

## **Happiness Capital and Youth Development in Iran: A Sociological Appraisal**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The paper explores the dimensions of happiness capital among youth as joy-seekers in different contexts. Due to the increasing use of social networks, the youth are increasingly pursuing perpetual happiness. Happiness capital by itself motivates the youth to move better towards the goals of happiness. The present research examined happiness capital and development of youth of the age groups of 15-29 years through different variables. The research was conducted in Tehran City, in which 489 respondents were randomly selected from different parts and neighbourhoods of the city. It explored the forces responsible for not-ever-lasting happiness among the youth. It was mainly based on the hypothesis that “social and economic conditions such as income, employment, general quality of life and successful marriage create happiness capital within the youth”. The research method used in this work was a combination of theoretical frameworks and empirical realities. The paper concludes that in the present changing and globalizing world, societies must make the necessary policies for the happiness and leisure pursuits of the youth in order to prevent the likely controversies.

*Keywords:* Happiness capital, social networks, quality of happiness, life satisfaction, well-being

### **INTRODUCTION**

Happiness capital, as inspired from social capital, was coined and posited by the author to represent how it highly influences individual performance at

different dimensions. The concept of social capital is frequently used by different social sciences. It is a wide term, and that is why it can be defined accentuating different aspects, depending on the perspective, such as happiness, in the present article. Social capital, being the outcome of social relations, creates closer treatment and cooperation between individuals and groups (Bourdieu, 1992). Just as a university

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education (human capital) can increase productivity, so do social contacts affect the productivity of individuals and groups (Putnam, 2000). Based on Putman's theory, youth development is influenced by happiness capital.

Social capital is anything that facilitates individual or collective action, generated by networks of relationships, social norms and trust (Coleman, 1988). Based on Coleman's view, happiness capital facilitates youth development in different areas. Fukuyama (2002) argues that social capital is a necessary precondition for a successful development, but strong rules of law and basic social and political institutions are necessary to build social capital. Based on Fukuyama's perspective, happiness capital could be counted as a prerequisite of youth development in any society.

Happiness is strongly connected to productivity with special reference to youth. Therefore, happiness allows one to maximize performance and achieve one's potential. Happiness capital enables youth to improve their performance, and consequently the organizations to develop sustainability.

While social capital, as a sociological concept, integrates aspects of social behaviour such as trust, cooperation, relationships, networks and social solidarity, the new concept of happiness capital strengthens and improves those aspects, and lets youth proceed with more enthusiasm. In the recent years, there have been attempts to quantify the influence of happiness capital upon community achievements, youth and other sectors of population in a

society. Loury (1977) defined social capital as a set of designated intangible resources in families and communities that help to promote the social development of the young people, which could be translated into happiness capital. Similarly, happiness capital concept has been recognized as an agent to further contribute to social capital.

The concept of happiness capital has motivated the author to elaborate on it. He has witnessed great changes within the youth, as a result of their new social networks in the past two decades. For example, having access to telephones or mobile phones is also positively correlated with happiness among these youth. Both variables are likely to facilitate social connections and networks, among other things (Clark *et al.*, 2009). People at all levels, especially the youth, are ever seeking happiness at different levels and dimensions. In the present study, the author was searching out what happiness capital is, or what it means among the youth of both genders in Tehran? Generally speaking, all the people or the people of all nations are ever and inherently seeking happiness capital and better fortune, or so to say, satisfaction with life. The concept of happiness capital has intrinsically captured the attention of sociologists, psychologists, and economists. They have been analyzing and discussing the concept with special reference to youth. So far as the youth in Iran are concerned, they are directly and indirectly searching a way of life in which they could find more and lasting happiness. Yet, satisfaction of wants does not always lead to happiness. That is, sometimes avoiding an enjoyment is

more desirable than attaining it, since it may have risky and challenging consequences (Rahimi Yeganeh, 2007).

