Pakistan Journal of Life and Social Sciences
www.pjlss.edu.pk

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Hedonistic Pursuits and Well-Being: A Retrospective Analysis of Expectations and Reality

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This paper investigates the relationship between hedonic pursuits and their impact on individuals' long-term happiness and well-being. While traditional views in logical positivism and conventional economics have emphasized the hedonic pursuit of happiness, it is essential to assess the contemporary prevalence of hedonism, the potential moral consequences of this focus, and its effects on individual well-being. This study examines the validity of the claim that prioritizing hedonic pursuits is the goal of life, contributing to discussions on human flourishing and genuine happiness. Employing a retrospective analysis approach, the research gathers data through interviews to capture both current assumptions and real feelings. The findings reveal that, although hedonic behaviors provide temporary satisfaction, they do not significantly enhance sustained happiness levels. In contrast, spirituality and eudemonic values—such as kindness, compassion, care for others, sharing, forgiveness, and gratitude—emerge as key drivers of long-term happiness among participants. This research underscores the importance of engaging in meaningful, purpose-driven eudemonic activities to enhance overall well-being, suggesting a shift away from purely hedonic pursuits toward a more balanced approach to happiness.

INTRODUCTION

Happiness is often described as a subjective state of well-being marked by positive emotions, life satisfaction, and a sense of fulfillment (Veenhoven, 2011). It can be divided into two categories: short-term happiness, derived from external stimuli and momentary joys, and long-term happiness, which reflects a deeper sense of purpose and overall life satisfaction. Research suggests that long-term happiness is closely linked to factors such as health, social connections, and quality of life (Bartolini & Sarracino, 2017). Understanding these distinctions is crucial for comprehending how happiness impacts overall human well-being.

The construct of happiness has evolved through various philosophical and economic frameworks, such as logical positivism which dominated social sciences and economics. This perspective posited the pursuit of satisfaction or happiness as life's primary goal (Bruni, 2004; Comte, 1858). Early positivist thinkers, including (Comte, 1858) and (Durkheim et al., 1938), emphasized measurable outcomes, focusing on quantifying human experiences related to pleasure and pain. Such an

emphasis on hedonic experiences often encouraged individuals to seek immediate gratification, potentially overlooking ethical and moral considerations (Aydin, 2012). As a result, this singular focus on hedonism may lead to superficial and fleeting forms of happiness, completely disregarding virtues and ethics essential for achieving enduring wellbeing (Easterlin & O'Connor, 2022).

In contemporary society, there is an increasing tendency for individuals to prioritize hedonic pursuits over eudemonic well-being (Dach, 2015). Modern values emphasizing consumerism and instant gratification can detract from deeper forms of fulfillment associated with personal growth and meaningful relationships. Popular culture, social media, and advertising often promote these hedonistic values, perpetuating a cycle where pleasure is prioritized above a sense of purpose(Gilroy-Ware, 2017). Although material wealth and short-term pleasure can contribute to subjective well-being, research in positive psychology indicates that long-lasting happiness is more closely linked to eudemonic aspects, such as self-acceptance, personal development, and fulfilling interpersonal connections (Gupta, 2019).

Further complicating the pursuit of happiness are cognitive biases that might lead individuals to overestimate the impact of hedonic experiences and external adversities on their overall well-being (Gilbert et al., 1998; Santos & Gendler, 2014a). This aligns with the Easterlin Paradox (Easterlin, 1974a), which asserts that beyond a certain wealth threshold, increases in material wealth do not correspond with greater happiness. Additionally, many individuals may lack awareness of their internal emotional resilience mechanisms, which can contribute to a misguided focus on external experiences to foster happiness (Calvo et al., 2022; Al-khresheh., 2022). Consequently, investigating how hedonic pursuits affect well-being necessitates a deeper understanding of intrinsic emotional regulation and adaptation processes (Leung et al., 2022; AL-Qadri et al., 2023).

Recent research in psychology aims to scrutinize the claims made by conventional economics regarding the relationship between long-term happiness and hedonic pursuits (Joshanloo et al., 2021). This investigation is timely and essential given the normalization of hedonism in contemporary society (Dach, 2015; Bhuiyan et al., 2024). By examining how belief systems and behaviors correlate with the intensity and longevity of happiness, the current study seeks to establish clearer connections between hedonistic pursuits and lasting well-being.

