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## CONTENTS

Sr. No.	TITLE & NAME OF THE AUTHOR (S)	Page No.
<u>1</u>	<b>Factors Influencing Marital Satisfaction among Postgraduate Students.</b> HasleeSharil Abdullah, Lau Poh Li and Pauline Ng Ai Ai	<u>1-19</u>
<u>2</u>	<b>Sustainability of Rural Water Supply Schemes In Oke-Ogun of Oyo State, NIGERIA.</b> Toyobo Adigun Emmanuel, Tanimowo N. Bolanle and Muili A .B	<u>20-36</u>
<u>3</u>	<b>Happiness Quotient of Upper Secondary School Students.</b> HasleeSharil Abdullah, Poh Li, Lau and Sing Yee, Ong	<u>37-57</u>
<u>4</u>	<b>Job Involvement among White Collar Employees.</b> Dr. Mu. Subrahmanian	<u>58-74</u>
<u>5</u>	<b>Socio-Economic Conditions of Agriculture Labourers In Punjab (Ground Reality of Unemployment).</b> Parshotam D. Aggarwal	<u>75-87</u>
<u>6</u>	<b>Family Management.</b> K. Prabakar	<u>88-98</u>
<u>7</u>	<b>FDI In Emerging Markets.</b> Dr. Ratna Vadra	<u>99-117</u>
<u>8</u>	<b>Hospitality And Tourism Industry.</b> Robil Sahni and Esha Mehta	<u>118-142</u>
<u>9</u>	<b>A New Proposal for Voltage Regulation Multi Feeders/ Multibus Systems Using MC-DVR.</b> Vasudevanaidu and Dr. Basavaraja	<u>143-168</u>
<u>10</u>	<b>Inclusive Growth: Vision And Challenges of An Emerging Economy –A case Study Of India.</b> Dr. Snigdha Tripathy	<u>169-195</u>
<u>11</u>	<b>Social Sector Revamp – A Need for Economic Growth.</b> Dr. Vijay Kumar Mishra	<u>196-207</u>
<u>12</u>	<b>Impact of Social Networking Sites on E-Commerce Business.</b> Preeti Dhankar	<u>208-222</u>
<u>13</u>	<b>Ansoff's strategic paradigm for MFIs sustainability in inclusive growth.</b> Asha Antony .P	<u>223-236</u>
<u>14</u>	<b>World Trade in Services: An Overview.</b> Minu Singal	<u>237-264</u>
<u>15</u>	<b>The Effects Of Joining To WTO on Non-Oil Export Of Iran.</b> Seyed Mohammad Hossein Sadr and Mahdi Ahrari	<u>265-285</u>

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**HAPPINESS QUOTIENT OF UPPER SECONDARY  
SCHOOL STUDENTS**

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**Abstract:**

This study is to identify happiness quotient among upper secondary school (high school) students. The study seeks to determine the factors contributing to the upper secondary students' happiness based on their gender, ethnic, religion, academic stream, good friends and hobbies. A total of 1000 students in Seremban were involved in the study. The instruments used were the research questionnaires regarding happiness of the students and OHQ. The Cronbach's alpha value for this inventory was .75. The results showed that most of the students had a moderate level of happiness. There were significant differences in happiness quotient mean with ethnic, religion, good friends and hobbies. However, there was no significant difference between happiness quotient mean with gender and academic stream.

**Keywords:** happiness, happiness quotient, counselling, adolescents, hobbies.

**Introduction:**

Today, while you are reading this study, take a moment and ask yourself the million dollar question: "Am I happy?" Go ahead and take the time to consider your answer a while. What is the one thing you want most in life other than money, career, marriage and family? How many among us have regarded happiness earnestly?

The topic of happiness has long been of particular interest to people. Authors of the American Constitution claimed that the pursuit of happiness was a fundamental human right. Happiness is one of the things that people most value in life (Veenhoven, 1984). Furthermore, most people confess to pollsters that they think about how satisfied or happy they are with their lives at least every week if not every day (Freedman, 1978; Veenhoven, 1984).