Due to the appearance of more means of communications and the increase in social networks, youths have become so concerned with finding more happiness in their lives. Similarly, as more competition has emerged in the lives of different classes of people in the modern time, they have become so interested to find increasing and lasting happiness. Similarly, due to the increasing social, economic and cultural changes in the lives of the youths in modern time, they have been highly motivated about their happiness. They try their best in different ways and directions to get to more happiness in their life course. The two concepts of unhappiness and happiness are also there in the present time. The youth are doing their utmost to get out of sadness or what may be called “marginality” in any way they can, so that they can get to happiness. Similarly, all classes of people (including the rich and the poor) are trying their best, attempting the most, and highly investing to access to happiness. So, happiness by itself motivates the youth to move better in their lives at the levels they are. They always try to avoid misery, and instead, get to satisfactory happiness in life. Therefore, the younger generations are attempting to access to more prosperity and success through education, new skills and personal income. Somehow or the other, happiness capital may be transferred to potential younger generations in any society.

In the present research, the youths of the age groups of 15-29 years were examined through different variables to measure their happiness. Policy issues and opportunities, all play role in the quality of happiness among the youth (Headey, 2010), not only in Iran, but in every other country with especial reference to urban areas and larger cities. In the present research, the author searched out the relevant perspectives and theories in order to validate the current research as much as possible.

Since 1950, post-war capitalism has led to an unprecedented standard of living with special reference to the youth, particularly in the West. Such an atmosphere has not translated into an equal upsurge in human happiness (Layard, 2005). The paper aimed to find out how happiness capital emerges among the youth of both sexes in Tehran, as a dynamic urban area of the country. Studies have indicated that while higher income does boost the levels of happiness among the youth at poverty line, this does not hold true for the rest of the population (Sen, 2009). While sociology as a part of social science focuses on the concept of happiness, psychology centres around the pathology of the issue (Nettle, 2005). The paper explores what happiness capital is, what conditions generate it, why it seems not to last, and what can be done to cultivate and sustain it.

However, there are two forces which do not let happiness to become lasting. That is, first the youth become habituated to what they get, and then care more, or something else. Secondly, they compare what they

have with others. In other words, happiness is merely an imaginary goal that gives us direction and purpose (Layard, 2005).

### *Theoretical Perspectives*

The theory that happiness is relative is based on three postulates: (1) happiness results from comparison, (2) standards of happiness adjust, and (3) standards of comparison are arbitrary constructs (Veenhoven, 2004). In the meantime, happiness is not always conditioned, based on all these three postulates. Happiness does not depend on the real quality of life. Therefore, conditions create happiness; after hard times, happiness is more felt. Similarly, recent investigations on happiness claim that happiness is reported to be as high in poor societies as it is in rich societies (Easterlin, 2003). It is influenced by societal norms, values, and frames, which vary across different countries and cultures.

There is a logical relationship between income and happiness within countries. Income matters to happiness (Diener *et al.*, 1993; Oswald, 1997). Yet, the definition of happiness varies across people and societies; it depends on norms, expectations and the capacity to adapt. Deprivation and abject poverty in particular are injurious to happiness. Usually after the basic needs are met, other factors such as rising aspirations increasingly become important. In addition to income under conditions of the new aspirations by the youth, the government must think of and make outlets for happiness within the youth. A number of studies on happiness have confirmed the effects of rising aspirations and economic behaviours

(Frank, 1999). This process affects happiness and the quality of happiness capital within the youth.

“Set point” theory of happiness states that every individual is presumed to have a happiness level that he or she goes back to over time even after major events such as winning a game or getting divorced (Easterlin, 2003). On average, wealthier countries (as a group) are happier than the poor ones (as a group), and happiness seems to rise with income up to a certain point, but not beyond it.

Research on happiness has been applied to a range of issues. These include relationship between income and happiness, inequality and poverty, effects of macro policies on individual welfare, etc. Meanwhile, surveys on happiness are particularly well suited to addressing questions that revealed preferences do not answer well. Happiness surveys also facilitate the measurement of the effects of broader, non-income components of inequality such as race, gender and status, all of which seem to be highly significant (Graham & Felton, 2006). These results find support in work in the health arena, which finds that relative social standing has significant effects on health outcomes (Marmot, 2004).

The theory of utilitarianism by (Mills, 1863) somehow reflects meaning and scope of happiness capital. It is often described by the phrase “the greatest good for the greatest number of people.” It is also known as “the greatest happiness principle.” Happiness or pleasure is used versus suffering or pain.