The study employs a focused literature review of empirical and experimental research (Boote & Beile, 2006), supplemented by a retrospective analysis through surveys (Hendrix & Griessenauer, 2019a). Participants will report their engagement in both hedonic and eudemonic behaviors, along with their respective happiness levels. This methodology is crucial for identifying patterns and correlations that bridge theoretical concepts and real-life happiness experiences, contributing to a nuanced understanding of the interplay between these factors.

Ultimately, this research holds significance for elucidating the multifaceted relationship between hedonic behaviors and long-term happiness, with implications for strategies aimed at enhancing human well-being. By understanding how various factors influence happiness, targeted interventions can be developed, tailored to individual needs and preferences, improving mental health outcomes and promoting overall well-being in society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Happiness, a central concept in psychology and philosophy, is broadly defined as subjective well-being characterized by positive emotions, life satisfaction, and a sense of fulfillment (Veenhoven, 2011; Jam et al., 2010). Research in positive psychology identifies two primary types: short-term or immediate happiness and long-term or enduring happiness.

Short-term happiness includes transient feelings of joy, pleasure, and gratification that arise from external stimuli or momentary experiences (Mandishekwa, 2021). These moments are often linked

to hedonic pursuits, involving pleasurable activities or material acquisitions. While they can temporarily enhance mood, their effects are fleeting and heavily dependent on external circumstances (Easterlin, 1974a).

Conversely, long-term happiness, also known as enduring happiness or eudemonic well-being, transcends momentary pleasures, encompassing a deeper sense of purpose, meaning, and overall life satisfaction (Caunt et al., 2013; Eddington & Shuman, 2005). Psychologists like Carol Ryff and Corey Keyes emphasize the importance of psychological well-being, which includes personal growth, positive relationships, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and self-acceptance, in fostering long-term happiness (Ryff & Keyes, 1995a).

Long-term happiness is closely tied to human well-being. It reflects not just subjective happiness, but also broader indicators like health, social connectedness, achievement, and quality of life (Diener & Seligman, 2004). Sustainable well-being involves balancing positive emotions, meaningful activities, accomplishments, and nurturing relationships over time. This research aims to explore long-term happiness, defining it as synonymous with human well-being, signifying a comprehensive state of flourishing beyond temporary pleasures, encapsulating deeper fulfillment and purpose.

 Logical positivism, a 20th-century philosophical stance, prioritized verifiable observations and empirical evidence in understanding knowledge (Blumberg & Feigl, 1931). In social sciences and traditional economics, this perspective framed life's primary purpose as the pursuit of happiness through hedonism (Zaman, 2015). Positivist thinkers emphasized empiricism and observable phenomena, cultivating a focus on quantifiable elements of human welfare, such as pleasure and pain, and aligning happiness with hedonistic pursuits (De Coulanges, 1872; Durkheim et al., 1938; Hayek, 1980). As a result, happiness was often simplistically equated to the sum of pleasurable experiences minus painful ones, which led to the development of utilitarian philosophies by figures like Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. They posited that the moral worth of actions is determined by their contribution to overall happiness, emphasizing quantitative measures of well-being (Bentham, 1789, 1843; Mill & Mill, 1966).

However, this emphasis on hedonism as a pathway to happiness has been increasingly challenged by contemporary research. Scholars argue that an over-reliance on hedonistic principles leads to a misinterpretation of happiness, promoting the belief that the accumulation of pleasurable experiences alone can sustain long-term happiness (Easterlin, 1974a; Lyubomirsky, 2008).

The concept of the "hedonic treadmill," proposed by (Brickman et al., 1978) in their 1971 study, illustrates how individuals quickly adapt to new levels of pleasure or achievement, leading to a return to a baseline level of happiness. This adaptation suggests that the pursuit of external sources of happiness, such as wealth, appearance, or success, is ultimately futile in yielding lasting contentment. As a result, individuals might find themselves continuously seeking new pleasures without achieving the anticipated satisfaction, hence the cyclical nature of happiness (Lucas et al., 2003).

Considering these insights, it becomes essential to explore alternative frameworks for understanding long-term happiness. Research indicates that factors like personal relationships, community involvement, altruism, and engagement in meaningful activities play a significant role in fostering enduring satisfaction (Diener & Seligman, 2004; Lyubomirsky, 2008). These aspects suggest that genuine happiness is not derived merely from individual pleasure but also from a sense of connection, purpose, and contribution to others.

