopening of all sectors after that, the level of happiness among university students will be increased. University life is a special period where students start to be independent, they need to be matured enough to adapt to the changes in their personal lives and studies, so that they can function well in whatever circumstances, especially among counsellors as they are in the frontline to help others to overcome psychological problems (Natvig et al., 2003).

The most positive items strongly agreed by students were "I feel that life is very useful," "Life is good," and "I always laugh" showed that even though the sectors were not fully reopened, most of the counselling students were still having some enjoyment in their life. It was supported by 3 strongly disagreed items namely "I have no happy memories of the past," "I have no particular meaning and purpose in my life," and "I don't think that the world is a good place." This evidence shows that even though

the level of happiness for the counselling students was moderate only, they were still optimistic about life.

Results also showed that there was no significant difference between genders. This is probably due to equality of treatment between genders in Malaysia. Bourne et al. (2022) suggesting that in terms of genders, those who do not experience the disparity would be happier than those who experience the disparity. As in Malaysia, both genders get the same opportunities, therefore shoulder the same responsibilities and burdens. Counselling students were facing the same problems when it came to online learning and doing the household chores during the pandemic, thus the results showed there was no significant difference in happiness between them.

CONCLUSION

It is hoped that the findings of this study could assist tertiary institutions in Malaysia to identify evidenced-based psychological intervention practices to assist and prepare the students for better levels of happiness, as there were some tendencies, they tried to be happy even though facing hard times such as in the situations of pandemic. It is hoped to provide guidelines for policymakers on possible mechanisms to moderate the impacts of students' happiness, as they are the backbone of our nation.

Informed Consent Statement
All participants had granted their consent to this study.

Conflict of Interest
The authors declared no conflict of interest.

Ethics Statement
The study was done compliance with the ethical guidelines approved by the Universiti Malaysia Sabah. Approval Code: JKEtika 2/21 (3)

Author's Contribution
Conceptualization, Eng Su Yin & Guan Teik Ee; Formal analysis, Eng Su Yin; Methodology, Eng Su Yin; Project administration; Guan Teik Ee; Resources, Guan Teik Ee & Eng Su Yin; Supervision, Guan Teik Ee; Visualization, Guan Teik Ee; Writing – Eng Su Yin; Writing – review & editing, Guan Teik Ee.

Data Availability Statement
All data is available upon request.

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