Happiness capital, being a state of mind or feeling characterized by contentment, love, satisfaction, pleasure, or joy, has been defined and analyzed in sociological, biological, psychological, and religious contexts, and most measures of happiness are based on self-report. It could also be measured through facial emergence<sup>1</sup>.

Subjective well-being (SWB), as coined by (Diener, 1984), includes three components, namely, life satisfaction, positive effects and negative effects. Overall, variables such as income, marital status, age, residence, employment status, and so on, have impacts well-being and happiness.

Happiness surveys may also be utilized to gauge the welfare effects of various public policies such as how a tax on tobacco may affect well-being (Gruber & Mullainathan, 2002). Similarly, happiness surveys can be used to examine the effects of different macro-policy arrangements on well-being. For example, most studies find that inflation and unemployment have negative effects on happiness. The effects of unemployment are stronger than those of inflation (Di Tella *et al.*, 2001). For instance in Iran, high levels of unemployment postpone marriage which eventually inflate unhappiness among the youth. The standard “misery index”, which assigns equal weight to inflation and unemployment, may underestimate the effects of the latter on well-being (Frey & Stutzer, 2002). Based on another hypothesis, the unemployed are less unhappy when there are more unemployed around

them, and when there is public support for unemployment benefits.

On the other hand, happiness economics opens a field of research questions which still need to be addressed. These include the implications of well-being findings for national indicators and economic growth patterns, the effects of happiness in behaviour such as work effort, consumption and investment. Similarly, unhappiness or frustration may be used for gauging the potential for social unrest in various contexts.

Health and happiness are reciprocally related to each other. Good health is linked to higher level of happiness and vice versa. A number of studies have found that happier people are healthier. Yet, some studies have exposed paradoxes in income-happiness relationship. That is to say, advances in health conditions do not necessarily result in equivalent increases in happiness, particularly as overall health conditions improve. This relationship is known as “Easterlin paradox”. However, higher levels of happiness are associated with better health outcomes (Dolan, 2006).

In these days of worldwide economic turmoil, there is a lot of talk about the “misery-index<sup>(2)</sup>” which is calculated by adding together the unemployment rate and the annual inflation rate (Okun, 2008). It is a concept which attempts to gauge the negative effects that both inflation and unemployment have on welfare, and is used as a way to measure the effects of each of these two phenomena on a particular country’s citizens’ welfare. The

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<sup>1</sup> Facial EMG

“misery index” assumes a straightforward “trade-off” of one for the other; namely, inflation versus unemployment. In other words, raising the inflation rate of 1% has equivalent negative effects on welfare, as does raising the unemployment rate. The assumption highly affects happiness in general with special reference to the youth.

Some other social scientists, such as Di Tella and MacCulloch (2006), believe that unemployment has far greater costs for happiness than does inflation — at a ratio of about four to one, i.e. much higher than the most important variables affecting well-being or happiness is unemployment status. That is one of the most traumatic events that can happen to people. That happens obviously due to the loss of income. In addition to that, there is also a cultural stigma to unemployment that impacts happiness.

Based on the research conducted in various countries around the world (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2008), countries with higher levels of per capita GDP have on average higher levels of happiness. Yet, there are cases with positive growth rates having lower happiness levels. This negative correlation between economic growth and happiness is known as the “paradox of unhappiness”. However, country-level patterns affect income-happiness relationship. Moreover, factors such as good health, social network, and intellectual curiosity contribute to happiness of the youth.

<sup>2</sup> Any situation in which one thing must be decreased for another to be increased.

### *Quality of Life (QoL)*

QoL is known as the conditions in which one lives, his/ her standard of living, or the degree of basic enjoyment of basic fulfilment in life. QoL is concerned with youth health, safety, and job satisfaction. It is associated with attempts to develop techniques and methods for improving the experience of work. These include job redesign, autonomous work groups and labour management committees (Huse & Cummings, 1985). Youth are the real wealth of a nation. Therefore, the basic objective of development is to create an enabling environment for them to live long, healthy, creative and happy lives, i.e. to be educated and to enjoy a decent standard of living.

