

Assessing the level of Happiness among dental students of Pakistan: Web-based study

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ABSTRACT

Background: Dental students in Pakistan suffer greatly from unusual distress and are unable to maintain happiness from the start of first year to final year. They are deprived from maintaining their mental wellbeing and happiness. There is lack of evidence Oxford happiness inventory (OHI) evaluation among the students.

Aim: To detect the level of happiness in dental students from different professional years.

Methods: A cross-sectional study in Bahria University Medical and Dental College was carried out. Dental students were enrolled from first year to final year using purposive sampling method.

Results: This study included females 209, and 55 males. Majority of students (48.5%) belonged to 18-20 years age group followed by 21-22. About 50% students were from 1st year BDS, followed by 2nd year (28%). Question assessing happiness of students, 30.9% male students and 35.4% female's students moderately agreed.

Conclusion: The study concludes that overall dental students had an average level of happiness. It is necessary that all the dental educationists in any institution should work with close association to psychologists, there shall be different student services provided and student supporting groups shall be encouraged.

Keywords: Oxford Happiness Questionnaire, happiness, well-being, students,

INTRODUCTION

Mental health and positive psychology are interconnected with happiness which has been in discussion during the recent years¹. Happiness is said to be 'the quality or state of being happy or to be satisfied that something is good or right; not anxious'². An inner state of successfulness and fullness that indicates gratification at the lowly end of the order and fierce enjoyment at the high end of the scale, happiness is a reflection of one's subjective well-being and their quality of life³. Being happy boosts the aptness of an individual, it tends to make one think positively, ensuring accomplishments, setting goals and exploring options⁴, it ameliorates individual ability to work efficiently in a team ensuring success in the workplace⁵. Happiness makes an individual to perceive, elucidate, and redesign life events in many ways compared to an unhappy person. It is influenced by different social contexts which includes individual cultures, religious beliefs, social relationships, social norms and values which shapes the meaning we give to things all these attributes increases one's ability to make choices^{4,5}. Studies have suggested that happy people are more likely to be victorious at their workplace, they interact positively with their work team and pursue new life goals⁶.

Happiness is considered to be the key component in maintaining good quality of life⁶. Previously happiness was studied to in probe mental health as it is one of the top valued subjects in human life. Thus later in 20th century it became an area of research to investigate positive

psychology related to human well-being and special assessment tools were developed to evaluate the happiness⁷. Any profession that provides job security is considered to be one of the most prominent indicator to measure careers success⁸ which evidently contributes to happiness of an individual (the experience of positive affect)⁵. Regarding this milieu, dentists are declared to have fortunate careers however; the reports regarding sodality of dental career and happiness are not enough.

Dental profession is associated with many health concerns which includes physical and mental tiredness, various psychological stressors (e.g., managing time, staff and patients' behaviors), pressure to make money along with emotional fatigue and burnout, all leading to poor mental health coupled with low level of performance⁹. Studies from different devolving and well developed countries have rated dentistry to be a demanding, pressured and hazardous profession¹⁰. It is highlighted in some researches that medical and dental students are supposedly more stressed but their psychological behavior is equally inclined towards happiness and stress simultaneously¹¹.

A limited number of studies have determined happiness among dentists^{11,12}. There is no current reported literature on the levels of happiness among undergraduate dental students across the nation.

Therefore, the current study attempts to address the gap by evaluating the level of happiness of dental students and how happiness could be consistent to emotional well being and one's own life satisfaction.

Received on 13-01-2021

Accepted on 21-05-2021

MATERIALS AND METHOD

This cross-sectional study was carried out at Bahria University. All the participants were well informed about the research objective; their participation in study was voluntary and anonymous. Dental students enrolled from first year to final year were included using purposive sampling method. The students who gave their consent and provided responses were added to the study. This study duration was Sep -Dec 20.

Due to the current Pandemic an online survey form was formulated using Google Docs. Consent form was attached with it and confidentiality of the information was assured. The link of the questionnaire was shared with the students via WhatsApp, Facebook, LinkedIn and other social media sites. The link was shared through all the main sources of communication to reach many students. After their agreement to the survey, they first filled the demographic detail, followed by set questions formulated using of Oxford Happiness Scale.