Malaysian secondary school students have grown in the period of globalization, which concentrates on economic and technological development. They are between the age of 13 and 19 years old, studying in secondary schools in Malaysia. Students in Form 4, 5 and 6 are considered as upper secondary school students who are also adolescents. They are facing a

transitional period from childhood to adulthood; biological, cognitive and social transition (Hasida Ben Zur, 2003). These transitions shape maturity of cognition, emotion and behavior.

Changes in the Malaysian adolescents' lead them to be negatively labeled. They are accused of creating problems to the society. Daily reports in the mass media on their brushes with the law are evident enough that there is questionable doubt on their behavioral pattern. Some examples of Malaysian adolescents' problems include rape (Azizi Hj Yahaya & Abdul Latif Ahmad, 2005), smoking, premarital sexual intercourse (Lee, Chen, Lee & Kaur, 2006), game and internet addiction, bullying (Mahadi Hj Khalid, 2007), school drop out, football gambling, teenage pregnancy, drug use (Zubaidah Zakaria, 2004) and also suicide.

Each day at school, these students work to maintain and establish interpersonal relationships, they strive to develop social identities and a sense of belongingness, observe and model standards for performance displayed by others, and are rewarded for behaving in ways that are valued by teachers and peers (Wentzel, 1998). Teachers hope that their students could gain excellent academic performance in all school assessments and examinations. As such, schools arrange all types of auxiliary classes for this purpose. In recent years participation in extra-curricular activities in school is regarded as one of the public universities' entry requirement. Students, therefore, must stay in school after long hours of learning in classes to fulfill the requirement.

Secondary students' relationships with their peers have a profound influence on their behavior and development (Lerner, 2003). In schools, they face peer competition in every aspect of their life. These include their academic and extra curricular performance, physical appearance and their boy-girl relationship. Sometimes, they also compare their hand phones among themselves. They may also face the risk of becoming victims of bullies.

These secondary school students face all sorts of challenges in life and facing the changes in behavior, cognition and emotional in themselves. Are they happy? How happy are they? Although a rapidly developing "positive psychology" movement that emphasizes people's strengths instead of their weaknesses is quickly steering social scientists towards conducting studies on happiness, most of these studies have focused on adults, not adolescents (Chaplin, 2008). Secondary school students are our future; they can determine our country's development. Most of the local scholars focused their research on their negative behavior, emotion and



cognition of these adolescent. For example; Zubaidah Zakaria (2004) and Mahadi Hj. Khalid (2007). Why can't we regard them positively?

### **Objectives:**

The objective of this study is to measure the overall happiness among upper secondary school students in Seremban. It is also to determine if there is any difference between the happiness quotient mean and gender, ethnic, religion, academic stream, good friends and hobbies.

### **Research Questions:**

In this study, data were collected and analyzed to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the overall happiness of upper secondary school students in Seremban?
2. Is there any significant difference between the happiness quotient mean and gender, ethnic, religion, academic stream, good friends and hobbies?

### **Methodology:**

In order to investigate the overall level of happiness and the factors which influence happiness among the upper secondary school respondents, a survey research design was employed to gather the necessary data and to answer the research questions formulated.

### **Sample:**

Respondents were solicited from 12 government secondary schools in the Seremban district of Negeri Sembilan. A total of 1000 students were asked to participate in this study. The sample was consisted 159 male and 271 female Form 4 students. There were approximately 130 male and 169 female Form 5 students in this study. Only 48 male and 129 female Lower 6 students took part in this study. Approximately 28 male and 66 female Upper 6 students participated in this study.

### **Data Collection:**

Permission was solicited from the school principals to conduct the study in the respective schools. The survey was administered during the replacement periods (waktu kelas ganti) that had been agreed upon in a prior discussion with the school principals. The researcher obtained consent from the participating respondents to protect the privacy and confidentiality which was clearly stated in the questionnaire. The time taken for every student to complete the demographic data and OHQ was approximately 25 to 30 minutes, depending on their level of understanding. All questionnaires were collected when they had completed their task.

### **Instruments:**

The questionnaire was prepared in the national language, Bahasa Melayu (BM). It consisted of two components: Respondent's Profile and Oxford Happiness Questionnaire.