QoL constructs that are measured metrically rather than by thresholds are, in general, much more straightforward. Happiness and subjective well-being are ascertained via numeric scales by survey questionnaire. Utility is, of course, ubiquitously measured in money terms, often by per capita GNP. The most straightforward of the macro quality of life instruments is happy life expectancy (Veenhoven, 1999). However, happiness capital highly contributes to the increasing trend of quality of life as a whole.

QoL is an individual’s perception of his/her position in life in the context of the culture and value system in which he/she lives in relation to one’s goals, expectation, values and concerns — incorporating physical health, psychological state, level of independence, and social relations. Quality of life refers to a subjective evaluation

which is embedded in a cultural, social and environmental context. An individual's happiness is highly influenced by the above aspects.

**RESEARCH METHOD**

Methodologically speaking, the focus of the study was to present a combination of theoretical frameworks and empirical realities. For the empirical part of the study, some 489 young people were randomly selected from different parts and neighbourhoods of Tehran City. They were approached through direct interviews with the help of designed questionnaires. In that, questions pertaining to leisure music, leisure trips, educational success, making a pilgrimage, happiness due to marriage, happiness due to care of elder parents, happiness due to income, and other questions were investigated in order to assess the happiness capital of the

transforming youth. Eventually, the filled-in questionnaires were edited, electronically extracted, and presented in the form of tables. The author also researched and reviewed the background literature on the youth of different societies of the world. In the theoretical part, the researcher tried to refer to, and make use of relevant theories such as Easterlin (2003), Diener *et al.* (1993), Frank (1999), etc.

The main hypothesis of this research is, "Social and economic conditions such as income, employment, general quality<sup>(3)</sup> of life and successful marriage create happiness capital within the youth". Rising aspirations and increasing knowledge and awareness interacting with the pre-existing cultural and normative difference influence the happiness capital within the youth. However, the research takes advantage of the analytical and research tools through discovering and interpreting

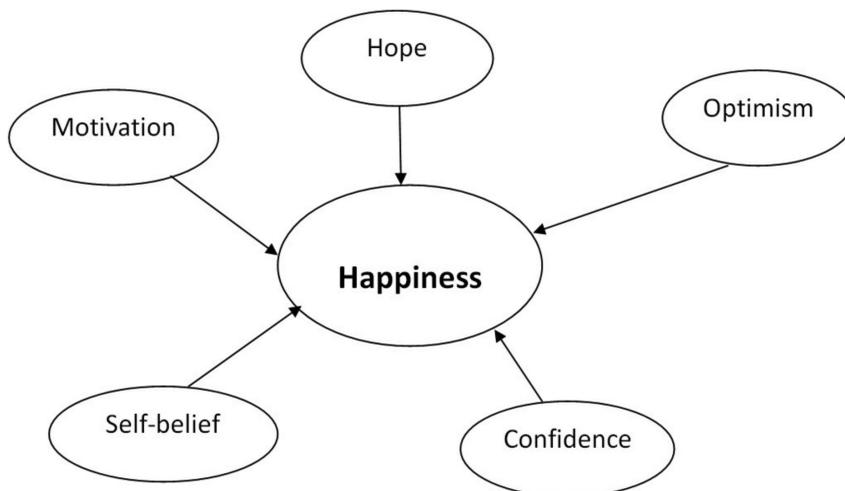


Fig.1: Other Variables Influencing Happiness Capital among the Youth in Tehran City (Model is derived as a result of interviews conducted with the respondents)

that are provided by new approaches in sociology, psychology as well as economics.

**FINDINGS**

Data analysis reflects findings of the research. This process of inspecting, clearing and transforming data highlights useful information relevant to the given research. In this section, the data collected are exposed through tables/abridged tables, and descriptive statistics.

Another set of data regarding happiness due to marriage among the youth indicates that out of the total number of 489

respondents, 121 respondents (24.8%) were not at all happy with their marriages, 144 (29.5%) of the youth were happy with their marriages, 116 respondents (23.72%) were much happy, and finally 108 young respondents (22.1%) were very much happy with the events of their marriages in Tehran City.

