

COMPARISON OF THE LEVEL OF HAPPINESS IN A UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

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Acceptance date : November 14, 2022, publication date : December 19, 2022

Abstract

Introduction: The physical, mental and emotional well-being of people is related to happiness. The evaluation of happiness in university education institutions is relevant, since it allows monitoring the impact of educational policies on the well-being of the university community. In this sense, this study measured the level of happiness of a university community in Colombia, where few studies of this type have been carried out. Methods: A total of 827 people participated in the study (78 administrative staff, 70 teachers and 679 students). For the measurement of happiness, the Sophie test was applied, which was answered completely online. A multivariate analysis of variance and a bivariate correlation analysis were applied. No significant differences were found in the level of happiness with respect to sex and the mention of study of the participants ($p > .05$). When occupation is taken into account, teachers and administrators are happier than students ($p < .05$). Happiness was significantly correlated with age and happiness in their occupation ($ps < .001$). The lowest scale scores were in the area of physical health and external vision for all groups. Conclusions: The results affirm that the evaluated community has an adequate level of happiness, but that in the areas of physical health and external vision, changes need to be reviewed and applied, for the improvement of these indicators in the members of the university community.

Keywords: Well-being, occupation, university students, teachers, physical activity

INTRODUCTION

Happiness is one of the most important quests of human beings and constitutes one of the main motivations that guide their actions (Clark et al., 2018). Since ancient times, Aristotle stressed that happiness is the only thing worth achieving in this life (as cited by Velado, 2014, p. 4). The importance of being happy is not only transferred to the subjective experience of the subject, but can have a positive impact on his or her health, as well as decreasing the risk of physical and mental illness (Steptoe, 2019). Diener (1984) indicates that the happiness and well-being of individuals can be explained by taking into account key human factors such as satisfaction with life and the positive affective aspects that the person has had during his or her life. In this sense, happiness can be described through external criteria such as virtues, as well as the way in which the human being perceives his or her life in terms of the balance between positive and negative affects. It follows that studies on subjective well-being and subjective happiness are derived from life satisfaction and positive affect.

The review of studies on happiness suggests approaches aimed at satisfaction with life, both in general and those that are influenced by experiences in the subject's present. The assessment can be made by studying satisfaction with life in general or by looking at particular situations, such as social relationships, health, and work (Pfeiffer & Cloutier, 2016). Purpose in life is one of the most important components of happiness, which, although not modified by recent events (Pfeiffer & Cloutier, 2016), can condition people's psychological well-being (Robak & Griffin, 2000).

From an empirical point of view and taking into account factors of the context in which the individual lives, we can highlight Veenhoven's (1991) findings, which suggest that happy people are more likely to be found in economically prosperous countries where freedom and democracy are respected and the political landscape is stable. In this sense, countries should provide the necessary conditions for their citizens to achieve the greatest possible happiness through coherent policies and laws (Margot, 2007), which allow the enjoyment and maximum development of the potential of individuals.

Similarly, happy people are more likely to be found in majority groups than in minorities and more often at the top of the social scale than at the bottom. Relationally, they are usually married and get along well with family and friends. In terms of their personal characteristics, the happy ones feel in control of their lives, are healthier both physically and mentally, are more active and open, and their aspirations are more concerned with social and moral issues than with earning money (Veenhoven, 1991).

What Veenhoven (1991) indicated contrasts with the reality of Colombia, which, despite having important social and economic problems, occupies the first place in the world in terms of happiness metrics (Veenhoven, s. f.). However, according to Clark et al. (2018), what most conditions the happiness of individuals is the quality of their affective relationships and their mental health. On the other hand, the results of the happiness studies in Colombia are related to some indicators, such as those indicated by Veenhoven (1991), as can be deduced from Table 1.

Table 1 Main factors affecting the level of happiness and general well-being reported for

Authors	Method description	Main conclusions
Botello-Peñalosa & Guerrero-Rincón (2021)	Analysis of data from the 2017 Life Survey	Safety, health perception and quality of work have a greater influence on happiness. Income level has no influence
Cruz & Torres (2006)	Analysis of data from the 2003 Life Survey	Employment, health, income and perception of poverty affect the level of happiness
Gómez et al. (2007)	Survey of 795 members of a private university. Satisfaction, Happiness and Positive and Negative Affect	Perceived self-efficacy, affective relationships, future life and work were related to general well-being
Londoño (2011)	Social and Political Survey 2007, Universidad de los Andes. Gallup	Subjective well-being increases with income level and experience of social mobility
Ortiz-Benavides (2016)	Survey of 4,797 people. Municipality of Pasto 2008-2010	Age, employment status and poverty affect the level of happiness. Marital status, sex, education and race do not influence happiness
Poveda (2015)	Analysis of a section of data from the World Longitudinal Survey 2010-2014	Health, patriotic pride, being married, and freedom of choice increase the probability of being happy
Ramírez (2022)	Survey of 234 participants from a private university. Happiness scale for adults	Teachers, those over 30 years of age and married people were happier
Vega & Osorio (2016)	Analysis of data from the World Report and the World Bank 2014.	Personal support, freedom and health

Colombia.