The "sustainable happiness model" proposed by (Lyubomirsky, 2008) highlights that approximately 40% of our long-term happiness is influenced by intentional activities and lifestyle choices, beyond genetic and circumstantial factors. This underscores the importance of proactive behaviors like gratitude, mindfulness, and fostering strong social connections, which can lead to improved mental health and overall life satisfaction (Park et al., 2004).

This review highlights the importance of shifting focus from merely seeking pleasure to pursuing meaningful experiences and nurturing relationships. By doing so, we can develop a more comprehensive and sustainable understanding of happiness that aligns with our evolving human experience.

Theoretical lens

Critics of this hedonic perspective argue that it overlooks the complexities of human experience and neglects the broader dimensions of well-being beyond momentary pleasures. Positive psychology, for instance, offers an alternative theoretical lens that emphasizes the importance of eudemonic well-being, which encompasses personal growth, positive relationships, and a sense of purpose in fostering long-term happiness and life satisfaction (Keyes, 2002; Ryff & Keyes, 1995b). By acknowledging the multidimensional nature of human well-being and exploring alternative theoretical frameworks that incorporate eudemonic elements, we can develop a more comprehensive understanding of happiness that goes beyond mere pleasure-seeking and materialistic pursuits (Jun, 2015).

Current study utilizes positive psychology theory (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) as theoretical lens for the study. Seligman's initial theory proposed that individuals have three basic psychological needs: To feel positive emotion, engage in activities that give life meaning and purpose, and have positive relationships with others. In addition, theory of spirituality (Pargament, 2013), which states that spirituality is a distinctive human motivation and process, one that contributes in unique ways to health and well-being, is also used as theoretical lens for the research.

METHODOLOGY

Methodology of the study is two staged, i.e. literature review of empirical and experimental studies on happiness and human belief systems and secondly a retrospective study conducted via survey. A retrospective study involves collecting data on a sample population concerning specific outcomes or events that have already occurred. This study design is an effective and expedient approach to clinical research mostly. It is especially valuable when investigating outcomes that are not feasible to study prospectively, or when the cost and time involved in conducting a prospective study is prohibitive (Hendrix & Griessenauer, 2019b). This method of analysis has been applied in social research as well (Heath et al., 2009; McElvaney & Culhane, 2017). A retrospective study design allows the investigator to formulate hypotheses about possible associations between an outcome and an exposure and to further investigate the potential relationships (Jürges, 2009).

Step one of current research involves reviewing literature studying what makes human happy and based on belief systems, what factors influence long term happiness or wellbeing. Second step of research involves administering surveys to a sample of participants to quantify their engagement in hedonic and eudaimonic behaviors, as well as their reported levels of happiness and retrospective test of their long-term happiness influencers. The collected data will be analyzed using statistical techniques to identify correlations and patterns between variables.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Setting hedonic goals never lead to actual long-term wellbeing and satisfaction (Thorsteinsen & Vittersø, 2018). This intensifies the feeling of failing or frustration of constantly running target after target. Accumulation of these negative feelings leads to stress, mental health issues and depreciated quality of life (Delle Fave et al., 2011).

Demographics for the Data

Following charts depict the demographics of respondents. Data was collected from all over the world via google forms. Link was shared with people from countries including Pakistan, Türkiye, Iran,

Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Yemen, Syria, Qatar, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. Some of the forms were also distributed manually at Türkiye and data was manually entered in google forms later. Total of 252 people responded with 251 filled forms and one form not filled up completely. Some people also missed filling a section or two. Given analysis of each section therefore shows the number of cases who responded to that section. Fig 1, Fig 2 and Fig 3 depict demographics related to age, gender and education level of the respondents.
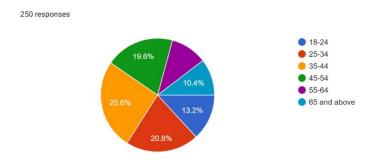
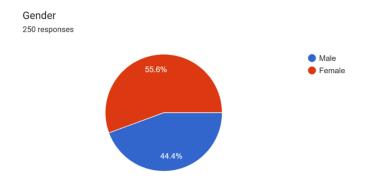250 responses