As one of the variable of this research, occupation also came to reach such conclusion. Out of the total number of 489 respondents, 90 respondents (18.4%) showed no happiness because of their access to occupations. Similarly, 85 young

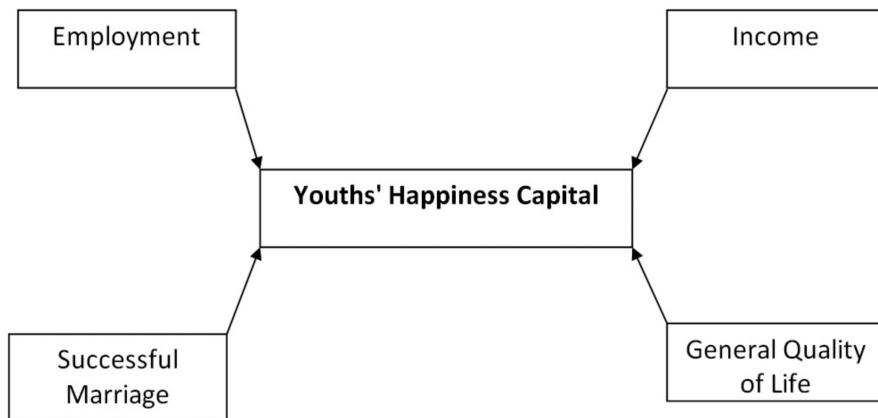


Fig.2: Factors Determining Youths’ Happiness Capital in Tehran City

TABLE 1  
Classification of Youth of by Age and Gender in Tehran City

Age	Males		Female		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Age 15-17	12	2.45	32	6.54	44	9
Age 18-20	24	4.91	61	12.47	85	17.38
Age 21-23	23	4.7	167	34.15	190	38.85
Age 24-26	37	7.57	71	14.52	108	22.09
Age 27-29	37	7.57	25	5.11	62	12.68
Total	133	27.2	356	72.8	489	100

TABLE 2  
Collective Table of Youth by Various Variables Contributes to Happiness in Tehran City

Factors of Happiness	Gender	Level of Happiness													
		Not at all			To Some Extent			Much			Very much			TOTAL	
		No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Happiness due to their educational success	Males	45	9.2	57	11.66	17	3.48	14	2.86	133	27.2				
	Females	47	9.61	145	29.65	90	18.4	74	15.13	356	72.8				
	Total	92	18.81	202	41.31	107	21.88	88	18	489	100				
Happiness due to going to pilgrimage	Males	34	6.95	50	10.22	25	5.11	24	4.91	133	27.2				
	Females	25	5.11	106	21.68	117	23.93	108	22.09	356	72.8				
	Total	59	12.07	156	31.9	142	29.04	132	27	489	100				
Happiness due to their care for their parents	Males	19	3.89	46	9.41	32	6.54	36	7.36	133	27.2				
	Females	24	4.91	102	20.86	126	25.77	104	21.27	356	72.8				
	Total	43	8.79	148	30.27	158	32.31	140	28.63	489	100				
Happiness due to their participation in charities	Males	14	2.86	54	11.04	37	7.57	28	5.73	133	27.2				
	Females	21	4.29	114	23.31	118	24.13	103	21.06	356	72.8				
	Total	35	7.16	168	34.36	155	31.7	131	26.79	489	100				

TABLE 3  
Collective Table of Youth by Various Variables Contributing to Happiness in Tehran City

Variables Contributing to Happiness	Level of Happiness									
	Not at all		To Some Extent		Much		Very much		TOTAL	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
(1) Medical Services	137	28.1	251	51.33	82	16.8	19	3.9	489	100
(2) Counseling Services	274	56.1	152	31.1	48	9.9	15	3.1	489	100
(3) Marriage Facilities/ Services	259	53	173	35.4	40	8.2	17	3.5	489	100
(4) Housing Facilities	258	52.8	130	26.6	72	14.7	29	5.9	489	100
(5) Law&Order for the Youth	136	27.8	233	47.7	87	17.8	33	6.8	489	100
(6) Educational Facilities for the Youth	96	19.6	230	47.1	118	24.1	45	9.2	489	100
(7) Social Security for the Youth	252	51.5	155	31.7	56	11.5	26	5.3	489	100
(8) Monthly Income of the Youth	193	39.5	192	39.3	75	15.3	29	5.9	489	100
(9) Food Conditions of the Youth	52	10.6	180	36.8	179	36.6	78	16	489	100
(10) Health Conditions of the Youth	83	17	226	46.2	139	28.4	41	8.4	489	100

respondents (17.4%) were to some extent happy to have access to occupations, 144 (29.5%) were much happy and finally, 170 respondents (34.8%) expressed their utmost happiness to have access to jobs.