Although the effect of income level on happiness seems contradictory (Botello-Peñaloza & Guerrero-Rincón, 2021; Londoño, 2011), the average economic situation of Colombians and having a stable job has an effect on their perception of well-being (Gómez et al., 2007; Ortiz-Benavides, 2016). Likewise, a relationship is observed between health and the perception of well-being, in the sense that by being healthier, the person can be more productive and dedicate time to sports and recreational activities, which can increase his or her level of happiness (Cruz & Torres, 2006).

In the field of university students, the prevalence of stress, anxiety, and depression is of concern (Ansari et al., 2014; Demirbatir, 2015), as is the excessive use of tobacco and alcohol, inadequate diets and sleep problems (Calderon et al., 2021), which have negative effects on physical and mental well-being. On the other hand, the optimism of university students and the family support received are variables that modulate stress and increase happiness in these groups of people (Denovan & Macaskill, 2017; Schnettler et al., 2015). In the Colombian case, affective relationships, age and occupation seem to have a positive effect in university communities (Gómez et al., 2007; Ramírez, 2022).

The purpose of this research is to compare the level of happiness of the members of the Unidad Central del Valle del Cauca, a University Institution of municipal order that operates in the city of Tuluá, Valle del Cauca, taking into account their occupation and the mentions of the careers of the educational community. To make such comparison, the Sophie test validated by Lobach et al. (2022) will be used, which has five dimensions of satisfaction and which have direct effects on happiness, such as the purpose in life and relationships with family and friends, and which for the context of application can provide useful information to contribute with actions leading to improve the general welfare of the community.

METHODS

This is a cross-sectional study with a non-experimental design. The Declaration of Helsinki (2013) was followed for the study and approval was obtained from the institution's ethics committee prior to conducting the research. All subjects participated voluntarily and could stop answering the questionnaire at any time. The sample applied is non-probabilistic due to the levels of convenience of the population. The sample comes from the university community of the Unidad Central del Valle del Cauca (UCEVA) in the city of Tuluá, Colombia.

For the study, a total of 827 individuals participated voluntarily (402 males and 425 females), of which 8.5% of the sample were teachers, 9.43% corresponded to administrative staff and 82.3% corresponded to students of all the programs offered by the university, as follows: 84 students of psychology, education and languages; 72 of law; 114 of health careers; 157 of different mentions of engineering; 125 of finance and related careers, and 127 who did not indicate the career they were studying.

The Sophie instrument (Lobach et al., 2022) was used to measure the level of happiness of the participants. The instrument consists of 32 sentences, such as "I have clear goals in life", which are answered with a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from "Strongly agree" (5) to "Strongly disagree" (1). The instrument also contains five dimensions which are: purpose in life and inner balance, physical health, external vision, family and friends. The initial reliability values of this instrument are .933 (Lobach et al., 2022). The application of the instrument was self-administered by sending a link by e-mail to access an online questionnaire, which also included the following questions: age, sex, occupation and career. Also included was the question "In my current occupation I am happy", with a seven-point Likert scale, from "Strongly agree" (7) to "Strongly disagree" (1).

Mean values (M) and standard deviations (SD) of the variables measured in the study were calculated. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to compare the level of the subscales of the Sophie instrument between groups of participants according to their education (student, teacher and administrative). A univariate ANOVA was used to compare the level of happiness of the participants and of the students according to the type of career. A correlation analysis was performed using Spearman's correlation coefficient, using the scores of the Sophie instrument, the subscales, age and the level of happiness at work.

