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The Epidemiology of Well-being, Happiness, Perceived Stress, and Health Behaviors of Asian University Students: A Multinational Project

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Introduction: The field of Positive Psychology is broad. One area of special focus is psychological well-being (PWB). Research on PWB and its relation to health outcomes has increased over the last 3 decades. However, much of the early research primarily focused on PWB and health outcomes in adults from western societies. There remains a lack of research using a theory-based operationalized definition for PWB and the use of a broader spectrum of health risk factors in student populations. To advance the field of PWB and student health, it is recommended that current theory-based constructs of PWB and a comprehensive list of health factors be utilized when investigating associations between PWB and health outcomes in Asian university students.

Purpose: This project aimed to (1) create a comprehensive questionnaire to assess PWB, happiness, health risk factors, and stress, (2) recruit universities from different Asian countries to administer the questionnaire to selected students, (3) validate the questionnaire for each country, (4) analyze data at the country and cross-cultural levels, and (5) present, publish, and disseminate finding.

Methods: Researchers from India, Thailand, and Vietnam were recruited to develop, translate, validate, and pilot a final research questionnaire consisting of the following constructs/instruments: (1) PWB/Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-being, (2) Happiness/Subjective Happiness Scale, (3) Mindfulness/Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale, (4) Stress/Perceived Stress Scale, (5) Mental Health/depressive symptoms, (6) Religiosity/regular practice, (7) Health Literacy/courses and knowledge, (8) Risk Assessment/Perceived health risk, (9) Health Behaviors/alcohol, diet, sleep, and smoking, and (10) Demographic information/standardized questions. The final questionnaire was administered to undergraduate students (including 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th year) from India (two universities, N=508), Thailand (two universities, N=1132), and Vietnam (three universities, N=1821). Students completed an online or paper survey in a classroom setting from October 2016-December 2017. The questionnaire consisted of 115 questions and was completed in an average of 15-20 minutes. The main component to assess PWB included the 54-item Ryff scales of psychological well-being (RSPWB), consisting of six subscales (autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, positive relations, personal growth, and self-acceptance), with 9-items per scale, and contained a six-point Likert scale

(from 1=Strongly Disagree to 6=Strongly Agree). A composite PWB score (sum of all subscales) was calculated for each country. Data were analyzed using univariate, bivariate, ANOVA, Post Hoc, regression, and structural equation modeling statistics on SPSS (v2019) and SmartPLSv2.

Results: Multiple papers have been published in peer-review journals over the last 3 years. The first set of papers are focused on country level analyses. The cross-cultural analyses will follow shortly.

Vietnam

Thi, N. N., Calderon Jr, R., Quang, T. T., Trung, K. N., Chi, Q., Thai, N., Thanh, T. H., Minh, T. N. H., Viet, V., & Thanh, H. N. (2020). Happiness, stress, depressive symptoms, and health behaviors among Vietnamese university students. *Journal of Public Health and Development*, 18(2), 58–73.

Calderon Jr, R., Nga, N. T., Tien, T. Q., Quyen, B. T. T., Thuan, N. H. M., & Bao, V. V. (2019). Adapting the Ryff scales of psychological well-being: A 28-Item Vietnamese version for university students. *VNU Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 5(2), 176–197.

Thailand

Calderon, R., Pupanead, S., Prachakul, W., & Kim, G. (2021). Happiness, perceived stress, psychological well-being, and health behaviors of Thai university students: Preliminary results from a multinational study on well-being. *Journal of American College Health*, 69(2), 176–184.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2019.1657871>

Calderon Jr, R., Kim, G., Ratsameemonthon, C., & Pupanead, S. (2020). Assessing the Adaptation of a Thai Version of the Ryff scales of psychological well-being: A PLS-SEM approach. *Psychology*, 11(7), 1037–1053. <https://doi.org/10.4236/psych.2020.117068>

India: Papers in progress

Cross-cultural papers: A Cross-sectional, Cross-cultural, Comparative Study: A Drill-down analysis of psychological well-being among Asian students from India, Thailand, and Vietnam (Oral presentation at IOHKS Online Conference, October 7-9, 2021)

Discussion: This project has been successful, thus far, in engaging researchers from multiple countries to contribute needed data in the area of Asian student health. A balanced questionnaire was developed, piloted, translated, and administered at universities in 3 Asian countries. Multiple papers validating the questionnaire and describing associations between PWB and health factors have been published in peer-reviewed scientific journals. Additional research questions will be formulated and explored in the large dataset created by this project. We expect to present and publish additional papers concerning PWB and Asian university student health over the next few years.

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