

## **A Study on the Relationship between Subjective Well-Being and Neuroticism among University Students**

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### **Abstract**

This study examined the relationship between Subjective Well-Being and Neuroticism. Based on Diener's Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (ED, Diener and et.al. 1985) and Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI) (Michel Argyle, 2001), Subjective Well-Being (LSH) questionnaire consisted of two factors: Life Satisfaction and Happiness. In addition, Neuroticism questionnaire developed by Ohn Hlaing and Ohn Kyaw: Psychiatric Rating Scale (1980) was also used in this study. This questionnaire was generated based on five factors, namely; anxiety, worry, depression, obsession, and hypochondriasis. In this study, the hypothesis states that Subjective Well-Being is negatively associated with Neuroticism. In this hypothesis, Subjective Well-Being was considered as independent variable and Neuroticism was considered as dependent variable. The results indicated that Neuroticism was negatively associated with Subjective Well-Being (-.156).

**Key words:** Subjective Well-Being, Neuroticism

### **Introduction**

Subjective Well-Being is the scientific name for how people evaluate their lives. People can evaluate their lives in terms of a global judgment (such as life satisfaction or feelings of fulfillment), in terms of evaluating the domains of their lives (such as marriage or work), or in terms of their ongoing emotional feelings about what is happening to them (feeling pleasant emotions, which arise from positive evaluations of one's experiences, and low levels of unpleasant feelings, which arise from negative evaluations of one's experiences). The English word 'happiness' means several different things (e.g., joy, satisfaction), and therefore many scientists prefer the term 'Subjective Well-Being'. However, Subjective Well-Being is an umbrella term that includes the various types of evaluation of one's life one might make— it can include self-esteem, joy, feelings of fulfillment, and so forth.

There are several cardinal characteristics in the study of Subjective Well-Being (Diener, 1984). First, the field covers the entire range of well-being from agony to ecstasy. It does not focus only on undesirable states such as depression or hopelessness. Instead, individual differences in levels of positive well-being are also considered important. Thus, the field of Subjective Well-Being includes the undesirable states that are treated by clinical psychologists, but is not limited to the study of these undesirable states. In other words, the field is concerned not just with the causes of depression and anxiety, but also with the factors that differentiate slightly happy people from moderately happy and extremely happy people.

Second, Subjective Well-Being is defined in terms of internal experience of the respondent. An external frame of reference is not imposed when assessing Subjective Well-Being. Although many criteria of mental health are dictated from outside by researchers and practitioners (e.g., maturity, autonomy, and realism), Subjective Well-Being is measured from the individual's own perspective. If a woman thinks her life is going well, then it is going well within this framework.

A final hallmark of Subjective Well-Being is that the field focuses on longer-term states, not just momentary moods. Although a person's moods are likely to fluctuate with each new event, the Subjective Well-Being researcher is most interested in the person's moods over time. Often, what leads to happiness at the moment may not be the same as what produces long-term Subjective Well-Being. Thus, we are interested in relatively enduring feelings of well-

being, not just fleeting emotions. An important distinction in Subjective Well-Being research between happiness and life satisfaction is that happiness is generally viewed as an emotion or feeling state, whereas life satisfaction refers to a more cognitive or judgmental process.

Contemporary studies that investigate the causes, predictors, and consequences of happiness and satisfaction with life are referred to as studies of Subjective Well-Being. Researchers in psychology tend to index Subjective Well-Being with scores on two major variables: happiness and satisfaction with life. When researchers ask people about their happiness, they are asking them to report on their emotional state and how they feel about their world and themselves. Question about a person's satisfaction with life tend to address a more global judgment about the acceptability of his or her life. In addition, a third factor-low neuroticism is sometimes added to form the basic triad of Subjective Well-Being. Therefore, high Subjective Well-Being is found when people report they are feeling very happy, very satisfied with life, and when experiencing low levels of neuroticism.