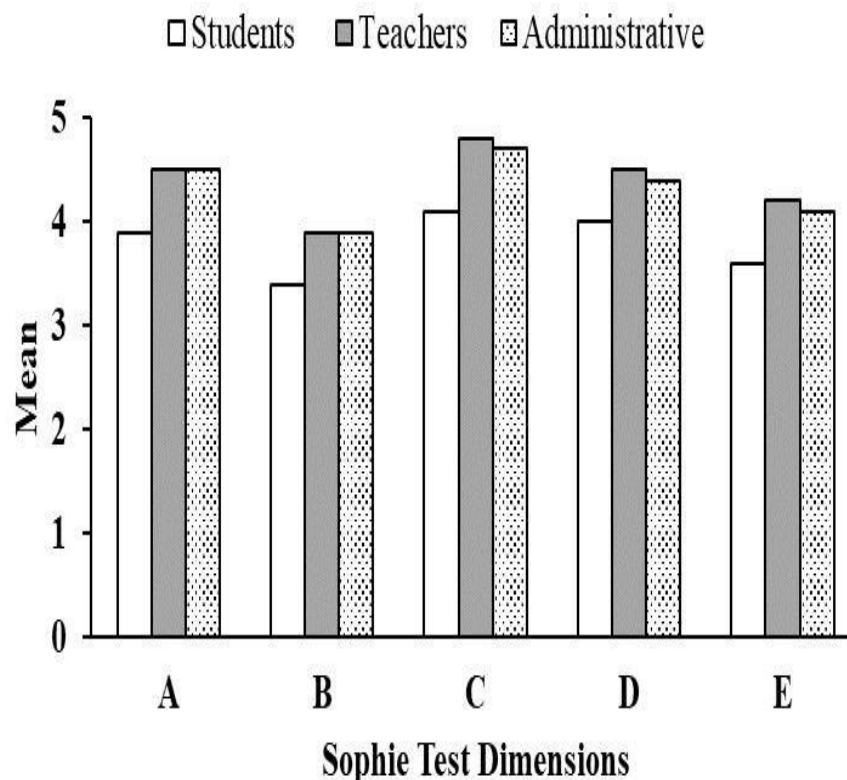
RESULTS

Differences were found between the level of happiness of the participants according to their occupation. [$F(2,824) = 56.08, p < .001, \eta^2 = .120$]. Post hoc tests applying Howel indicated that students ($M = 19.1, SD = 2.9$) scored lower than teachers ($M = 21.9, SD = 1.7$), $p < .001$, with a CI95% [-3.27, -2.15], and administrative staff ($M = 21.6, SD = 1.8$), $p < .001$, with a CI95% [-3.04, -1.93]. The same analysis applied to students according to career type resulted in $F(5, 673) = 1.74, p = .123$, indicating no differences in students' level of happiness according to mention. We also found no evidence of differences in participants' Sophie test scores when accounting for gender [$F(1,821) = 1.00, p = .317$] and the interaction of gender with participant occupation [$F(2,821) = 0.20, p = .822$]. The overall mean Sophie test scores by sex and occupation were: students (males, 19.1 ± 2.9 ; females, 19.2 ± 2.9), teachers (males, 21.6 ± 1.8 ; females, 22.1 ± 1.8), and administrative staff (males, 21.4 ± 1.9 ; females, 21.8 ± 1.8).

The MANOVA applied to test whether the occupation of the participant (student, administrative and teacher) influences the values of the subscales evaluated by the Sophie test, indicated for the global Pillai model a value of $F(10,1642) = 12.59, p < .001, \eta^2 = .071$, which indicates that there are differences between the groups according to their occupation. A post hoc analysis was applied using Howell's test, indicating for all cases that students scored lower than teachers and administrative staff ($p < .05$) in all dimensions of the Sophie test (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Comparison of each of the dimensions of the Sophie test according to occupation (A, purpose in life and inner balance; B, physical well-being; C, family; D, friends; E, external vision).



Comparison of participants' level of happiness in relation to their current occupation showed that teachers ($M = 6.5, SD = 0.7, p < .001$) and administrative staff ($M = 6.6, SD = 0.7, p < .001$) were happier than students ($M = 5.7, SD = 1.2$). Purpose in life and inner balance, and the Sophie test were mildly to moderately correlated with age and happiness in current occupation (Mukaka, 2012).

TABLE 2 SPEARMAN'S CORRELATION COEFFICIENT BETWEEN THE STUDY VARIABLES.

	Age	*Happiness
Sophie	.288	.453
Purpose in life and inner balance	.352	.542
Physical Activity	.171	.273
Family	.233	.279
Friends	.206	.372
External vision	.126	.268

Note. *, Level of happiness in current occupation; all correlations were significant at $p < .001$.