Fig 1: Age Distribution of Respondents

Gender
250 responses

Fig 2: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Education Level
251 responses

Fig 3: Education Distribution of Respondents

Table 1: Pivot Table Education Level with respect to Age and Gender

Age	Associate Degree Female	Associate Degree Male	Associate Degree Total	Bachelors Female	Bachelors Male	Bachelors Total	Doctorate Female	Doctorate Male	Doctorate Total	High School Female	High School Male	High School Total	Maters Female	Maters Male	Maters Total	No formal education Female	No formal education Male	No formal education Total	Primary Female	Primary Male	Primary Total	Grand Total
18-24	5	5	10	5	8	13				2	5	7	2	3	5				3		3	38
25-34	3	4	7	4	3	7	6	3	9	6	8	14	10	7	17				1		1	55
35-44	6	4	10	9	3	12	5	3	8	3		3	8	11	19	2	2	4	1		1	57
45-54	4	8	12	4	3	7	4	7	11		3	3	5	6	11	1		1	1		1	46
55-64	3	3	6	3	3	6				3	2	5	3	5	8	3		3	2	1	3	31
65 and above	3		3	3	5	8				2		2		2	2	3	2	7	3	2	5	25
Grand Total	24	24	48	28	25	53	15	13	28	16	18	34	28	34	62	9	4	15	11	3	14	252

Table 1 shows the distribution of the sample population's education level with gender and age. A total of 252 surveys were filled. Out of which one was incomplete, therefore, 251 were used for analysis. Out of 252, 38 belonged to the age group 18-24; 17 were females and 21 were male. 55 respondents belonged to 25-34 age group, 57 in 35-44, 46 in 45-54, 31 were in the age group 55-64 and twenty five respondents in > 65 years of age respectively.

Perceptions of the Respondents

Following charts depict the responses of respondents for the perceptions of what make them happy and how happy they think they are. Questions were asked to see how often respondents engaged in hedonic and eudemonic activities and what they think makes them happy; hedonism or eudemonism. More than 60 percent of the respondents admitted to be involved in hedonic activities frequently (Fig. 4). First question regarding behavior asked for the frequency of hedonic activities in the life of the respondent.
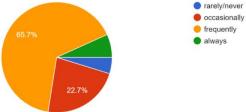

Fig 4: Hedonic Activity Frequency Chart

More than 50 percent had the perception that hedonic activities made them happy. 22.4 percent were neutral about hedonism making them happy and 18.8 percent disagreed with this perception (Fig. 5). This question measured the perception of respondents about hedonic influence on happiness.

To what extent do you agree with the statement: "Engaging in hedonic behaviors makes me happy?"
250 responses

Fig 5: Perception about Hedonic Happiness

When it came to eudemonic activities, 54.2% agreed to be involved in such activities occasionally and 30.7% frequently (Fig. 6). Next question asked about the frequency of eudemonic activities in the life of respondents.
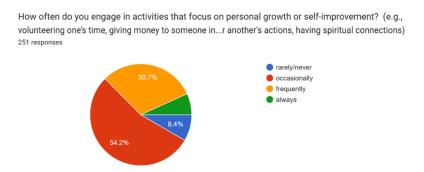
How often do you engage in activities that focus on personal growth or self-improvement? (e.g., volunteering one's time, giving money to someone in...r another's actions, having spiritual connections)
251 responses

Fig 6: Eudemonic Activity Frequency Chart

Fig. 7 shows overall happiness perception on 10 point Likert scale. Only less than 12 percent of total sample population reposting happiness to be less than 5. 70 percent of the total population reported happiness to range from 5 to 8. No one reported to be extremely sad (1) and only one reported to be extremely happy (10).
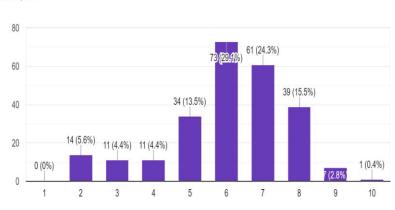
On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your overall happiness and well-being at this moment?
251 responses

Fig 7: Overall Subjective Happiness Levels

When average subjective happiness was calculated for eudemonic activities involvement frequency response, it appeared that people involved more frequently in eudemonic activities reported to have higher levels of subjective happiness (see Table 2). Similarly, those whose involvement in eudemonic activities was occasionally, had average happiness level as low as 3 on the scale from 1-10.

