



# Interpersonal Trust and Happiness among Young Adults: A Correlational Study

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## Abstract

**Background:** Trust happens when two or more people in a relationship believe each another to be honest and look out for the best interests of the relationship and each other. There are several benefits of trusting that contributes to people's overall happiness and state of wellbeing, including a decrease in anxiety levels. It also enables people to live in the moment, enjoying the people and situations surrounding them. For example, by trusting at work people are more productive because they are able to concentrate more on the task at hand. Interpersonal trust, just like happiness is a choice. Interpersonal trust is the glue that binds people together. It is a rare concept in the social and behavioral sciences in that the evidence for its benefits is overwhelming. It is correlated with increased civic participation, decreased corruption, increased resilience to disasters, decreased economic inequality, and decreases in illegal activities. It is also correlated with increased health, happiness, and intelligence. Practically all researchers studying trust have concluded that it improves the human experience.

**Purpose:** The aim of the current study was to examine interpersonal trust and happiness among young adults.

**Method:** The objectives of the current study were to examine

- a) Interpersonal trust in a group of young adults
- b) Happiness in a group of young adults and
- c) Correlation between interpersonal trust and happiness

The sample consisted of 300 participants. They were taken from two different private organizations from Bangalore City using convenience sampling after having taken written informed consent from them. The mean age and SD of the sample was 24.79 and 2.46 years respectively. The sample consisted of 217 Hindus and 83 Muslims. The measures used were Interpersonal Trust Scale (Robinson, Shaver, & Wrightsman, 1991) and Subjective Well-being scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffen, 1985).

**Data Analyses:** The Data was analyzed by using descriptive statistics like mean and SD. Karl Pearson correlation was used to examine relationships between variables and simple regression was used to examine prediction.

**Results:** Correlation between interpersonal trust and happiness has been found to be significant and

positive (0.204). Using stepwise regression analysis, the predictor variable (Interpersonal trust) in the current study accounted for 4.2% contribution toward happiness. The results have implications for developing interpersonal trust building interventions for enhancing people's happiness and thereby developing happier nations and societies.

**Key words:** Interpersonal trust, happiness, well-being, social capital

## I INTRODUCTION

Well-being is a broad concept that includes experiencing pleasant emotion, low level of negative mood and high life satisfaction. It is not only the lack disease or illness or the absence of anxiety or depression. It is a state of complete physical, emotional, social health and spiritual health. It can also be defined as person's cognitive effective evaluation of his or her life. Well-being essentially consists of three components, including subjective well-being, life satisfaction and happiness. Many researchers [1] use the term subjective well-being and happiness interchangeably.

Subjective well-being is the subjective feeling of contentment, happiness, satisfaction with life and work, sense of achievement, utility, belongingness, and no distress, dissatisfaction or worry, etc. Some of the earlier definitions in psychology and sociology focused on well-being as the ultimate goal of life [2]. Subjective well-being (SWB) is defined as "a person's cognitive and affective evaluations of his or her life [3]. "The cognitive component (of subjective well-being) usually corresponds to the individual's evaluation of life satisfaction, according to subjectively determined standards, that may be formulated at a general level when they refer to life as a whole, or at more specific levels when they refer to particular life domains". The affective element refers to emotions, moods and feelings. In essence, subjective well-being or life satisfaction refers to the satisfaction experienced by an individual in his or her life as a whole (global terms) and in domain terms (specific areas of life). According to some researchers, these evaluations may be in the form of cognitions or in the form of affect. The cognitive

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part is an information based appraisal of one's life that is when a person gives conscious evaluative judgments about one's satisfaction with life as a whole [4]. The affective part is a hedonic evaluation guided by emotions and feelings such as frequency with which people experience pleasant/unpleasant moods in reaction to their lives. In this paper, the term subjective well-being and happiness are used interchangeably.

The variable of happiness has many meanings. Discussions of human happiness, concerning both the best means for achieving it and whether or not it is a proper goal of human activity, have been frequent throughout history. Happiness consists of three basic components: positive affect, life satisfaction and negative affect [5]. People strive to be happy and appear to be in constant search and pursuit to be happy. Some researchers posit that happiness is the "very thing which makes life worth living." [6].

