



[www.aassjournal.com](http://www.aassjournal.com)  
ISSN (Online): 2322 – 4479

**Original Article**

Received: 06/04/2013  
Accepted: 17/06/2013

# Happiness as a Predictor of Psychological Well-Being of Male Athlete Students

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## ABSTRACT

Happiness is a concept which has become of high importance for the past years because of its role in psychological well-being and the social health of people. The present research has been conducted to study the role of happiness in predicting the psychological well-being of male athlete students. A number of 100 physically active students were chosen through multistep cluster sampling out of male physically active students in the city of Miyandoab in the academic year 1391-92. They responded to the short scale depression-happiness of Joseph *et al.* (with the stability of 0.69) and Ryff's scale of psychological well-being (with the stability of 0.68) having six components of self-acceptance, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, purpose in life, personal growth and independence. The results showed that there is a relationship between happiness and well-being ( $r = 0.53$ ). Also, happiness, in a positive and meaningful way, predicts changes pertaining to psychological well-being ( $p < 0.001$ ;  $r^2 = 0.282$ ). Enhancing and improving happiness along with physical and sportive activities may help increase psychological well-being of students.

**Key Words:** physically active male students, psychological well-being, happiness.

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## INTRODUCTION

Physical activities are associated with a vast range of health issues, while lack of exercise can be correlated with the increasing growth of mental disorders. In this regard, some clinical and epidemiological studies of sectional and long-term kind have indicated that there is a positive, powerful relationship between positive psychology components like psychological well-being (1). Emphasizing on the fact that health is something beyond lack of disease, Ryff (1989) said that psychological well-being refers to what an individual needs for mental, social, and cognitive health (2). Ryff (1989) understood that the researchers were agreed on factors like positive attitude towards oneself, self-acceptance, the ability to create contexts which are consistent with psychological status, environmental mastery, warm and reliable relationship with others, positive relationship with others, having a sense of purpose and direction, purpose in life, continuous growth of personal abilities, personal growth, independence, and autonomy (2). Regarding the role of sport and physical activities in the psychological well-beings of individuals, the results of researches indicate that physical activities can have positive effects on different aspects of psychological well-being, qua in a research Barbar (2012) showed that physical activities and morning sports cause to increase the psychological well-being and its components like positive relationship with others, purpose in life and self-acceptance in female high school students (3). Opendacker *et al.* (2008) showed that physical activities are associated with increased levels of psychological well-being (4). All in all, this idea is generally accepted that sport and physical activities increase and improve the psychological well-being in people (1, 3, 4).

In addition to the role of sport and physical activities in people's psychological

well-being, paying attention to the psychological variables affecting psychological well-being of individuals is of high importance. Happiness is one of these variables. There have been various definitions of the word happiness. To Veenhoven (1988), happiness is referred to the level by which the individual judges the general desirability of his or her life. This means how much the individual loves his or her life and enjoys it (5). Lyubomirsky (2005) considers happiness as the experience of joy, gratification, and meaningfulness of life, too (6). By this definition, happiness is an abstract and subjective phenomenon, and each person has a unique pattern by which to interpret their experiences in way that keeps them happy (6). Different surveys have shown that happiness has a positive and meaningful relationship with different dimensions of psychological health and has an important role in preventing physical and mental disorders (7, 8). Piqueras *et al.* (2011) stated that happiness was associated with the increment of behaviors relating to mental health in students (7). Veenhoven (2008) indicated that happiness prolongs the lifetime of healthy people in the society, in addition to improvement and decrease mental problems along with increasing the mental health (9). The results of the research by Lyubomirsky (2001) indicated that happiness is able to predict changes associated with psychological health and well-being (6). In a research by Edwards *et al.* (2005), the importance of life satisfaction as a component of happiness in psychological well-being and positive performance of adult athletes was emphasized, and the results indicated that high life satisfaction had an important role in enhancing athletes' psychological well-being (10). Also, Asady *et al.* (2013) showed that there was a positive and meaningful relationship between self-concept and self-esteem in athlete students (11). Generally, it

can be inferred that happiness and sport are of factors having important roles in the psychological well-being of people, although there is no coherent study on Iranian adolescent athletes in this research field. Intertwiningly environmental, social, and psychological problems can cause difficulties in the psychological well-being, emergence of adaptive behaviors, and adopting a healthy lifestyle in adolescents and high school students in Iran. It is hypothesized that sport and happiness are effective in emerging healthy behaviors and psychological well-being of Iranian adolescents. Since no research has been conducted on Iranian samples in this field, this study becomes important and necessary. Accordingly, the present research has been conducted with the purpose of studying the role of happiness in predicting the psychological well-being of male athlete students.

#### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The method of descriptive research is of correlation type (regression analysis). In this research, happiness is considered as a predictor variable and the psychological well-being is considered a criterion variable. The statistical population in the present study included all of physically active male students in the city of Miyandoab in the academic year 1391-92. The statistical sample of the research included 100 physically active students (the average age: 15.55; the standard deviation: 0.91) which were selected through multistep cluster sampling. In this research, a student who had enrolled in a sport outside the school curriculum (regardless of the sport) and regularly exercised in a club at least two days a week fitted the definition of physically active. After coordination with respective officials, cooperation of the participants, and explanation of purposes, the scale of psychological well-being and the short scale of depression-happiness were

given to the participants and were answered in the self-report way.

The following tools have been used to collect data:

**Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWBS):** This scale which was designed by Ryff in 1989 has 18 items. This scale has 6 subscales of self-acceptance, environmental mastery, positive relationship with others, and purpose in life, personal growth, and autonomy. In this scale, every three items test one factor and 8 items are graded reversely. To answer each item, a continuum from 1 (totally disagree) to 6 (totally agree) has been considered. Joushanlou *et al.* (2006) reported the internal consistency of this tool between 0.43 and 0.60, and verified its validity (12). The stability of Ryff's psychological well-being has been calculated 0.68 through using Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

**Short Depression-Happiness Scale:** This scale was made by Joseph *et al.* and included 6 items. Three items are scored reversely and the three others directly (13). The way of answering the items of this scale is based on Likert's scale (4-point), from never (0) to always (3). A high score in this scale shows positive thoughts, emotions, and behaviors which mainly indicate people's happiness compared with depression symptoms. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of this scale has been reported 0.80 (13). The reliability of depression-happiness short scale in this research has been calculated 0.69 through Cronbach's alpha test.

The data has been analyzed with the use of special package for the social sciences (SPSS) and through statistical methods of Pearson correlation and regression analysis.

#### RESULTS

There was a positive and meaningful relationship between the overall score of psychological well-being and happiness ( $p < 0.01$ ). A positive and meaningful relationship was observed among the

components of self-acceptance, environmental mastery, positive relationship with others, personal growth in athlete students ( $p < 0.01$ ) (table1). A positive correlation was observed between the

component of autonomy and happiness in athlete students, although it was not statistically meaningful ( $p > 0.05$ ) (table1).

**Table1.** Statistics and Simple correlation of psychological well-being in athlete students

| Subscales                                | Mean $\pm$ SD     | Correlation with Happiness<br>r |
|--|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| Happiness                                | 18.09 $\pm$ 4.16  | 1                               |
| Psychological well-being's overall score | 81.86 $\pm$ 14.89 | 0.53*                           |
| Self-acceptance                          | 12.38 $\pm$ 4.56  | 0.56*                           |
| Environmental mastery                    | 13.74 $\pm$ 3.9   | 0.23*                           |
| Positive relationship with others        | 13.82 $\pm$ 3.89  | 0.4*                            |
| Purpose in life                          | 14.97 $\pm$ 3.43  | 0.27*                           |
| Personal growth                          | 13.67 $\pm$ 4.24  | 0.29*                           |
| Autonomy                                 | 13.28 $\pm$ 3.74  | 0.16                            |

\*: significance in  $p \leq 0.01$  level

The results of regression analysis indicated that happiness as a predictor variable predicts 0.28% of the variance of psychological well-being's overall score ( $p < 0.001$ ), 0.31% of the variance of self-acceptance ( $p < 0.001$ ), 0.05% of the

variance of environmental mastery ( $p < 0.01$ ), 0.16% of the variance of positive relationship with others, 0.07% of the variance of purpose in life ( $p < 0.005$ ), and 0.08% of the variance of personal growth ( $p < 0.003$ ) in athlete students.