An improved instrument introduced by Hills and Argyle (2002), the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ), has been derived from the Oxford Happiness Inventory, (OHI, Argyle, Martin, & Crossland, 1989). OHQ comprises 29 items, each presented as a single statement which can be endorsed on a uniform 6 point Likert Scale. The items used a Likert scale of 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = moderately disagree; 3 = slightly disagree; 4 = slightly agree, 5 = moderately agree, 6 = strongly agree. There are both positive and negative items in this questionnaire.

OHQ had been translated into the national language, Bahasa Melayu (BM) by the researcher and had been checked by 2 independent bilingual secondary school teachers for accuracy in meaning and suitability in language use. Oxford Happiness Questionnaire Bahasa Melayu version was tested for internal consistency. There were seven items (item 1, item 6, item 10, item 24, item 27, item 28 and item 29) taken out to yields an internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) of .75.

**Data Analysis:**

For descriptive analysis, means, frequency distribution and standard deviations were provided to answer research question 1. To assess whether there is any significant difference in OHQ score mean and six independent variables, One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and T-tests were used.

**Results:****Happiness Quotient Mean of Upper Secondary School Students in Seremban**

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Happiness Quotient Mean of Upper Secondary School Students in Seremban (N = 1000)

Mean	4.04
Median	4.09
Mode	4.23
Std. Deviation	0.55
Variance	0.31
Minimum	2.50
Maximum	5.36

Overall, the result in Table 1 shows that the upper secondary school students in Seremban with the happiness quotient mean of  $M = 4.04$  and  $SD = 0.55$ . They have average level of happiness.

**Gender and Happiness Quotient Mean of Upper Secondary School Student in Seremban**

Table 2

T – test by Gender and Happiness Quotient Mean of Upper Secondary School Students in Seremban (N = 1000)

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
Male	365	4.03	0.58	-0.449	0.654
Female	635	4.05	0.54		

The analysis according to gender in Table 2 revealed that male upper secondary school students (M = 4.03, SD = 0.58) have a lower happiness quotient mean compared to female upper secondary students (M= 4.05, SD = 0.54). On seeking this difference, t – test is used for independent mean, the result shown is no statistically significant,  $t(998) = -0.449$ ,  $p = 0.654$ . Therefore, there is no significant difference between gender and the happiness quotient mean of upper secondary school students in Seremban at  $p < 0.05$ .

### Ethnic and Happiness Quotient Mean of Upper Secondary School Students in Seremban

Table 3

One – Way Anova by Ethnic and Happiness Quotient Mean of Upper Secondary School Students in Seremban (N = 1000)

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	N
Between Groups	5.188	2	2.594	8.634	.000	990
Within Groups	296.575	987	.300			
Total	301.763	989				

Multiple Comparisons Test

Tukey HSD Procedure

(\*) denotes pairs of groups significantly difference at .05 level

Mean	Category of Ethnic	Malay (n = 426)	Chinese (n = 385)	Indian (n = 179)
4.07		0.01		
3.96			0.01	
4.16				0.19

n (male) = 365 , n (female) = 635

Ethnic group consisted of three different ethnics who are Malay, Chinese and Indian. The mean for each of this group are 4.07, 3.96 and 4.16. One way Anova is used to test the difference. The result in Table 3 showed a significant relationship between ethnic group and the happiness quotient mean of upper secondary school students in Seremban,  $F(2, 987) = 8.634, p < 0.05$ .

**Religion and Happiness Quotient Mean of Upper Secondary School Students in Seremban**

Table 4

One – Way Anova by Religion and Happiness Quotient Mean of Upper Secondary School Students in Seremban (N = 978)

	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	N
Between Groups	5.714	3	1.905	6.339	.000	978
Within Groups	292.649	974	.300			
Total	298.363	977				

Multiple Comparisons Test

Tukey HSD Procedure

(\*) denotes pairs of groups significantly difference at .05 level

Mean	Category of Religion	Islam (n = 433)	Buddhism (n = 319)	Christianity (n = 74)	Hinduism (n = 152)
4.06		0.06			
3.96			0.06		
4.03				0.97	
4.19					0.06

n (male) = 365 , n (female) = 635

Religion group consisted of four different religions which are Islam, Buddhism, Christian and Hinduism. The mean for each of this group are 4.06, 3.96, 4.03 and 4.19. One way Anova is used to test the difference. Table 4 showed the results of the analysis between the happiness quotient mean and religion. There is significant difference between religion and the happiness quotient mean of upper secondary school students in Seremban,  $F(3, 974) = 6.339, p < 0.05$ .