The fact that higher Subjective Well-Being is associated with fewer debilitating psychological conflicts is quite obvious. The third major component of Subjective Well-Being is an inverse relationship with negative emotionality and neuroticism: the less neuroticism, the higher the Subjective Well-Being.

In an important study of neuroticism and anxiety, it was found that neurotics differ from normal on several factors. Furthermore, it was found that anxiety is only one of many factors contributing to neurosis, that is, anxiety is apart, but not all, of neurosis (Cattell and Scheier, 1961). Some factors such as anxiety, appear to be important for all forms of neurosis whereas other factors are important only to some forms of neurosis.

In summary, these studies considered three major variables: Happiness, Life Satisfaction and low Neuroticism. Low Neuroticism means higher Subjective Well-Being. Higher Subjective Well-Being is associated with lower scores on measures of anxiety, worry, and depression. These predictors of well-being form what might be called the cycle of well-being in that they are mutually reinforcing.

### **Objective**

To explore the relationship between Subjective Well-Being (Life Satisfaction and Happiness, LSH) and Neuroticism (NTSM)

### **Hypothesis**

Subjective Well-Being (LSH) is negatively associated with Neuroticism(NTSM).

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

A total of 300 university students participated on a voluntary basis in the study. Demographic characteristics of study sample of university students (N=300) based self-reported data were shown in Table 1 and it summarizes the demographic characteristics of the participants. Of those who indicated their gender, 130 were men (43.33%) and 170 were women (56.66%). The age of the respondents ranged from 17 to 25 years, with an overall mean age of (21) years. The vast majority of the respondents who reported their religious affiliations were Buddhist (88.00 %), Islam (7.66 %), Hindu (1.00%) and Christians (3.33%).

At the time of study, (52.66%) participants were in first year, (30.66%) participants were in second year, and (16.66%) participants were in third year. Participants enrolled in Dagon University were (27.00%), participants enrolled in University of East Yangon were (32.66%).

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Study Sample of University Students (N=300) Based Self-Reported Data

<b>Variables</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>% of Responses</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	170	56.66
Male	130	43.33
Total Response	300	100
<b>Age</b>		
17-19	235	78.33
20-22	45	15.00
23-25	20	6.67
Total respondents	300	100
<b>Religion</b>		
Buddhist	264	88.00
Islam	23	7.66
Hindu	3	1.00
Christian	10	3.33
Other	0	0
Total respondents	300	100
<b>Universities</b>		
Dagon University	81	27.00
University of East Yangon	121	40.33
University of Pharmacy	98	32.66
Total respondents	300	100

## Measures

Subjective Well-Being is assessed with Life Satisfaction and Happiness questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 50 items (22 items for Life Satisfaction and 28 items for Happiness). The items were generated on the basis of Diener's Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (ED, Diener and et.al. 1985) and Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI) (Michel Argyle, 2001). The response options included: (1) nothing or almost nothing, (2) sometimes, (3) frequently, (4) very much. Responses were rated on 4 point scale so as avoid neutral answers. To assess Neuroticism, Neuroticism questionnaire was used. It was developed by Ohn Hlaing and Ohn Kyaw: Psychiatric Rating Scale (1980). This questionnaire was generated based on five factors, namely; anxiety, worry, depression, obsession, and hypochondriasis. It was made up of 10 items and had to be responded with a four point scale format.

## Procedure

These questionnaires were administered to 300 undergraduate students volunteers during the (2007-2008) academic year. The participants were told that their responses were kept confidential and encouraged to answer as quickly as possible. They took about 40 minutes in answering the questionnaire. They were also explained that there was no right or wrong answer so they can choose one which they agreed most. They were also explained the study's general aims and expectations. Some of the items which were not responded fully by the participants and which have more than one answer were rejected.

In this study, the data analysis was done by demographic statistics and bivariate correlation. Descriptive statistics was used to present the demographic data in the form of tables to describe some of its characteristic, such as percentage, mean and standard deviation. Pearson correlations were also used to explore the magnitude of the relationship between Subjective Well-Being and Neuroticism.