**Table2.** The summary of regression model, variance analysis, and the statistical regression of happiness on psychological well-being and its components

| Variable                                 | predicator | Beta  | t     | p      | R     | R <sup>2</sup> | Adj.R <sup>2</sup> | F      | p      |
|--|------------|-------|-------|--------|-------|----------------|--------------------|--------|--------|
| Psychological well-being's overall score | Happiness  | 0.531 | 6.208 | 0.001* | 0.531 | 0.282          | 0.279              | 38.535 | 0.001* |
| Self-acceptance                          | Happiness  | 0.563 | 6.747 | 0.001* | 0.563 | 0.317          | 0.31               | 45.524 | 0.001* |
| Environmental mastery                    | Happiness  | 0.239 | 2.435 | 0.01*  | 0.239 | 0.057          | 0.047              | 5.928  | 0.01*  |
| Positive relationship with others        | Happiness  | 0.404 | 4.372 | 0.001* | 0.404 | 0.163          | 0.155              | 19.11  | 0.001* |
| Purpose in life                          | Happiness  | 0.278 | 2.863 | 0.005* | 0.278 | 0.077          | 0.068              | 8.196  | 0.005* |
| Personal growth                          | Happiness  | 0.298 | 3.087 | 0.003* | 0.298 | 0.089          | 0.079              | 9.531  | 0.003* |

\*: significance in  $p \leq 0.01$  level

## DISCUSSION

This research has been done with the purpose of studying the role of happiness in predicting the psychological well-being in athlete students. The results indicated that there is a meaningful and positive relationship between happiness and the general psychological well-being, self-acceptance, environmental mastery, positive

relationship with others, purpose in life, and personal growth in male athlete students. Considering this relationship, it can be said that the more happiness is in athlete students, the better state of psychological well-being they are in. These findings are in consistence with the results of Salovey *et al.* (2000), Edwards *et al.* (2005), Veenhoven (2008), and Piqueras *et al.* (2011) (7-10). In

the research by Edwards *et al.* (2005), it was clarified that life satisfaction as a component of happiness had a relationship with the psychological well-being of adults in a positive way (10). To justify this finding and in consistence with the previous findings, it can be said that happiness leads to improve life satisfaction, self-efficacy, self-esteem, optimism, efficient and adaptive coping with adverse events through increasing positive emotions, balance of joy (the balance between positive and negative emotions), and creating states like laughter and humor. In this regard, happiness as a moderating mechanism leads to positive adaptability and psychological well-being through improving the mentioned component, and the individuals bearing higher psychological well-being are satisfied with their life circumstances, always having positive emotions and are less affected by negative ones. On the other hand, happiness causes positive emotions and psychological well-being to increase, because it has positive consequences for the individuals (5, 7). Hence, a person's happiness has a major role in their psychological well-being. Additionally, there is this hypothesis that people bear different skills in applying positive emotions and processing feelings like happiness, which can have various reasons like participating in physical and sports activities. Participating in physical and sports activities is an effective and safe way to decrease the negative feelings like sorrow and stress, to regulate emotions (actions representing the ways a person copes with stressful situations and misfortunes.), and to increase social and interpersonal skills. Psychologically, the physical and sport activities probably lead to increase the relationship between happiness and psychological well-being through providing a situation to divert the individual's attention from stress and creating a ground to increase self-

confidence, having relationship with others, positive emotions, and power (14).