Table 2: Cross Tabulation of Eudemonic Activity Involvement and Subject Happiness Level

Eudemonic Activity Involvement	%age	Frequency of Involvement category	Average Subjective Happiness
always	8.457	16	9
frequently	33.831	76	8
occasionally	53.731	136	5
rarely/never	3.483	21	3

Another very interesting observation during analysis was that higher percentage of people perceived themselves to be happy with hedonic activities like earning, having good grades finding love, spending time doing activities for the sake of please etc. However, out of 252 total responses of what makes them really sad only 5 people gave hedonic losses as an answer and rest all of them responded with eudemonic losses as discussed in detail in next section. This validated G.I.Joe fallacy (Santos & Gendler, 2014b).

QDA sentiments Analysis for open ended responses

QDA Minor is a powerful sentiment analysis tool designed to facilitate the qualitative analysis of textual data. By leveraging advanced algorithms, it enables researchers to systematically assess and interpret sentiments expressed in various forms of text, making it an invaluable resource for understanding public opinion and emotional responses (Gonzalez et al., 2018). This tool enhances the ability to extract meaningful insights from qualitative data, thereby enriching the research process (Lewis & Maas, 2007). Therefore, current study utilizes QDA Minor for exploring the difference between perceptions and reality of happiness influencing factors; both positive and negative. Next two subsections cover this analysis.

Factors having negative impact on Happiness

This analysis has two parts; what really makes people happy and what really makes them sad. First part of the analysis in this section covers the factors affecting the happiness negatively.

Table 3: Frequency Table of Worst Sentiments and Experiences

Worst Sentiments	Number of cases	Percentage share in responses
Loss of loved one	57	18.7%
Guilt	32	11.9%
Feeling for others	13	4.7%
Emotional hurt	62	20.7%
Longing recognition	12	4.7%
Loss of trust	16	6.4%
Unfulfilled wishes	19	7.6%

Physical pain and illness	3	1.2%
Stress of worldly demands	22	8.7%
Fear of loneliness and desertion	12	4.8%
Self-doubt	19	7.5%
Trauma	6	2.4%
Many	1	0.4%

Qualitative data analysis revealed interconnected themes reflecting individuals' emotional landscapes, including emotional struggles, relationships, healing and growth, loss and grief, trust issues, and personal reflection. Emotional struggles reveal feelings of pain and self-doubt linked to past traumas, while relationship dynamics show the impact of supportive and harmful interactions on well-being. Healing is a non-linear process that requires patience, and loss and grief express deep sorrow for absent loved ones or possessions. Trust issues hinder new relationships due to past betrayals, requiring vulnerability. Personal reflection helps address negative self-perceptions and inspires a more fulfilling life.

Significantly, these emotional and relational factors affected respondents' happiness, and were not related to the loss of material acquisitions. This highlights a gap between perceptions of happiness and reality, as discussed by Professor Laurie Santos from Yale University (Santos & Gendler, 2014a). These findings also align with the Quran's assertion that life can be deceptive, as many pursue worldly desires that do not yield true fulfillment.

"Know that the life of this world is but amusement and diversion, and adornment and boasting among yourselves and rivalry in increase of wealth and children. Like the example of a rain whose produce is pleasing to the tiller; then it dries and you see it turned yellow; then it becomes scattered debris. And in the Hereafter is severe punishment and forgiveness from Allah and pleasure. And what is the worldly life except the enjoyment of delusion?" Surah Al-Hadid (57:20), Al-Quran
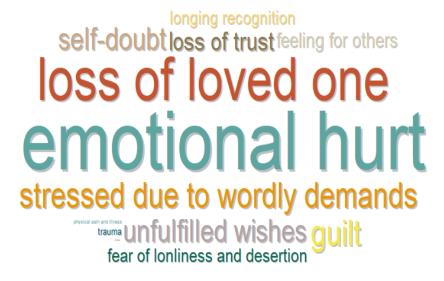

Fig 8: Word Cloud of Factors Affecting Happiness Negatively

Word cloud in Fig. 8 shows that emotional hurt, loss of trust and loss of loved ones are three major factors followed by the others. Below is the in-depth analysis of each of these negatively impacting factors.