Income indicator plays a determining role in the happiness of youth. The present research showed that 193 respondents (39.5%) were very much happy due to their individual incomes, and 75 others (15.3%) were to some extent happy with their incomes.

While having a baby is expected to bring about happiness, the research reached different and unexpected conclusions. In that, out of a total of 489 respondents, 170 (34.8%) were not at all happy with having a baby/child, 140 (28.6%) were happy with

that to some extent, 96 respondents (19.6%) were much happy with having a child, and finally, 82 respondents (17%) were very much happy with that. However, the reaction towards the questions was different so far as male/female child is concerned.

Services such as medical insurance have impacts on youth happiness not only in Iran, but around the world. It acts as a means of security for the individuals. In this question, the researcher identified that out of 489 respondents, 104 (21.3%) of the addressees responded that insurance services did not make them happy at all. Another group, i.e. 236 respondents (48.3%) were to some extent satisfied with the issue. Similarly, 123 respondents (25.2%) benefited much from the medical insurance and 26 others

(5.3%) somehow or the other indicated youth happiness.

Other issues and facilities which contributed to the happiness among the Iranian youth, and the ones which are relevant to the Iranian standards could be listed as counselling services to the youth, marital financial facilities for the youth and housing facilities for them. Similarly, creation of law and order for the youth, educational facilities, social security, as well as satisfaction with the monthly income, food and health conditions and the like were also among the variables measured to evaluate the scale and quality of happiness among the youth in the present research, based on the data presented in Table 3.

In an effort to represent happiness among youth, among other factors, seven different variables such as health security, social relations, occupational status, recreation, provision of accommodation, education and wealth were used. Based on

the variables reflected in Fig.3, youths are subject to further happiness. What indeed is the term happiness? It refers to certain accepted standards and satisfaction with those standards as they affect us (or in this paper the youth). For many youths, the most important part of happiness capital is the availability of functional social networks.

### DISCUSSION

As indicated earlier, happier people perform better in the labour market and in general in their careers. They could even invest more in their children's future. Happier people are generally healthier. It also matters to their future outcomes. Many social psychologists argue that happier people earn more income in later periods than their less happy cohorts do (Diener *et al.*, 2008).

However, there are a lot of variables responsible for happiness in general among youths. These factors and variables play roles in the appearance of happiness among

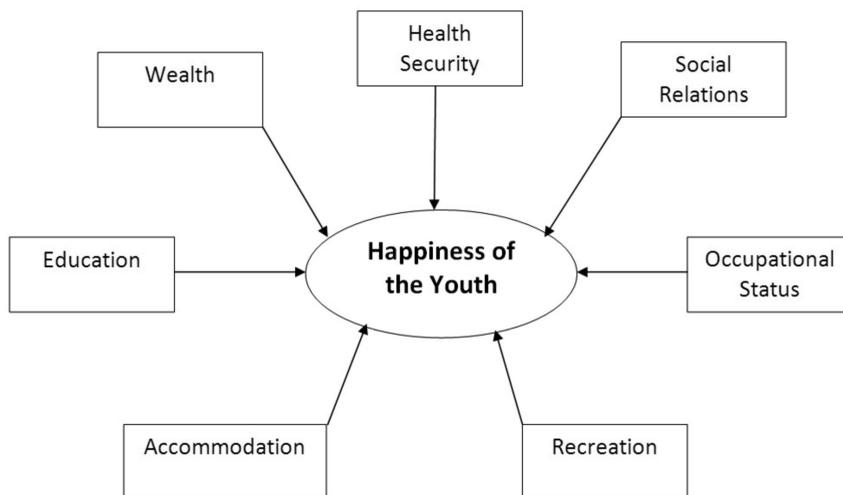


Fig.3: Objective Indicators Leading to Happiness among Youth

them in Iran. In the present research, out of the a thousand and one factors which play part in the creation of happiness, the researcher selected a few. Happiness may appear among the youth, following their access to educational aims. It may also appear among them for the ritual opportunities based on the Iranian standards. It also somehow or the other seems to show in the youth when they are satisfied with giving care and support to their parents.