Happiness is a culturally constructed concept. As such, 'happiness' is not understood as a 'given universal' but is construed culturally bounded and is defined, internalized and socialized accordingly. The beliefs and values people hold as a result of such factors as familial socialization, relatedness, and life experiences (e.g., living in violence) shape their understanding of happiness and their appraisals of their emotions. Some researchers describe happiness in terms of personal achievement in the individualist West and it is defined in terms of interpersonal connectedness in the collectivist East [7]. Happiness is the ratio of material consumption and desire. Happiness not only refers to material well-being but also concerned with personal judgements in economic matters, family considerations and health. . one of the religious Gurus concluded, 'the purpose of life is happiness' [8].

Happiness has also been defined as the degree to which individuals judge their lives favorably [9]. It is the degree to which a person evaluates the overall quality of his present life-as-a-whole positively. It is also defined as "the frequent experience of positive emotions" [10]. The author of *The How of Happiness* posits that happiness is determined 50% by one's genes, second by one's life circumstances like marital status, looks etc and approximately 10% of happiness can be attributed to people's intentional or unintentional activities that they do to make them happy. The cultural factors, political systems and other structural systems of any particular society and culture also determine happiness of people [11].

#### **Approaches to Happiness**

1. *Hedonic approach to Happiness:* It is based on the notion that increased pleasure and decreased pain leads to happiness. It comprises of an affective component and a cognitive component. It is proposed that an individual experiences happiness when positive affect and satisfaction with life are both high.
2. *Eudaimonic approach to Happiness:* It is based on Maslow's theory of self-actualization and Roger's concept of fully functioning person and their subjective well-being. Eudaimonic happiness is based on the premise that people feel happy if they experience purpose in life, challenges and growth. Eudemonia is a lifestyle characterized by the pursuit of virtue/excellence, meaning/purpose, doing good/making a difference and the resulting sense of fulfillment or flourishing.

Happiness research distinguish two types of happiness. Short term happiness refers to those experiences that people have at specific situations like getting a job, getting engaged and married etc where they experience strong positive emotions. Long term happiness refers to a deeper and fundamental satisfaction with life. it involves a lasting sense that exist independently from momentary moods.

#### **Gross National Happiness**

The concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH) was first proposed by the King of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck in 1972. He argued that GNH is more important than Gross Domestic Product (GDP). There was a widespread assumption that increasing GDP will enhance the growth and development of nations and its people. GNH means development with values and to nurture behaviors which make people united, harmonious and secure. It can be nurtured through strong community structure and cohesiveness and respect for the environment. It aims to build peaceful coexistence with other nations and individual members of the member and the government should contribute to the happiness and well-being of people. It recognizes that the individual has material, spiritual and emotional needs.

Research in behavioral sciences like psychology has, however, revealed that money and wealth do not go linearly with happiness. There is a curvilinear relationship between money and happiness. Till the time money satisfies our needs



like food, thirst, safety, housing etc it is linearly related. After that the relationship between money and happiness goes off. There are other variables which contribute to happiness. These variables might be good relationship with people, engaging in spiritual practices, purposeful life etc. These need to be further explored. The idea behind GNH is that nations should aim to increase their GNH rather than GDP.

Recently, an International conference was organized in Bhutan from 4-6 November 2015 on GNH [12]. The conference aimed to develop approaches which are more inclusive, broad and holistic where in political and spiritual matters need to be put in balance. The Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh has announced that a 'Ministry of Happiness' would be set up to measure the progress of the state [13]. Such programmes indicate the increased focus on mental health and happiness at the national and international levels.

### **World Happiness Report**

The first World Happiness Report was presented at the United Conference on happiness in 2012. The World Database of Happiness gathered the results from different happiness surveys around the world, from Afghanistan to Yemen, from Austria to Australia. The database contains statistics from approximately 160 countries gathered over more than 40 years from 1973 to 2012. The researchers used self report measures to evaluate their happiness. The people who report the lowest happiness levels are found in countries such as Togo, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Iraq, Rwanda, Burundi, The Central African Republic and Sierra Leone where the reported happiness level were between 3 and 4 [14]. In the European surveys, it is the people from former Communist countries who are the least satisfied with life. Among these countries the level is generally between 5 and 6. Thus, Denmark lies on the high end of the scale, together with the other Nordic countries plus the Netherlands, Canada and Switzerland, all of whom usually score between 7.5 and 8. Denmark was found at the top of happiness ranking lists. Researchers have begun to use the expression, "getting to Denmark" [15], when talking about successful modernisation. It is often called as "Danish effect" and is trying to understand and explain the possible underlying factors for this [16,17].