### Academic Stream and Happiness Quotient Mean of Upper Secondary School Students in Seremban

Table 5

T- test by Academic Stream and Happiness Quotient Mean of Upper Secondary School Students in Seremban (N = 1000)

Academic Stream	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
Science	564	4.07	0.54	1.81	0.071
Arts	436	4.01	0.56		

n (male) = 365 , n (female) = 635

Data is also analyzed according to the respondents' different academic stream. Interestingly, there is evidence to suggest that science stream (M = 4.07, SD = 0.54) contributes to a higher happiness quotient mean compared to arts stream (M = 4.01, SD = 0.56). T- test is used to obtain the result. Table 5 showed that the result is not statistically significant,  $t(998) = 1.81, p = 0.071$ . Therefore, there is no significant difference between academic stream group and the happiness quotient mean of upper secondary school students in Seremban at  $p < 0.05$ .

### Good Friends and Happiness Quotient Mean of Upper Secondary School Students in Seremban

Table 6

T- Test by Good Friends and Happiness Quotient Mean of Upper Secondary School Students in Seremban (N = 1000)

Good Friend(s)	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
Yes	932	4.06	0.55	3.882	0.000
No	68	3.79	0.60		

n (male) = 365 , n (female) = 635

Referring to the upper secondary school students who have good friends (M = 4.06, SD = 0.55), they have a higher happiness quotient mean compared to those who do not have good friends (M = 3.79, SD = 0.60). t – Test is used. The result shown in table 6, there is statistically significant,  $t(998) = 3.882$ ,  $p = 0.000$ . Therefore, there is significant difference whether the upper secondary school students have good friends and happiness quotient mean in Seremban at  $p < 0.05$ .

### Hobbies and Happiness Quotient Mean of Upper Secondary School Students in Seremban

Table 7

T-test by Hobbies and Happiness Quotient Mean of Upper Secondary School Students in Seremban (N = 1000)

Hobby	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
Yes	943	4.07	0.54	6.777	0.000
No	57	3.56	0.47		

n (male) = 365 , n (female) = 635

Finally, upper secondary school students who have hobbies ( $M = 4.07$ ,  $SD = 0.54$ ) have higher happiness quotient mean compared to those who do not have hobbies ( $M = 3.56$ ,  $SD = 0.47$ ). On seeking the difference,  $t$  – test is used. It showed a statically significant result in Table 7 where  $t(998) = 6.777$ ,  $p = 0.000$ . This can be concluded that there is significant difference between whether the upper secondary school students have hobby and happiness quotient mean in Seremban at  $p < 0.05$ .

### **Discussion:**

The upper secondary school students in Seremban with the happiness quotient mean of 4.04. They have average level of happiness. This study discovered that ethnic, religion; peers and hobbies are the happiness indicators among the upper secondary school students in Seremban. The result also indicated that gender, and academic stream do not contribute towards their happiness.

This study showed that there is no gender difference in happiness. This outcome is supported by Seligman (2002) who viewed that men and women do not differ in relation to happiness. Seligman further explained that women are happier than men but that their happiness is modified by a greater sadness than that experienced by men, resulting in no differences in reported happiness between men and women. It is also consistent with the findings done by Myers (2000b), Kousha and Mohseni (2000) and Mahon et al. (2005) that cited that there is no gender difference in happiness. However, this is contrary with the outcomes of studies on adults done by Lu et al. (1997) and Gerdtham and Johannesson (2001), where they said that gender contributed positively to happiness.