DISCUSSION

The average value of the Sophie instrument obtained by the participants was in the fifth percentile of the scale, which suggests a broad level of happiness in the sample studied. These data are comparable to those presented in previous studies using this instrument to assess happiness in similar groups (Lobach et al., 2022). In addition, some rankings of happiness measurements worldwide, such as the World Database of Happiness (Veenhoven, s. f.) place Colombia for the year 2019 in third place, with a score of 8.1 out of 10, being behind countries such as Denmark and Mexico.

The results showed that there were no differences between men and women with respect to the level of happiness, even considering the participant's occupation. Studies carried out in Latin America (Graham & Pettinato, 2001; Moyano & Ramos, 2007; Zweig, 2015) also show no such differences, despite what can be inferred by virtue of the different roles played by each in society. The work carried out in the Municipality of Pasto, Colombia, by Ortiz-Benavides (2016) also found the same tendency, which suggests that in general, there are other variables that have a greater incidence on happiness than sex.

According to occupation, the participants with higher levels of happiness are teachers and administrators than students. These results are comparable to those reported in other research, such as those of Gómez et al. (2007) and Ramírez (2022). In this case, teachers and administrators who already have a profession, most of them have a family and have clear goals in life, can better appreciate their level of happiness, if compared to students who are concerned about their performance in their studies and in the search for their life purpose. There is evidence that indicates that older people have a greater purpose in life (Meier & Edwards, 1974), and that this greater purpose is associated with physical and psychological well-being (Reker et al., 1987) and with greater satisfaction with life (Cotton et al., 2009). In the results of this work, this is corroborated by the mild to moderate correlation of age with happiness and purpose in life and inner balance.

The lowest score obtained in the subscales was in physical well-being. This item is considered relevant, since it takes into account physical activity, nutrition and the perception of general health. Previous studies, such as the one conducted by Cruz and Torres (2006) in a large sample of the Colombian population, concluded that the positive perception of health increases the level of satisfaction with their living conditions in a percentage higher than 50% of the participants. Similarly, a study by Badri et al. (2022) found a significant association between happiness with healthy eating, regular physical exercise and self-perceived health. In the case of eating, happiness may be associated with a satisfactory diet and its importance for a person's well-being (Schnettler et al., 2015). On the other hand, physical activity and sleep quality are predictors of people's general well-being (Ridner et al., 2016). Similarly, a strong relationship has been found between self-perceived health and happiness (Sabatini, 2014). Considering the results of this study, there is an opportunity to intervene in the community being evaluated to significantly improve these indicators, especially in terms of physical activity and diet.

The social relationships of the individuals, evaluated in the dimensions of family and friends, were relevant for the participants according to their occupation. Overall, leisure, cultural and sports

activities increase individuals' happiness. Similarly, satisfaction with family members and with relationships with people related to work life also positively affect an individual's happiness (Acar, 2020; Moyano & Ramos, 2007). Although social relationships can be of hedonic flexibility (Quoidbach et al., 2019) or be conditioned by the personality of the person (extraverted or introverted), they can be a source of positive affect for individuals. A review by Rojas-Solís (2022) highlights the importance of social relationships and optimism in the perception of happiness in Latin American university students. Ramirez (2022) found in a research conducted at a private university in Bogota that participants over 30 years of age and married reported being happier. The values obtained for this section highlight a strength at the relational level, which can be a source of positive affection for people (2017).

External vision was the other dimension in which participants scored lowest, and it is related to people's material and economic expectations. This relationship between economic aspects and happiness has been addressed in other studies in Colombia. Poveda (2015) found that a higher educational level is associated with happiness, but that groups of Colombians with higher economic income were not necessarily the happiest. This contrasts with Londoño (2011) who indicates that subjective wellbeing increases with income level and mobility experience. Botello-Peñaloza & Guerrero-Rincón (2021) find that in addition to the perception of health, security and work affect the level of happiness of Colombians. Given that the sample evaluated comes from a public university and in a post-pandemic context, which has brought economic and social consequences for the community in general, with economic contraction and loss of jobs (Vallejo, 2021), this could condition the perception of respondents about their finances and material security.

CONCLUSIONS


The level of happiness determined through Sophie in the university community (UCEVA) evaluated was adequate, being the student sector with the lowest scores. The teachers and administrative staff, being the oldest group and with higher scores in the purpose in life and inner balance, are associated with a greater ability to assess their level of happiness, which means that the results of their questions are more grounded in reality, without ignoring that students have high levels of happiness.

The mention to which the student belongs had no effect on the overall score of the Sophie instrument, which suggests a more relevant conditioning factor that affects his level of happiness. Social relationships, in the context of family and friends, are important for all groups. In general, the evaluated sample feels happy in their current occupation, which correlates significantly with their life purpose according to the results of the model.

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