### **Interpersonal Trust**

Trust is an interpersonal aspect which leads to have faith and positive belief in another person in any interpersonal relationship. Webster defines trust in the sense of a belief as an assured

reliance on some person, thing or situation. It is a sort of confidence dependent on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something. It is being defined as "a reliance upon information received from another person about uncertain environmental states and their accompanying outcomes in a risky situation" [18]. It is essential for human survival. Lack of trust on others often leads to loneliness. Trusting others is essential for personal sense of well-being and smooth functioning of the society. One of the best known theories of trust was propounded by Erikson in 1963 [19]. Trust is basic to the unfolding sense of identity and to the healthy development of personality. He emphasized that within first two years of life each individual must learn to trust at least one other person. It is basic to one's personality development especially the growing sense of personal identity. He also emphasized on the situational aspect of trust. There is a dynamic process of balancing between trust and mistrust. Trust affects almost every area of human functioning and interpersonal exchange including educational, social, commercial, political and health domains.

### **Development of Interpersonal Trust**

Trust develops in interpersonal, situational, and also in socio cultural context. The feedback that people get from others in the interpersonal context plays a pivotal role the process of development of trust. Early socialization experiences set the tone for the development of trust in general and interpersonal trust specifically among people. In general, positive experiences leads to positive expectancies and negative experiences lead to negative expectancies. Expectancies are defined as "the anticipation of a systematic relationship between events of objects in a future situation", that is, if certain events are recorded, as a consequence, certain events will be expected. In practical terms, expectancies refer to an individual's beliefs about the expected effects of one's experiences and are considered an important theoretical construct, since they allow us to link such early experiences with future decisions on the specific domains of their daily functioning. Humans often generalize from the past experiences in the process of developing expectancies about how the next person will treat him/her. These expectancies about the trustworthiness of people in general is known as generalized trust. These expectancies by themselves do not determine whether a person will trust or mistrust another in any specific situation. One of the reasons for this is difficulty of relating any internal, inferred characteristics such a trait to some observable



behaviour. One of the personality researchers argues that besides trait, situations play more significant role in influencing behaviour [20]. The understanding of the situational context of any behaviour is especially important in the understanding of trusting behaviour because trust always depends on the situation and other person's behaviour. Identical situations may be perceived differently by different people depending upon the level of generalized trust the person has on others. People who trust few others respond differently to situations than those who trust nearly everyone. Besides this, Erikson's model posits that besides interpersonal caretakers, other family members, social institutions like school, church, mosques, temples and other cultural traditions which contribute to the societal support that sustain caretakers in their role of teaching trust to children.

#### **Measurement of Interpersonal Trust**

Empirical measurement of trust as a psychological construct has always been a challenge for social scientists and psychologists. There were so many words related to trust in the English language like confidence, faith, rely etc. Wrightsman [20] attempted to measure trust and gave two dimensions of his scale. These were cynicism and trust. The scale was named as Philosophies of Human Nature Scale (PHN). One of the researchers developed the scale for measuring interpersonal trust. His scale attempts to measure credibility and expectancy [21].

#### **Kee and Knox Conceptual Model of Trust**

A model of trust has been proposed [22] involving three classes of predictor variables involved in any trust related situation. These include:

- a) The person's previous experiences
- b) Structural and situational factors and
- c) Dispositional factors

The structure and situational factors include incentive, power, communication, and characteristics of other person. Dispositional factors include one's motivational orientation, personality factors and his/her attitude. These along with the person's perception of the other person's motive, his/her subjective trust or suspiciousness of the other person will determine the behavioral trust or suspicion of the person. There could be another class of variables which can intervene between person/situation and trust is the person's perception of his/her partner, intentions, competence and so forth. Interpersonal trust, therefore, is a complex set of behaviour determined by gamut of factors as described by these authors who proposed this model of trust.

