Gender differences in self-esteem and happiness among university students

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Abstract

The current research examines gender differences in the self esteem and happiness of university students. A sample of 120 students (60 males and 60 females) was drawn from the various departments of university of Sargodha within the age range of 18-26 years. Convenience sampling technique was used. *Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1985) and Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (Hills and Argyle, 2001) were individually administered to the participants. The results suggested that the male students reported significantly higher level of self esteem as compared to the female university students (t = 3.78, df = 117, ***p < .001). Moreover, the results suggested insignificant differences in male and female student in level of happiness (t = 404, df = 117, p > .05). Furthermore, significant positive relationship was found between happiness and self esteem of students (r = .22*). These findings have implications for helping teachers and parents.

Keywords: Happiness, Self-esteem, University students

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1. Introduction

The present study was conducted to explore gender differences in self-esteem and happiness among university students. It is a common observation that happy persons have a tendency to feel positive about themselves and those individuals who have low self value and self-worth are usually miserable and unhappy (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Happiness can increase wellbeing, health, work performance, warmth, altruism, creative thinking and problem solving, and reduce stress Argyle (2001).

According to Kesebir and Diener (2008), happiness is a mental state of well-being described by positive emotions ranging from contentment to profound delight. Diener et al. (1999) argued that happiness is one of the most important and major dimensions of human experience and emotional life. Happiness could be better understood in relation to frequent and repeated positive effect, elevated life satisfaction and uncommon negative effect, which are three basic elements of subjective well-being (Diener, 1984; 1994). Argyle et al. (1995) described that people usually define happiness as experiencing a positive affecting state such as pleasure, or contented with life as a whole or partially.

Self –esteem is a major element that influences the level of expertise in all fields of effort. Self-esteem has relationship with job success, school accomplishments, interpersonal compatibility, and common happiness (Redenbach, 1991). Evans (1997) stated that self-esteem is a significant psychological element causal to health and quality of life. According to Bandura (as cited in Malbi and Reasoner, 2000)**,** self esteem is the sense of personal significance and capability that persons correlate with their self-concepts. Battle (1982) suggested that the concept of self-esteem is a personal, evaluative experience which decides the individual's characteristic insight of sense of worth.

Self-esteem is a comprehensive feeling of sense of worth or capability as an individual, or general feelings of self-acceptance, kindness, and self-worth (Coopersmith, 1967; Lyubomirsky et al., 2006; Rosenberg, 1965; Wylie, 1979). Woolfolk (2005) defined self-esteem as an emotional act which summarizes the value or worth we relate to our self-assessments. Self-esteem is broadly known as being less flexible than self-concept as it covers the ways that individuals think about their strong points and weakness. According to Tudor (1996), the most important elements of mental health are self-concept, self-esteem and identity are. Self-esteem is frequently considered as a guide of general happiness or well-being (Ryff, 1989; Whitley, 1983). Myers and Diener (1995) found self-esteem as a consistent trait which portrays happy people (Fordyce, 1988; Diener and Diener, 1995; Kozma and Stones, 1978).

Wilson (1967) explored different demographic characteristics of happiness. According to him, a happy individual is one who is youthful, vigorous, knowledgeable, productive, extroverted, hopeful, religious, and have high self-esteem. Zimmerman (2000) reviewed several studies and concluded that subjective well-being notably associated with high self-esteem. He further argued that self-esteem contributes to major difference in both happiness and mental well-being. Furnham and Cheng (2000) found self-esteem as the central and influential reason of happiness. DeNeve and Cooper (1998) concluded that generally happy persons have social, friendly personalities, bright and optimistic view about themselves, their competence and their future. Moreover, they are more vigorous and active and less tendency to be anxious.

Goodarzi et al. (2008) conducted a study to investigate the happiness level of male and female athlete Irani students. The sample of 282 students was drawn from Tehran University. Oxford Happiness questionnaire was individually administered. The results showed that female athletes had reported higher self- efficacy, happiness and life satisfaction as compared to male students. The results further suggested that although both groups gained a same level of self-esteem, but female students reported more happiness than male participants.

Veselska et al. (2008) investigated the impact of whether social support, personality and mental health on the relationship between self-esteem and socio-economic status in a sample of 3694 students of elementary school. Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale, the Ten-Item Personality Inventory, Perceived Social Support Scale, the Family Affluence Scale and the 12-item General Health Questionnaire were administered. The results suggested that family prosperity, extroversion, openness and emotional stability (dimensions of personality) mental health and social support from family and important others were found to be related with self-esteem.

The current research investigated the following research questions:

- Is there any gender difference in happiness level of university students?
- Is there any gender difference in self-esteem of university students?
- Is there any relationship between happiness and self-esteem of university students?

2. Method

2.1. Research design

The survey research design was used in this research.

2.1.1. Sample and sampling strategy

Non-probability purposive sampling technique was used. The following inclusion criteria were used: Enrollment in University of Sargodha as student availability and willingness of the research participants. The sample was composed of 120 university students (60 males and 60 females). The sample was drawn from various departments of university of Sargodha. Further demographic characteristics of the sample are given in Table 1.

2.2. Instrument

Following instruments were used:

- Demographic Information Form
- Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965)
- Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (Argyle and Hills, 2001).

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

	f	*%*
Gender		
Male	60	50
Female	60	50
Education		
science	82	68
Social science	38	32
Age		
18-20	38	32
21-23	63	53
24-26	19	15

2.2.1. Demographic information form

Demographic Information Form was used to gather information about age, education and gender of the research participants.