There is a long list of factors that positively impact long-term happiness or wellbeing. Below the discussion revolves around top three such factors including emotional hurt, loss of loved ones and loss of trust.

Emotional Hurt

The following word cloud analysis revealed a profound exploration of emotional experiences characterized by grief, betrayal, and disillusionment (Fig. 9). It highlighted the pain of lost companionship, particularly the absence of pets and familial relationships, and the struggles with self-doubt and negative self-talk. The analysis also reflected feelings of disappointment in mentors and friends, along with a yearning for healing and connection. Regret for past choices, coupled with fears of judgment and the impact of external events, and underscored the ongoing challenges faced. Ultimately, it painted a complex picture of the journey through emotional turmoil towards understanding and recovery.

Fig 9: Word Cloud of Emotional Hurt

The word cloud analysis revealed several key themes related to loss of loved ones. "Family Loss" highlighted the profound emotional impact of losing parents, siblings, and relatives. "Emotional Struggles" captured the complex feelings experienced, such as guilt, regret, shame, fear, and deep pain. The theme of "Personal Growth" illustrated how individuals shifted their perspectives, learned from their experiences, and sought forgiveness and reconciliation in the wake of grief. Additionally, "Companionship and Pets" emphasized the significant emotional toll of losing pets, reflecting a longing for their presence. Finally, "Hope and Healing" represented the universal pursuit of happiness, peace, and the hope for reunification with loved ones in the afterlife, showcasing the resilience of the human spirit amidst loss.
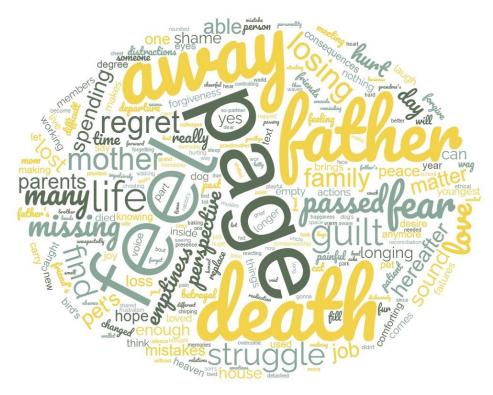
Fig 10: Word Cloud of Loss of Loved Ones

Fig 11: Word Cloud of Loss of Trust

The word cloud analysis on betrayal and trust issues, illustrated in Fig. 11, revealed several significant themes that highlight the emotional impact of these experiences. Prominently, "Betrayal and Trust Issues" showcased how betrayal undermines one's ability to trust, particularly when experienced from friends or loved ones. This leads to "Emotional Pain and Disappointment," capturing the hurt and sadness felt when let down by someone admired. Additionally, the theme of "Fear of Vulnerability" represents the anxiety about potential future hurt, creating a conflict between

the desire for connection and the fear of further pain. Themes of "Disillusionment" and "Familial Conflict" reflected a loss of innocence regarding trustworthiness and the long-term effects of betrayal within family dynamics, respectively. Individuals also navigate "Self-Reflection and Growth," learning valuable lessons on trust and forgiveness while confronting the complexities of moving on. Finally, the "Search for Authentic Relationships" underscores the longing for genuine connections and the challenges of finding trustworthy individuals after experiencing betrayal.

Factors having a positive impact on Happiness

This second section of the sentiment analysis explores respondents' reactions to their best and happiest memories, focusing on the distinction between hedonic and eudemonic memories to uncover any discrepancies between expectations and reality regarding happiness. The analysis identified key factors influencing happiness, ranked by significance in Table 4, with family, cherished memories, and emotional support/love emerging as the top three contributors. Additional factors included peace and nature, love, learning and growth, helping others, reunions with loved ones, recognition, gratitude, charity, connections, and the health of loved ones. Importantly, none of these factors are classified as hedonic; instead, they reflect deeper, more meaningful experiences aligned with eudemonic well-being, suggesting that respondents derive happiness from elements that promote lasting fulfillment rather than transient pleasures. Results are consistent with both Easterlin paradox (Easterlin, 1974b) and G.I.Joe fallacy (Santos & Gendler, 2014b).