#### **Social Capital and Interpersonal Trust**

Social capital as defined is defined as "the norms and networks facilitating collective action for mutual benefit" [23]. It has become a key input in social, economic and even political analyses. It is the idea that individuals and groups can gain resources from their connections to one another (and the type of these connections). He asserts that social capital is a resource that can be used by economic actors to enable productivity. It refers to multiple features of social organization: including (1) trust and obligations, (2) information channels and (3) norms and effective sanctions. These three dimensions affect the efficiency of a society by encouraging coordination and cooperation among individuals or social groups. The trust and obligations aspect of social capital is based on the trustworthiness of the social environment when making agreements. The confidence that other people share people fundamental values creates bonds between people, facilitating cooperation and efficiency. Societal structures also play an important role in shaping trust. General trust in the quality of the political, legal and institutional environment influences individual outcomes as well as social group interactions, thus, increasing a society's overall effectiveness.

Although trust is presumably a good thing, no one is exactly sure where it comes from. There are many possible explanations. The most common theory links it to frequencies of social interaction. The more often we choose to engage with people, the more likely we are to cooperate with and have trust in them. Forces that limit these interpersonal connections would limit people in their willingness to seek them out and trust others.

#### **Interpersonal Trust and Happiness**

Researchers using data from General Social Survey (GSS) analyzed the responses to trust related questions on eleven sociodemographic variables among the Americans from 1972 to 2012. According to the data, trust peaked in 1967-1968, when roughly 56% of survey respondents agreed that "most people can be trusted." From there, trust began to decline, and the trend has continued ever since. The researchers also examined the correlation between trust and happiness and they found that trust was positively associated with happiness. There have been many studies in which trust and happiness were found to be positively correlated [24, 25, 26]. There have been, however, inconsistent findings on these variables. One of the researchers did not find a significant association between trust and happiness [27]. There are multiple factors which determine the link between trust and happiness [28]. These



include political system, family structure, presence of any crisis in the society, contextual and personality related factors.

### Significance of the Current Study

Nowadays, the progress of any nation is understood broadly. It is not understood merely in terms of their gross domestic product, rather in terms of how contented and happy are the people of the nation. It is often referred to as gross national happiness. Happier nations are more productive. There are many socio cultural variables which determine the happiness of its people. There are very few studies done in India to explore these variables. The authors of the current study have not come across any research done on trust as one of the variables if it is associated with happiness in a group of young adults in Indian context. The study is the step in this direction.

### Operational definitions:

- a) **Interpersonal Trust:** Based on the contents of the items, it can be operationally defined as people's beliefs, attitudes and expectancies toward faith in other social institutions, and people of the society.
- b) **Happiness:** Based on the contents of the items, it can be operationally defined as people's overall life satisfaction.
- c) **Young adults:** For the purpose of the current research, young adults were defined as those between the age of 18 to 27 years.

### Method

The aim of the current study was to examine interpersonal trust and happiness among young adults.

**Objectives:** The objectives of the current study were to examine

- d) Interpersonal trust in a group of young adults
- e) Happiness in a group of young adults and
- f) Correlation between interpersonal trust and happiness

### Hypothesis:

H0: There will be no relationship between interpersonal trust and happiness.

### Research Design

The present study used cross-sectional design to examine the variables.

### Participants

The sample consisted of 300 participants. All

participants were drawn from two different private organizations. With regards to the demographics of the sample, in terms of religion, Hindus were 217 (72.33%), and Muslims were 83(27.66%). In terms of gender, males were 207 (69%) and females were 93 (31%). The mean age of the 300 participants was 24.79 years and SD was 2.46.

**Table: 1: Mean Age ( In years) and SD of Males and Females**

Participants	Mean	SD
Males	26.59	3.05
Females	22.05	1.97

**Table: 2: Mean Age ( In years) and SD of Hindus and Muslims**

Participants	Mean	SD
Hindus	24.55	2.14
Muslims	21.98	1.41

### Measures

- (i) **Sociodemographic Data Sheet:** It was developed by the investigators to obtain information about respondents' name, age, gender, class, its year and stream.
- (ii) **Subjective Well-being Scale** .It is a seven point rating scale consists of five global statements about life satisfaction. Thus, minimum score on this scale is 5 and the maximum score is 35. A score above 21 indicates an above average satisfaction with life [24].
- (iii) **Interpersonal Trust Scale** It is a 25 item five point likert type rating scale. With the response categories being strongly agree, mildly agree, agree and disagree equally, mildly disagree and strongly disagree. The scoring were 1,2,3,4 and 5 respectively. Thus, minimum score on this scale is 25 and the maximum score is 125 [29].