Initially demographic information was required which included age, gender, year of study educational level. Questions related to family income, and family structure was also asked. Rest of the questions were focused on Oxford Happiness Questionnaire that is a 29 questions-based survey which aims at utilizing a six-point rating scale of agreement ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 6 (strongly disagree). Reliability for this scale was found to be α 0.92.

Data Analysis: Data was analyzed using SPSS (v 23) for Windows. In this study, descriptive statistics (average, standard deviation, frequency) while for the inferential statistics Chi square test and Fischer Exact test were used.

RESULTS

This study included females n=209, and n=55 males. Majority of students (48.5%) belonged to 18-20 years age group followed by 21-22 being 43.5%. About 50% students were from 1st year BDS, followed by 2nd year 28%. About 50% of the female and 29% of male students moderately agreed not being pleased with the way they were. Regarding waking up feeling rested, 29% females and 25% males moderately disagreed with this.

Query regarding not having happy memories of past, 45.3% females and 38.6% males demonstrated slightly disagreement with this. Question regarding not being pleased with the way I am; 24% of final year and 23% of first year students slightly disagreed with this, while 41% of the third year students slightly agreed with this. (Table 2)

Table 1: Demonstrating the demographics of the dental students

Gender	n	%age
Male	55	20.8
Female	209	79.2
Total	264	100.0
Age (years)		
18-20 years	128	48.5
21-22 years	115	43.6
23-24 years	21	8.0
Total	264	100.0
Year at Dental College		
1 st year	131	49.6
2 nd year	74	28.0
3 rd year	22	8.3
4 th year	37	14.0
Total	264	100.0

Table 2: Exhibits association between the students and questions

**I don't feel particularly pleased with the way I am	1 st year	2 nd year	3 rd year	4 th year	P-value
Slightly disagree	30(22.90%)	16(21.60%)	0	9(24.30%)	0.07
slightly agree	20(15.30%)	14(18.90%)	9(40.90%)	8(21.60%)	
moderately agree	14(10.70%)	5(6.80%)	4(18.20%)	4(10.80%)	
strongly agree	15(11.50%)	14(18.90%)	0	6(16.20%)	
moderately disagree	41(31.30%)	18(24.30%)	2(9.10%)	8(21.60%)	
strongly disagree	11(8.40%)	7(9.50%)	7(31.80%)	2(5.40%)	
**I rarely wake up feeling rested					
Slightly disagree	10(7.60%)	8(10.80%)	4(18.20%)	6(16.20%)	0.004
slightly agree	19(14.50%)	7(9.50%)	3(13.60%)	6(16.20%)	
moderately agree	29(22.10%)	13(17.60%)	7(31.80%)	2(5.40%)	
strongly agree	20(15.30%)	14(18.90%)	3(13.60%)	8(21.60%)	
moderately disagree	35(26.70%)	22(29.70%)	5(22.70%)	10(27%)	
strongly disagree	18(13.70%)	10(13.50%)	0	5(13.50%)	
**I do not have particularly happy memories of the past					
Slightly disagree	56(42.70%)	30(40.50%)	10(45.50%)	16(43.20%)	0.107
slightly agree	19(14.50%)	11(14.90%)	4(18.20%)	7(18.90%)	
moderately agree	14(10.70%)	6(8.10%)	7(31.80%)	4(10.80%)	
strongly agree	20(15.30%)	8(10.80%)	1(4.50%)	4(10.80%)	
moderately disagree	11(8.40%)	12(16.20%)	0	5(13.50%)	
strongly disagree	11(8.40%)	7(9.50%)	0	1(2.70%)	
** I don't feel particularly healthy					
Slightly disagree	30(22.90%)	16(21.60%)	0	9(24.30%)	0.003
slightly agree	20(15.30%)	14(18.90%)	9(40.90%)	8(21.60%)	
moderately agree	14(10.70%)	5(6.80%)	4(18.20%)	4(10.80%)	
strongly agree	15(11.50%)	14(18.90%)	0	6(16.20%)	
moderately disagree	41(31.30%)	18(24.30%)	2(9.10%)	8(21.60%)	
strongly disagree	11(8.40%)	7(9.50%)	7(31.80%)	2(5.40%)	

Majority of the students from all years demonstrated moderate disagreement with the question of rarely waking

up feeling rested. Similarly majority of the students from 1st year to final year slightly disagreed with the question of not

having happy memories of past. Question related to gap between what I would like to do and what I have done exhibited moderate disagreement from all the students. Question regarding not feeling healthy, 31% of 1st year, 24% of second year moderately disagreed with this, 41% of third years slightly agreed, while 24% of final years slightly disagreed with this. Questions related to not having fun with other people, majority of the students responded by slightly agreeing with this statement (Table 2).