Table 4: Frequency Table of Best Sentiments and Experiences

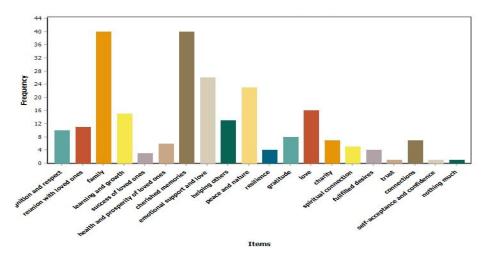| Worst Sentiments	Number of cases	Percentage share in responses
Family	40	20.00%
Cherished memories	40	20.00%
Emotional support and love	26	13.00%
Peace and nature	23	11.50%
Love	16	8.00%
Learning and growth	15	7.50%
Helping others	13	6.50%
Reunion with loved ones	11	5.50%
Recognition and respect	10	5.00%
Gratitude	8	4.00%
Charity/kindness	7	3.50%
Connections	7	3.50%
Health and prosperity of loved ones	6	3.00%
Spiritual connection	5	2.50%
Resilience	4	2.00%
Fulfilled desires	4	2.00%
Success of loved ones	3	1.50%
Trust	1	0.50%
Self-acceptance and confidence	1	0.50%
Nothing much	1	0.50%

Fig 12: Bar Chart of Positive Factors Influencing Happiness

Fig 13: Word Cloud of Positive Factors Influencing Happiness

Fig. 12 and Fig. 13 show that word frequency positively influences happiness.

Fig 14: Word Cloud for Family as Happiness Influencer

Analyzing respondents' influences on happiness reveals a strong emphasis on family (Fig. 14). Many described transformative moments, such as the birth of children, and the joy of family gatherings filled with laughter and unity. Simple pleasures, like dancing with a partner or playing with nephews, highlighted the profound impact of family interactions. Enduring memories from activities like building sandcastles and baking together foster deep emotional connections, while family support during tough times emerged as a crucial source of comfort. Overall, happiness for many stems from familial relationships characterized by love, shared experiences, and cherished memories.

Fig. 15 illustrates another happiness influencer: cherished memories. Word analysis via QDA Minor Lite software revealed that many respondents reminisced about family vacations, special occasions, and lighthearted moments, emphasizing the joy found in both grand adventures and everyday experiences. Nostalgia played a significant role, with individuals recalling childhood toys and favorite movies. These reflections underscore that happiness is deeply intertwined with meaningful relationships and shared experiences.

The third major happiness influencer identified was emotional support and love (Fig. 16). Participants highlighted the joy of surprise celebrations, laughter with loved ones, and significant milestones that foster supportive relationships. Intimate moments, such as sharing a cup of tea with a pet or heartfelt conversations with friends, also contributed to their happiness. The act of giving and gratitude for support during challenges illustrated the profound impact of connections with others. Overall, these insights reveal that happiness is intricately linked to shared experiences, laughter, and emotional support.

Fig 15: Word Cloud for Cherished Memories as Happiness Influencer

Analysis of QDA results reveals key themes of joy and connection (Fig. 16). Participants highlighted the significance of social bonds through a surprise birthday party and the joy of dancing at a niece's wedding. Carefree moments, like laughter with nephews, and thoughtful gestures, such as celebrating milestones and finding cherished gifts, emphasized emotional resilience. Cherished experiences included stargazing, tea with a parrot, and trips with friends. Nurturing relationships were evident in cooking family recipes, sharing meals, and creating handmade gifts. Heartfelt letters, deep conversations, and bonding through team sports further enriched these connections. Being the best man at a friend's wedding epitomized the essence of friendship and support.

Fig 16: Word Cloud for Emotional Support as Happiness Influencer

Limitations and Future Directions of Research

Current research faces limitations due to time constraints, suggesting that expanding the research scale could yield better insights. Longitudinal experimental studies may provide improved results compared to retrospective studies. Notably, the study challenges prevailing neo-classical thought, showing that values, beliefs, and positive emotions, rather than material gains, lead to happiness despite unchanged life conditions (Layous & Lyubomirsky, 2014b). Religion and spirituality can also enhance habit formation and emotion regulation (McCullough & Willoughby, 2009; Van Cappellen et al., 2021; Vishkin et al., 2014). Future research directions include 1) using AI and simulations to differentiate between eudemonic and hedonic belief-based societies; 2) exploring eudemonism's mechanisms for long-term happiness; and 3) investigating differences in religious and non-religious eudemonic values and their impact on well-being.