According to the results of the present research, happiness was able to predict the generally positive and meaningful psychological well-being and components including self-acceptance, environmental mastery, positive relationship with others, purpose in life, and personal in male athlete students. These findings were consistent with the results of the surveys by Veenhoven (2008), Edwards *et al.* (2005), and Lyubomirsky (2001) (6, 9, 10). Lyubomirsky (2001) showed that high happiness was the best predictor for psychological health and well-being in individuals (6). This finding can be explained according to Eysenck's theory of personality traits. According to this theory, sport and regularly physical activities improve and grow the social processes like self-esteem, autonomy, empathy, conformity, reduction in aggression and anti-social behaviors through making changes in the arousal level of the brain, biochemical and mental structure of the individual. In Eysenck's point of view, athletes are outgoing and bold so that they bear a higher threshold than their ordinary counterparts in dealing with problems and issues (15). According to the above theory, it can be said that sport and physical activities can enhance positive personality aspects, reduce behaviors considered socially wrong, and improve happiness which has a more important role in predicting psychological well-being as one of the positively psychological structures through reducing stress and increasing components associated with psychological health (7). Also, sport and physical activity cause to create delightful feelings and happiness in people by increasing the level of endorphins (a hormone which causes delightful feelings and is a natural painkiller) and decreasing cortisol levels (a hormone which is secreted in blood due to stress) (16). Hence, not only

do athlete students respond to events and circumstances in a more positive and adaptive way because of happiness, but also they bear a lower level of stress and more powerful safety system while they are more creative than ordinary people. In other words, athlete students act more successfully not only in controlling daily routines, but also in coping with very stressful and life-threatening events, and they also have better levels of psychological well-being.

### CONCLUSION

Generally, the results of the research indicated a meaningful relationship between happiness and psychological well-being in male athlete students, and also, happiness was able to predict psychological well-being and its components in male athletes. Hence, the education officials are advised to pay more attention to sport and physical

activities for the sake of more happiness and psychological well-being in students and provide this class of the society with the necessary equipment. Moreover, conducting more research with more various research samples including students of other educational grades like guidance school, female athlete students, and non-athlete students can provide more admissible evidence for the role of happiness in predicting psychological well-being. Evaluating happiness and psychological well-being based on the personal reports of the testable items which may be biased is of the limitations of the present study. Another limitation pertains to the sample group which leads to a caution aspect in generalizing the results to the testable items of outside this group. Also, the method of this research is of correlation studies which restrain the conclusion on the findings.

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## مقاله اصیل

تاریخ دریافت: ۱۳۹۲/۰۱/۱۷

تاریخ پذیرش: ۱۳۹۲/۰۳/۲۷

## تازه‌های علوم کاربردی ورزش

دوره اول، شماره دوم

صص ۳۲-۲۵، تابستان ۱۳۹۲

# شادکامی به عنوان پیشگوی بهزیستی روانشناختی دانش‌آموزان پسر ورزشکار

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## چکیده

شادکامی مفهومی است که در سال‌های اخیر بواسطه نقشی که در بهزیستی روانشناختی و سلامت اجتماعی افراد دارد، اهمیت بسزایی یافته است. پژوهش حاضر با هدف بررسی نقش شادکامی در پیش‌بینی بهزیستی روانشناختی دانش‌آموزان پسر ورزشکار بود. تعداد ۱۰۰ دانش‌آموز فعال بدنی به صورت نمونه‌گیری خوشه‌ای چندمرحله‌ای از میان دانش‌آموزان پسر فعال بدنی شهرستان میاندوآب در سال تحصیلی ۹۲-۹۱ انتخاب شدند و به مقیاس کوتاه افسردگی - شادکامی Joseph و همکاران (با پایایی ۰/۶۹) و مقیاس بهزیستی روانشناختی Ryff (با پایایی ۰/۶۸) که دارای شش مولفه؛ پذیرش خود، تسلط محیطی، روابط مثبت با دیگران، هدف در زندگی، رشد فردی و استقلال بود، پاسخ دادند. نتایج نشان داد که بین شادکامی و بهزیستی روانشناختی ارتباط وجود دارد ( $r=0/53$ ). همچنین، شادکامی بصورت مثبت و معنادار تغییرات مربوط بهزیستی روانشناختی را پیش‌بینی می‌کند ( $R^2=0/282$ ;  $P<0/001$ ). تقویت و ارتقاء شادکامی همراه با فعالیت‌های حرکتی و ورزشی می‌تواند به افزایش بهزیستی روانشناختی دانش‌آموزان کمک کند.

**واژگان کلیدی:** دانش‌آموزان پسر، فعال بدنی، بهزیستی روانشناختی، شادکامی.

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