2.2.2. Rosenberg self-esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965)

Rosenberg self-esteem scale was used in this research. it was devolved by Rosenberg in 1965 and consist of 10 items. It is related to the feelings of self acceptance and self worth. Responses were measured on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*).

2.2.3. Oxford happiness questionnaire (Argyle and Hills, 2001)

Happiness was measured by the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (Hills and Argyle, 2001) which is a 29-item scale. Each item was evaluated on a six-point scale: strongly agree, moderately, agree, slightly agree, slightly disagree, moderately disagree, and strongly disagree. This tool gives a range of scores between 29 and 145, with higher scores representing greater happiness. In the present research, the scale has sufficient reliability of alpha co-efficient of .74.

2.3. Procedure

Official permission was sought from the Principal from the various heads of the departments for data collection. A briefing about nature and purpose of the study was given to the participant to develop the rapport. They were assured that all information taken from them will be kept confidential. Written informed

consents were taken from them individually. Then RES and OHQ were individually administered to all the research participants to determine their self esteem and happiness level.

2.4. Statistics

The SPSS (version 17) was used for statistical analysis of the data. To examine the gender differences in the study variables, Independent sample t-test was performed. Moreover, Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient was used to explore the correlation between happiness and self esteem among university students.

3. Results

The results given in Table 2 indicate significant gender differences in self-esteem of university students (t = -2.58, df =118, *p < .05). The male students reported higher level of self-esteem as compared to the female students (Mean= 22.95 and Mean 21.48, respectively). The Table 2 further suggests no significant gender differences in level of happiness among university students. However, mean differences show that male university students are happier than female students (Mean= 3.68 and Mean 3.64, respectively).

Table 2. Gender Differences in Happiness Level and Self-esteem of University Students (N=120)

Variable	Male (n=60)		Female (n=60)		t	95.0% C.I. LL	UL
	M	SD	M	SD			
Happiness	3.68	0.66	3.64	0.49	0.308	-0.177	0.243
Self-esteem	22.95	2.89	21.48	4.1	2.58*	0.343	2.58

*t= -.308, df =118, p > .05; t= -2.58, df =118, *p < .05*

The result given in Table 3 (r = .22, *P < .01) suggest significant positive relationship between happiness and self-esteem of university students

Table 3. Relationship between Happiness Level and Self-esteem of University Students (N=120)

	1	2
1.Happiness	-	
2. Self esteem	.22*	-

r = .22, * p <.05*

The result given in Table 4 (r = .49, **P < .01) suggest significant positive relationship between happiness and self-esteem of male university students.

Table 4. Relationship between Happiness Level and Self-esteem of Male University Students (n=60)

	1	2
1. Happiness	-	
2. Self esteem	.49**	-

*r = .49**, * *p < .01*

The result given in Table 5 (r = -.17, P >.05) suggest insignificant relationship between happiness and self-esteem in the sub-sample of female university students.

Table 5. Relationship between Happiness Level and Self-esteem of Female University Students (n=60)

	1	2
1. Happiness	-	
2. Self esteem	-0.17	-

r = -.17, p > .05

4. Discussion

The findings of the current research suggest that gender has an impact upon the development, expression and demonstration of self-esteem and there are considerable gender differences in self-esteem of university students. Furthermore, the male students reported higher level of self-esteem as compared to the female students. These findings are consistent with the previous research findings of Baumeister (1993), Hossaini, (2002), Marcotte et al. (2002), Pipher (1994), Pollack (1998), SarAbadaniTafreshi (2006), and Zareh (1994); which suggested that females, on average, have a lower sense of self-esteem than males.

Zeinvand (2006) conducted a study on 72 students in Iran to explore relationship between social support, self esteem and student's educational development. The t test analysis suggested that boys reported more self-esteem as compared to female students. The findings further revealed no significant gender differences in level of happiness among university students. However, mean differences suggested that boys reported more happiness than female students. The findings are consistent with those of Abbu-Rayya (2005), Abdel-Khalek and Lester (2003), Argyle (1986), Diener and Diener (1995), Haring et al. (1984), Ryff and Singer (1998), Peerz (2012), and Roothman et al. (2003); which suggested that males students had significantly higher happiness level than female students. Abdel-Khalek (2004) argues that different factors such child-rearing techniques and gender role can play an important role in this context.

Furthermore, significant positive relationship was found between self-esteem and happiness. These findings are consistent with the earlier research findings (Argyle and Crossland, 1987; Diener, 2000; Malekiha and Abedi, 2012; Myers, 1992; Sheldon and Houser, 2001; Sprague, 1997; Visser, 2000) which

reported that self-esteem was found to be correlated with individual s self-reported happiness. Self-esteem is so closely associated to happiness that it could be considered as a part of happiness (Argyle, 2001). Recently, a number of studies revealed that subjective well-being associated with high self-esteem (Zimmerman, 2000). Furnham and Cheng (2000) stated that self-esteem is the most central and influential predictor of happiness.

The gender differences in self-esteem and happiness level may be attributed to different social roles consigned to male and female in our traditional Pakistani society. The female students are more prone to low level of self-esteem and happiness; probably due to the reason that our patriarchal society discourages higher education for girls.

5. Conclusion

It is concluded that there are significant gender differences in happiness level and self esteem of university students. The male Pakistani university students reported higher level of self esteem as compared to female students possibly due to the traditional gender and social roles in the patriarchal Pakistani society in which boys are given more importance and privileges as compared to girls. Furthermore, significant positive relationship was found between happiness and self esteem of students. The findings of this research would be beneficial in helping parents and teachers to deal with the self esteem and happiness issues of the students especially in higher education. It would also have implication for the timely and efficient counseling and interventions if required in colleges and universities.

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