CONCLUSION

The research findings present a profound insight into the complexities of human happiness, demonstrating a stark distinction between hedonic pursuits and the sources of genuine well-being. First, consistent with the works of Thorsteinsen & Vittersø (2018) and Delle Fave et al. (2011), it is evident that pursuing hedonic goals does not equate to long-term well-being or satisfaction. Respondents reported engaging in hedonic activities frequently, yet they simultaneously experienced a significant accumulation of negative feelings, such as frustration and stress, stemming from an unyielding chase after transient pleasures. This aligns with the notion that the relentless pursuit of hedonic goals can yield detrimental effects on mental health and quality of life.

The qualitative analysis offers further depth, illuminating how emotional struggles, relationship dynamics, loss, and trust issues collectively shape individual experiences of happiness. Interestingly, these factors reveal that respondents often pointed to relationships and personal growth as primary contributors to their happiness, reaffirming the eudaimonic perspective that finds fulfillment in meaningful connections and experiences rather than superficial pleasures.

In contrast, when analyzing what truly brings happiness to respondents, the results indicate a preference for eudaimonic sources, such as family, love, emotional support, and personal growth, over hedonic pleasures. This juxtaposition underscores a critical discrepancy: while individuals may perceive hedonic activities as important for happiness, their deepest fulfillment stems from relational and emotional aspects of life, which are inherently more stable and enriching.

Moreover, these findings resonate with philosophical and theological perspectives, such as those presented in the Quran, which cautions against the deceptive allure of worldly pursuits. This connection reinforces the study's conclusions that the pursuit of happiness is often misaligned with true sources of well-being, aligning with Santos & Gendler's (2014) exploration of the gulf between expectation and reality in happiness.

This research underscores a crucial understanding of happiness, suggesting that instead of solely pursuing hedonic pleasures, individuals may find greater fulfillment by focusing on eudaimonic aspects of life, such as nurturing relationships and fostering personal growth. The concept of happiness, a central theme in psychology and philosophy, encompasses subjective well-being, positive emotions, life satisfaction, and a sense of fulfillment (Veenhoven, 2011). Positive psychology identifies two main types of happiness: short-term, linked to transient joy and pleasure, and long-term, reflecting enduring well-being beyond mere external stimuli (Mandishekwa, 2021). Contrary to the emphasis on material wealth in traditional economic and positivist perspectives (Becker, 1976), the implications of these findings encourage a re-evaluation of societal values and individual pursuits, advocating for a more holistic approach to well-being that honors the complex interplay between emotional and relational fulfillment. Pursuing immediate pleasure and hedonic desires may not lead to lasting well-being, as evidenced by societal shifts towards materialism and misjudgments of happiness linked to external acquisitions (Lyubomirsky, 2008). The allure of hedonistic pursuits—whether concerning financial success, beauty, perfect relationships, or academic achievements—often proves illusory in sustaining long-term happiness (EAGAN et al., 2016; Santos & Gendler, 2014). Cognitive biases and societal influences shed light on the limitations of seeking happiness through hedonism, calling for a reevaluation of approaches to fostering enduring well-being. Empirical findings characterize long-term happiness by eudaimonic well-being and psychological richness, emphasizing personal growth, positive relationships, autonomy, and purpose in life (Caunt et al., 2013; Eddington & Shuman, 2005). As such, future research could explore interventions designed to shift focus from hedonic achievements to fostering strong, meaningful connections and personal growth, ultimately promoting a healthier understanding of happiness and life satisfaction, which aligns with human well-being, encompassing health, social connections, achievement, spirituality, and quality of life (Ryff, 2021).

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT: Taseer Salahuddin, Conceptualization, writeup, analysis. Hasan Vergil, review, improvement and conclusion

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT: No conflict of interest

FUNDING DECLARATION: No funding utilized.

ETHICS STATEMENT: Ethical permission present from Ibn Haldun University Ethics Committee. Only Adults above 18 years were included as respondents therefore parental permission was not needed.

DATA ACCESS STATEMENT: Data file submitted as Excel File along with the paper.

WORD COUNT: 6401

JEL CODES: I31, D03, J01

DECLARATION: We assure that this paper has not been submitted any where else for publication.

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