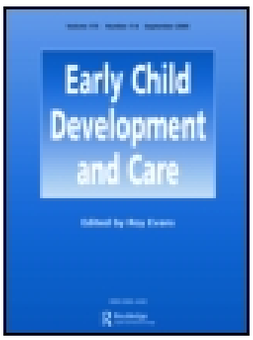

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Happiness from the perspective of mother and children: Indonesian setting

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to evaluate whether mothers and their children have the same perspective on the children's happiness. It enriched studies gap concerning agreement on perspective about young children happiness. Some studies showed agreement, the others showed disagreement. In total 777 children and 367 mothers were involved in this study. This study used face scale test for children to address their happiness. This study required mothers to recognize face scales and give ratings as to what the level of their children's happiness was. The Spearman rho analysis was revealed that Indonesian mothers and children have discrepancies on happiness ($r = 0.091$; $p = .080$). In view of gender difference, agreement was found between mothers and sons ($r = 0.195$; $p = .009$), but not on daughters. It is needed to develop parenting program to educate mothers on how build better communication particularly with daughters.

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Happiness; mother–child agreement; young children; Indonesian

Introduction

One of the most obvious questions in the literature over the last few years is the need for research on children happiness. As mentioned by Chaplin (2009), more studies that involved children, rather than adults, as informants are needed. This statement is supported by Ben-Arieh et al. (2001) who mentioned that we want to be able to properly measure happiness in children; therefore, children should be involved in all of the research process with regard to evaluating and observing their happiness.

Some research on happiness in young children using adults' perspective was carried out by Park and Peterson (2006). The study used descriptions from parents (indirectly from children) to obtain a description on characters and levels of happiness among children. Park and Peterson suggested that parents and children should have common understandings on positive emotions children experience, as it was also mentioned earlier by Levine, Stein, and Liwag (1999).

One of the strategies used to assess children's happiness is collecting information from respondents (Hunsley & Mash, 2007). The assessments include reports from parents, teachers, and the children themselves (De Los Reyes, Salas, Menzer, & Daruwala, 2013). Nonetheless, most research concerning children under the age of 7 did not directly involve the children themselves (e.g. Bilancia & Rescorla, 2010; Furniss, Beyer, & Müller, 2009).

However, measurements which involve multiple respondents would allow for discrepancies (Treutler & Epkins, 2003). In previous studies, there was a trend of study results leading to disagreement among respondents especially in studies involving children under the age of 7 years (e.g. Durbin &

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Wilson, 2012; Lagattuta, Sayfan, & Bamford, 2012; Youngstrom, Izard, & Ackerman, 1999). The results showed that parents of children under the age of 7 tend to overestimate their child's happiness level when compared to the child's private report.

Lagattuta et al. (2012) recently identified the relationships of reports from parents and children aged 4 to 11. Their results indicated positive bias, meaning that parents tend to provide higher scores for optimism aspects, and lower scores for pessimism facets, compared to those of their children. This is in line with previous results provided by Youngstrom et al. (1999). Another investigation on children aged 8 and 12 showed that parents tend to overrate children's happiness compared to the report by the children themselves (Holder, Coleman, & Wallace, 2010).

Other research by Lagattuta et al. (2012) tried to involve both parents and children. It aimed at measuring misunderstandings between parents and their children (aged 4–11) on daily emotions. Despite the fact that both parents and children provide internally consistent responses, the parents' perception on their children's emotional well-being fails to provide any correlation. Parents were significantly underestimating the concerns and worries and also optimism of their children.

Further review on previous studies related to parent and children agreement on happiness, showed a gap between its results. Some showed disagreement between parent's (mother's) perception of their children and children's self-report of themselves, and the others showed an agreement (De Los Reyes et al., 2013; Karp, Serbin, Stack, & Schwartzman, 2004; Levine et al., 1999).

The study by Levine et al. (1999) involved parents and asked them to recall and describe the events that lead to happiness, sadness, anger, and fear in children. The understanding between parents and children in the study was found to vary in a wide range of emotions. Children frequently encountered to agree with parents when it comes to emotional attributions that evoke happiness and sadness, rather than fear or even anger. Parents recognize emotions on events that have occurred previously but failed to recognize the purpose of those events on their children.

It is a common assumption that parents who know and understand more about their children's growth will be more sensitive toward their children's needs (Goodnow, Knight, & Cashmore, 1985). Parents know their children best. Their everyday observation should provide the most reliable information of their children's behaviour (Karp et al., 2004). A study by De Los Reyes et al. (2013) revealed the relationship reports from both parents and children concerning emotions in children aged 7 and older who are diagnosed with an emotional disorder.

Based on those empirical findings, there was a gap between its results. Some showed an agreement between parent's (mother's) perception of their children and children's self-report of themselves, and the others showed a disagreement. Considering that challenge, there should have been more research on identifying agreements of perceptions among parents and the self-report made by their children. This dis-or-agreement will provide a rare opportunity for researchers to understand the underlying factors of the dis-or-agreement.

Aim and research questions

The purpose of this study was to describe Indonesian children's happiness both from the perspective of children and their mothers and to investigate whether parents and their children reported an agreement of opinions upon children's happiness. The following research questions were addressed:

- How do children describe their happiness (at most of the time)?
- How do parents (mothers) describe their children happiness (at most of the time)?
- Is there any agreement between parents (mothers) and their children when reported children happiness?