Similarly, based on the varied culture, happiness sometimes appears among the youth through donating charities. In Iran, happiness is widely created because of the marriage among the youth. Likewise, as many youth attain employment, they get happy. Other variables which add to the happiness among the youths are the increase in income and the access to regular income.

As far as the Iranian youth of both genders are concerned, they highly become happy when they get a baby, or a baby is born in a young family. Similarly, social services and counselling services are somehow or the other responsible for creating happiness within the youth. That means, when they have it, they are happy, and when they lack it, they are less happy. As getting married is somehow financially hard for the youth to manage these days in Iran, they feel happy whenever they get the facilities such as loans for their marriage arrangements. Another variable which is highly responsible for a lasting happiness among the youth is securing accommodation/housing.

The research findings also showed how law and order contribute to the happiness

among youth. In Iran, many youths get the happiness for having the access to higher education. Among other factors which are responsible for the happiness among youths are social security, unemployment insurance, and those of similar opportunities. As discussed earlier on, poverty in socio-economic contexts is largely responsible for the unhappiness among the youth. On the other hand, satisfaction with monthly income highly contributes to the happiness among them.

Access to food sufficiency also, as examined, adds to the happiness of youth, as far as the universe of study is concerned. In another question, the researcher could find out the quality of happiness among the youth because of local health conditions or health status. However, sufficient income or financial security, leisure possibilities or services, largely contribute to the emergence of happiness among the youth.

## CONCLUSION

The present research looked at several fundamental relationships, namely, between happiness capital and income, happiness and economic development levels, happiness and health, happiness and quality of life, and how they interact and contribute to happiness capital. Youths have become more concerned with happiness due to the increase in social networks. Not only the youths in Iran, those around the world are also expecting increasing means of happiness. The paper concludes that under such circumstances, societies must be prepared to do everything possible to

arrange the necessary policies for youths in order to prevent controversies. In the globalized world of today, youth are prone to more changes as compared to those in the previous time. Factors such as unemployment and inflation highly affect happiness among the youth, and these add to stress, conflicts and challenges within them. Similarly, under an atmosphere of peace and lasting happiness, development in general will be attainable and sustainable.

The data collected for the present youth research are reflected in the forms of tables and descriptive statistics. Various variables have been analyzed, and through these, the scale of happiness among the youth has been measured. For example, though having a baby is a part and parcel of the Iranian value system, under the present socio-economic conditions, about one-third (34.8%) of the respondents disagreed with this, and were not at all happy with having a baby. Similarly, the variables such as monthly income, educational status, etc., were measured to determine the scale and quality of happiness among the youth in Tehran City. The research reached the conclusion that many youth were not that happy because of their deterred marriages under the unemployment crisis in the society. It is concluded that sufficient income and leisure services highly contribute to happiness capital among youth, which is achieved rather than ascribed.

## END NOTES

<sup>1</sup>**Life satisfaction** is a measure of an individual's perceived level of well-being and happiness. It is frequently assessed in surveys by asking individuals

how satisfied they are with their own lives. It is sometimes used as a synonym for subjective happiness, i.e., a state of mind or feeling characterized by contentment, love, satisfaction, pleasure, or joy. A variety of sociological, biological, psychological, religious and philosophical approaches have striven to define happiness and identify its sources.

<sup>2</sup>**Misery index** is an economic indicator adding unemployment to the inflation rate. It is assumed that a higher rate of unemployment and a worsening of inflation create economic and social costs for a country. The basic misery index causes unhappiness under the condition of joblessness. It is even followed by an increase in the crime rate in the society with special reference to the youth.

<sup>3</sup>**General Quality of Life** requires that people's basic and social needs are met, and that they have the autonomy to choose to enjoy life, to flourish and to participate as citizens in a society with high levels of civic integration, social collectivity, trust and other integrative norms, including at least fairness, equity and possibly to some degree of social justice and egalitarianism — all within a physically and socially sustainable global environment.

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