Ethnic is one of the happiness indicators for upper secondary school students in Seremban as revealed in the findings of this study. It is consistent with the perspective of existing link between ethnic identity and individuals' well being proposed by Ryff et al. (2003) and Umana- Taylor (2004). Theoretically, from a social identity perspective, having positive feelings about and a strong identification with one's ethnic group can provide a foundation from which individuals can draw in the face of stress which, in turn, can have a protective influence on development and well-being (Tajfel, 1981). Thus, adolescents with a high ethnic regard



maintained a generally positive and happy attitude in the face of stress and despite their anxious feelings. This might be the explanation for the finding in this study where ethnic identity influence upper secondary school students' happiness.

The findings of this study provide clear evidence that religion is one of the determinants of happiness among the upper secondary school students in Seremban. It is consistent with what was proposed by Morkejee and Beron (2005) and Alexander et al. (2006) who claimed that religion is one of the indicators of life satisfaction. Therefore, it can be suggested that religion is related to individual's psychological well being including happiness. Religion is thought to help and equip the individual to make sense of the world, and enable the individual to respond positively in the appraisal and coping of stressful events over longer periods of time (Lewis et al., 2004). When these upper secondary school students practice their religion, it indirectly helps them to have peace in mind which might indeed increase their level of happiness. This might explain that religion do contribute towards their happiness.

The outcome of this study indicates that academic stream does not affect happiness among the upper secondary school students in Seremban. This is consistent with the findings in the previous works done by McCullough and Huebner (2003). The education system in many Asian countries is structured so that test scores in the primary years are the sole determinant in secondary schools and later educational opportunities (Suldo, Riley & Shaffer, 2006). The importance of academic achievement may have an impact on all areas of functioning for students, including their levels of subjective well being. Even though upper secondary schools students are divided into difference academic streams in schools, they still face the same stress and competition with others in schools. This might be able to explain why academic stream does not contribute towards upper secondary school students' happiness.

The finding of this study reveals that whether the upper secondary school students have good friends or not does have a significant relationship with their happiness. This result does support Demir et al. (2007). It can be best explained that best friends contributes to happiness. Best friendships hold a special status in the network of friends. Best friends serve as a constant companion, a reliable confident and supportive person. They are the friends who know us best and they are the friends one is likely to share positive and negative experiences with.

Considering the characteristics attributed to best friends, it is not surprising that individuals benefited from their best friendship.

Whether upper secondary school students have hobbies or not is also one of the happiness indicators in this study. Activities that students are involved during their free time actually promote a sense of connection with others and are qualitatively different than activities that stimulate more individualistic goals (Eccles & Barber, 1999). This can explained the result shown in this study.

### **Counseling Implication:**

The information gained in thi study is able to help educators especially the school counselors to gain general information about upper secondary school students' happiness. Other than the job scope which is stated clearly in the school setting by the Ministry of Education, school counselors need to monitor students' psychosocial development. School counselors can conduct workshops instilling proper communication skills and social skills. This is an opportunity for students to develop their interpersonal skills which can help to enhance their happiness. School counselors need to be aware how external factors which are mentioned in this study affect adolescents' happiness. They should not be judgmental of their clients, assuming factors which affect their level of happiness. They need to understand their social relationship and cultural background (ethnic and religion) to tackle the problems that adolescents facing. For school counselors to instill the importance of happiness among the adolescents, they need to promote and create supportive, stress free environment and healthy life styles. They should help the adolescents to solve their problems during the counseling sessions. Other than that, they should also conduct workshops to highlight the importance of happiness. These efforts, in turn, will contribute in enhancing happiness.

### **Conclusion:**

Happiness is one important component in one's life. As the future generation, adolescents have an important role in building our nation. In conclusion, the upper secondary school students show an average level of happiness. The finding of the study show several external factors which

influence adolescents' happiness. Religious education, difference in ethnic gives impact on adolescents' happiness. Adolescents' relationship with friends influences their happiness. Their hobbies also influence their happiness.

It would be devastating if the younger generation is unhappy with their lives. We need to promote the importance of happiness among the adolescents in our society. When they are happy, they will be able to contribute to our country. It is the nation's challenge to enhance the adolescents' happiness.

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