## Result

This study was an attempt to investigate the relationship between Subjective Well-Being (Life Satisfaction and Happiness, LSH) and Neuroticism (NTSM). Table 2 summarizes the descriptive statistics of all the measures for the total sample.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Participants' Scores on Measures of Subjective Well-Being (LSH) and Neuroticism (NTSM)

Measures	Mean	SD	Range
Subjective Well-Being (LSH)	68.99	17.56	11
NTSM	12.69	5.46	30

Note: LSH - Life Satisfaction and Happiness, NTSM- Neuroticism

To investigate the possible relationships among Subjective Well-Being and Neuroticism, Pearson correlations were calculated. The results were summarized in Table (3).

Table 3. Results of Pearson correlations between Subjective Well-Being (LSH) and Neuroticism (NTSM)

	LSH	NTSM
LSH Pearson Correlation	1	-.156 (**)
Sig. (2-tailed)		.007
N	300	300

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed\*)

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Note: LSH - Life Satisfaction and Happiness, NTSM - Neuroticism

The results showed that Neuroticism (NTSM) was negatively associated with Subjective Well-Being (LSH) (-.156).

## Discussion

Present study investigated the relationship between Subjective Well-Being (LSH) and Neuroticism in a particular Myanmar culture. Often the Subjective Well-Being measures are simple self-report responses in interviews or questionnaires of how happy and satisfied with life they are. Another method that is used to assess Subjective Well-Being is to ask subjects to generate as many good life events as they can in a short time period, and then to do the same for negative events. By examining the difference in recall between good and bad events it can obtain a measure of the recall availability of good and bad life events in the respondent's life. Additional measures of Subjective Well-Being include, interviews with respondents, biological measures (e.g., measures of stress hormones or cardiac variability), informant reports from family and friends, and coding of facial expressions. By using simple self-report responses in questionnaire, Subjective Well-Being (LSH) was measured in the present study.

Present study hypothesized that Neuroticism (NTSM) was negatively correlated with Subjective Well-Being (LSH). The outcome of Pearson correlation analysis in this study indicated that Neuroticism (NTSM) was negatively correlated with Subjective Well-Being (LSH) (correlation coefficient -.156). Neuroticism is the propensity to experience negative emotions and thought. Therefore, it is unsurprising that it makes lower Subjective Well-Being because there were heightened levels of unpleasant emotions among neurotics. Neuroticism includes characteristics such as, anxiety, worry, depression, irritability and bodily complaints. In other words, it encompasses a wide range of unpleasant thoughts and emotions. The fact that higher Subjective Well-Being is associated with lower Neuroticism is quite obvious. Among personality variables, Neuroticism has been studied extensively. The study of Costa and McCrae (1980) revealed that satisfaction with life was related to a low level of Neuroticism. Subsequent research has confirmed these relations (Brebner, Donaldson, Kirby and Ward,

1995; Chan and Joseph, 2000; Hills and Argyle, 2001). Costa and McCrae (1980, 1994) have shown that personality trait of Neuroticism can account for a significant amount of the variance of Subjective Well-Being and that they can even predict the level of psychological well-being 20 years later. The findings of present study were consistent with the results found in previous studies on the relation between Neuroticism and Subjective Well-Being and supported the hypothesis. In addition, this study can demonstrate that a person's Subjective Well-Being (LSH) is not only dependent on his or her psychosocial status but also on Neuroticism (NTSM).

### Conclusion

This study provides further evidence regarding the association between Subjective Well-Being (LSH) and Neuroticism (NTSM). Present research suggested that a person's Subjective Well-Being (LSH) was determined by Neuroticism (NTSM). The results of correlational analysis indicated that Neuroticism (NTSM) was negatively correlated with Subjective Well-Being (LSH). Therefore, nobody will claim that Subjective Well-Being (LSH) is a sufficient condition for mental health. High Subjective Well-Being may be found when people report they are feeling very happy, very satisfied with life, and when experiencing low levels of Neuroticism (NTSM).

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