DISCUSSION

Dentistry is considered among one of the prestigious and enriching professions, it is a stressful job associated with various physical and mental stress that affects a dentist's life^{13,14}. Studies related to the level of happiness among dental students are quite rare worldwide⁶. Happiness imparts different effects on an individual, which includes positive attitudes towards life, high self-concept, increase of vitality, good mental health status; and higher level of physical performance^{15,16}.

Overall, the dental students surveyed in our study showed moderate levels of happiness; 30.9% male students and 35.4% female. Dentists from Peru, Croatia and Serbia when assessed for their happiness levels, their happiness scores were noted to be quite high, while low happiness scores were recorded for dentists of Iraq, Yemen and Syria. This discrepancy might be related to a large variation in socio-economic framework, cultural environment and varied working environments¹⁷. Studies have reported findings in healthcare workers which were similar to our study¹⁸.

Present study reported that most of the 3rd and 4th year students were not happy with the way they were while the level of responses were same for both the genders. A study conducted by Moghadam M et al¹⁹ among the Taif University medical students, in Saudi Arabia (45.6%) of the students responded being happy. The findings of Alshehri et al²⁰ showed that (56.77%) of females were more unhappy as compared to males (52.5%) although the reported difference was statistically insignificant²⁰. They observed gender differences in overall scores. Studies conducted by Blasius JJ et al²¹ and Keshavarz et al have identified a positive relationship between the happiness scores and female gender, they suggest that the females are generally more content with their working environment²². On the other hand Danesh²³ and Solymani's et al⁶ reported no significant relationship between gender and happiness in their studies. However, the study by Solymani's et al., men had achieved high scores regarding life satisfaction while 31.6% of the male respondents of our study disagreed when they were asked if they were not pleased with the way they were⁹.

Students from different professional years were asked regarding having happy memories of the past majority of the students responded positively (Table 3). Happy memories were highest in the 3rd and final year students' students, this might be due to the fact that they have been involved in treating patients and received patient gratitude from their work. Moreover it can be accredited to the increasing age and experience that is related with increased happiness. Similarly a study by RB Baran found

high happiness levels in practicing dentists practicing from more than 10 years²⁴. Similarly, Jain et al., found that the level of happiness in dentists is directly correlated with increasing experience of the field, graduate and postgraduate degree²⁵.

Most of the final year students reported rarely waking up feeling completely rested during their time at the medical school (Table 4). It can be attributed to the fact that most of the final year students are under exam stress, they have to think about the career. Most of the final year course includes clinical rotations this combined with the pressure to cover up course on time can be a reason causing stress. A study by AA Surani reported that most of the Pakistani medical students (40%) had poor sleep quality during their medical career²⁶. Some other factors associated with disturbed sleep might be different clinical rotations and early class timings which can cause sleep deprivation across the study year²⁷.

Majority of the third years agreed upon not feeling healthy, these results are in contrast from the study led on Iranian student where they found that those medical students who exercised regularly were generally happier²⁸. Exercise tends to increase the level of self-esteem and reduces the depression^{29,30}.

The level of happiness, in dental students has an impact on their performance as it may be reflected in self-care or patient care. Suggesting an urgent need for different training programs for stress management and attaining professional satisfaction. The present study is important as it explores the subjective well-being and happiness of undergraduate dental students which might affect their life and professional performances. A key strength of the study is that it explores the level of happiness using a standard scale. Well-designed studies shall be carried out to explore, in depth, subjective and objective responses obtained from a larger and randomly selected sample.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that overall dental students showed a moderate level of happiness, psychological well-being and satisfaction with life. It is necessary that all the dental educationists in any institution shall work closer to psychologists, there shall be different student services provided and student supporting groups shall be encouraged. The issue of satisfaction and happiness among dental students shall be addressed in the nation to help increase happiness levels, which will ultimately improve their job performances.

Limitations: Due to the anonymity of the current study, we were not able to recognize those participants who responded negatively. Since, survey was conducted in only one dental school, the results may not be generalizable to students in other dental schools. Programs needs to be conducted how to provide a positive and supportive environment for students.

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