### II PROCEDURE

The investigator first met the management of each of the organizations of Bangalore City and explained the purpose of the research to them. The management was clearly explained that their employees need to fill the three questionnaires. After seeking the permission from the



management, the data was collected in small groups. The data were collected in the premises of the organization in 4 sessions during June 2016. Written informed consent form was filled by the respondents. The investigator explained about of the nature and purpose of the study to each respondent. In addition, they were informed that continuing to the first page of the study questionnaires represented their consent to participate and they had the option to withdraw from the study. They were informed that their responses on the questionnaires would be kept strictly confidential and used for the research purpose only. Data collection for each setting and group took around 30 to 45 minutes. After completing the questionnaires, participants were given the option to provide their contact information in case they are interested in future studies. The investigator collected the data using convenience sampling strategy.

**Data Analyses**

The protocols were scored and Descriptive statistics was used to calculate mean and standard deviation of each of the scales. Karl Pearson product moment correlation and simple regression analyses was done to examine the data. SPSS version 16.0 was used for data analyzing.

**Ethical considerations**

1. The management of the organizations were assured that the confidentiality of the results will be maintained.
2. Written informed consent was taken from all the respondents.
3. The researcher made sure that the data collection would not hamper the employees' working hour time
4. The organization and its authorities will be informed about the implications of the study.
5. The respondents were informed that they could contact the investigator in case they need any psychological help.

**III RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Table: 3: Mean and SD of Interpersonal Trust and Happiness of young adults**

Variable	Mean	SD
Interpersonal Trust	78.88	7.326
Happiness	20.17	8.20

**Interco relations between the variables**

**Table 4: Correlations between Interpersonal Trust and Happiness**

Variable	Interpersonal Trust	Happiness
Interpersonal Trust	1	0.204**
Happiness	0.204**	1

\*\*Correlation coefficient is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed, p<0.01)

The table 4 showed that correlation between interpersonal trust and happiness has been found to be significant and positive (0.204) rejecting the Null hypothesis formulated by the researchers. The significant positive correlation means that as interpersonal trust increases, happiness also increases in a group of young adults and vice versa. Using stepwise regression analysis, the predictor variable (Interpersonal trust) in the current study accounted for 4.2% contribution toward happiness as shown in the table 5 below.

**Table 5: Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Estimate d error of Estimate
1	.204	.042	.038	8.041

a. Predictors: (Constant), Interpersonal Trust

The findings of the current study are consistent with the findings of the work of some other researchers [24,25, 26]. Bjørnsvov attempted to explain the possible reasons for the positive association between trust and happiness. He says "Sharing a sufficiently high degree of social trust at the level of society allows people to interact with fellow citizens whom they do not know and consequently do not know anything about, making for a safer, more predictable, easier and therefore also a happier life" [28]. Interpersonal trust develops in the social context. It is conducive for well-being and happiness for a number of reasons. For example, higher social trust mirrors belonging to more trustworthy communities which are usually associated with desirable amenities such as cleaner and safer environment, more opportunities for social contacts, and higher social cohesion [29, 30]. Furthermore, social trust seems to be at the root of good governance and, thus, of well-being [31]. Trust as a psychological trait is related to caring family climate during socialization and rewarding



personal relationships which both are conducive to well-being.

#### Improvement in the current research

The current research can be improved by following the below given strategies.

1. It needs to incorporate other socio cultural, demographic variable to examine the other possible contributing factors to happiness.
2. Longitudinal research design will help the researchers to understand the more about different factors which might play a role in people's happiness.
3. The variables like trust and happiness are very abstract and work need to be done to conceptualize them more objectively.
4. In order to get better results, quantitative research needs to be incorporated with qualitative research designs like narrative and ethnographic methodology.

#### Implications

1. Individuals can build trust in their own lives and in the lives of those around them, including their families and their communities. This requires accepting responsibility for and doing trustworthy deeds, even if it seems like "most people" would not do the same. Trustworthiness requires leadership through

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#### IV CONCLUSIONS

The current study examines interpersonal trust and happiness in a group of young adults. The results indicate a significant and positive correlation between these variables implying that increasing interpersonal trust among people is associated with increasing happiness in them. There is a need that other sociodemographic, socio cultural and interpersonal related variables need to be incorporated to give a better understanding of possible contributing factor which can lead to happiness. The study would help giving insight into developing trust building interventions for enriching relationships thereby enhancing people's happiness.

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