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German and Tagalog Happiness Scales

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Synonyms

Subjective happiness scale (SHS)

Definition

Subjective happiness refers to the measurement of happiness from the point of view of participants themselves. Subjective happiness has been found to be associated with self-perceptions of well-being, satisfaction with life, and improved interpersonal relationships.

Description

The Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) was developed as "a global, subjective assessment of whether one is a happy or unhappy person" as measured through self-reports (Lyubormirsky & Lepper, 1999, p. 139). The scale consists of four items, two of which assess self-perceptions based on absolute ratings of well-being and ratings relative to peers. In two further items, participants are presented with descriptions happy and unhappy individuals and are asked to rate the extent to which the descriptions are accurate descriptions of participants themselves. According to Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1999), the SHS is superior to other scales of subjective well-being because it measures global subjective assessments, rather than focusing on multiple aspects of happiness.

Several studies have examined the psychometric properties of the SHS and have reported that it has good internal consistency and test-retest reliability, as well as good discriminant and convergent validity (Lyubormirsky & Lepper, 1999; Mattei & Schaefer, 2004). The SHS has also been translated into a number of different languages, including Russian (Lyubormirsky & Lepper, 1999), Japanese (Shimai, Otake, Utsui, Ikemi and Lyubormirsky 2004), and Malay (Swami, 2008). Each of these translated versions of the SHS has been shown to have a one-dimensional factor structure as well as good psychometric properties, including high internal consistency, good test-retest reliability, and patterns of divergent and convergent validity.

Swami et al. (2009) further presented translations and validations of German and Tagalog versions of the SHS. They argued this was important in order to confirm the extent to which the SHS is suitable for use in different linguistic and cultural groups and in order to facilitate cross-cultural research on happiness. In two studies, therefore, they translated the SHS into German and Tagalog and examined its psychometric properties in Austria and the Philippines,

respectively. In addition, they also conducted a cross-cultural comparison of SHS scores among participants from Austria, the Philippines, Malaysia (these data being obtained from Swami, 2008), and Britain (a novel dataset).

Results of the study showed that the German version of the SHS, when tested with 960 individuals from the community in Vienna, had a one-dimensional factor structure and good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .82). In addition, the German SHS was significantly associated with other measures of subjective happiness (including single- and multi-item measures of well-being), suggesting a good pattern of convergent validity. Swami et al. (2009) also argued that, to the extent that the strengths of these correlations were small to medium, the SHS can be conceptually distinguished from other similar scales.

Similarly, the Tagalog version of the SHS, when tested with 182 members of the community in Manila, was found to have a one-dimensional factor structure and good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = .78). Furthermore, the Tagalog SHS was found to correlate positively with other measures of subjective well-being. Based on these results, Swami et al. (2009) reported that both the German and Tagalog versions of the SHS had good psychometric properties, although they also noted that their examination did not specifically examine test-retest reliability. In addition, they also noted that they did not conduct validation checks that overcome the general limitations of using self-reported data.

In terms of the cross-cultural comparisons of British, Filipino, German, and Malaysian participants, Swami et al. (2009) initially predicted that members of individualist cultures (Austria and Britain in their study) would have higher SHS than participants from collectivist cultures (Malaysia and the Philippines). This was based on the suggestion that happiness is constructed as a personal achievement in individualist cultures, whereas it is predicated upon the realization of positive social relationships in collective cultures (Uchida, Kitayama, Mesquita and Rayes 2001). The results of Swami et al.'s (2009) cross-cultural comparison generally supported this hypothesis.

Specifically, Swami et al. (2009) found that, controlling for participant age, British and Austrian participants had significantly higher scores than Filipino and Malaysian participants. They argued that this supports the hypothesis that participants from individualist cultures are more likely to report positive emotions and well-being than their counterparts in collectivist cultures. However, their results also showed that Filipino participants had significantly higher SHS scores than Malaysian participants. Swami et al. (2009) considered a number of explanations for this finding, including the possibility on national differences in conceptions of health and well-being as well as limitations of their collectivism-individualism dichotomy.

Cross-References

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