Conceptual and theoretical framework

Happiness is a positive emotional status subjectively stated by an individual personally or subjectively (Snyder & Lopez, 2007). Happiness is also defined *as a global satisfaction in life or a perception on quality of life, the presence of positive affect, and the absence of negative affect* (Diener, 1984). Argyle, Martin, and Crossland (1989) define happiness as the average satisfaction at a certain period with certain frequencies of positive and negative effects.

Chappell and Crisp (1998) stated that a subjectively experienced mental state (i.e. happiness) cannot be measured, only people's preferences can be stated and inferred from their behaviour, objectively. Angner (2013) tries to break that notion by writing an article entitled 'Is it possible to measure happiness? The argument from measurability'. This article tries to convince us that distributing questionnaires and feeding the data gained into a computer program such as SPSS to get a general impression on the matter simply can be conducted. Ware and Sherbourne (1992) stated that it is only true that happiness can simply be measured from a single question, compared to depression that requires a 21-item Beck Depression Inventory or perhaps health status that needs a 36-item Short Form Health Survey (SF-36).

Based on previous literatures and studies, children's happiness is defined as the average satisfaction at a certain period which can be measured from a single question. Children's overall happiness is measured using an item scale such as the Facial Scale (Agner, 2013; Holder et al., 2010). It has been widely used due to its validity and reliability (Abdel-Khalek, 2006).

Method

This study was designed from children's and mothers' perspective on happiness, responding to a previous study by Hunsley and Mash (2007) that the best practice in measuring children happiness is by involving multiple respondents.

Participant and data collection

This study involved 777 children and 367 mothers. Participating children were aged 4–6 years old and still in kindergarten. The flowchart below describes participation from both children and parents (mothers) (Figure 1).

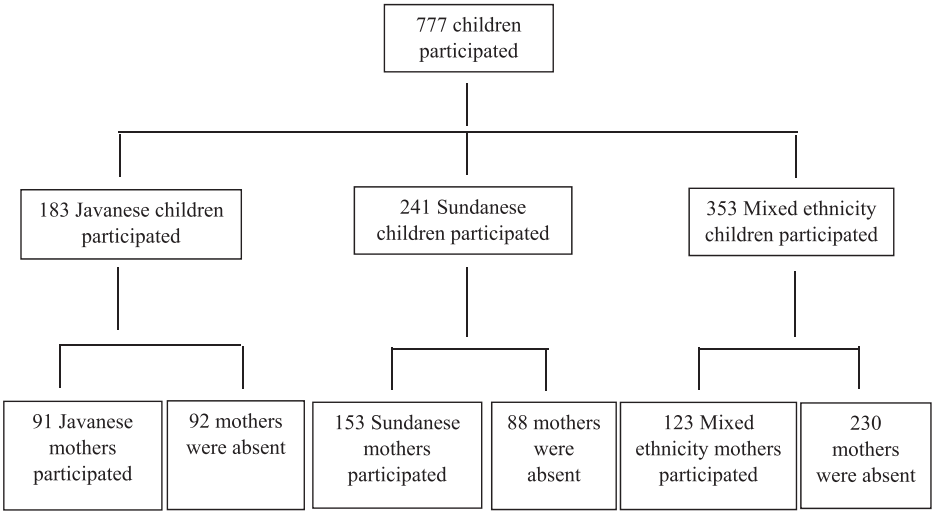

Figure 1. Flowchart of participants.

All participants were living in Java islands which consists of Javanese (in Yogyakarta), Sundanese (in Bandung, west Java), and mixed ethnicity (in Jakarta, capital city of Indonesia). The research was carried out in two largest ethnic groups in Indonesia.

The Face scale – children's self-report

A face scale was modified to look more real, considering that a participant of age was as young as 4. Adjustments were made by reducing the number of pictures (from 7 to 6). This was in line with a previous clinical study that also used the face scale to identify pain in children. The Faces Pain Rating Scale by Wong and Baker is the dominant method used nowadays to measure pain intensity in children. This scale is depicted in Figure 1. Six faces are shown to 3-year-olds or older; (0) is very happy because he does not feel hurt at all; (1) hurts a little bit; (2) hurts a little more; (3) hurts even more; (4) hurts a whole lot; and (5) hurts worst (Wong & Baker, 1988). This face scale has been widely applied in children as respondents, as a graphical representation of emotions that can be recognized by children (MacDonald, Kirkpatrick, & Sullivan, 1996).

The face scale was used to measure one's perception on happiness (Agner, 2013; Andrews & Withey, 1976; Holder et al., 2010). It has been widely used due to its validity and reliability (Abdel-Khalek, 2006). In Indonesian setting, a validity and reliability test for Face Scale was done previously (Pranoto & Hong, 2016).

Once children names and ages were confirmed, they underwent the face scale test to address the area of their happiness. This scale used a Likert-type scale with six simple pictures positioned parallel to the horizontal line. These pictures depict varied mouth expressions, from very upturned (indicating great happiness) to the very downturned (indicating unhappiness) (Figure 2). Researchers asked children to value their happiness as 'most of the time'.

The Face scale – mothers' report

Before the questionnaire for mothers' session, a procedure was implemented, sending enveloped invitation to parents. These envelopes were given to parents through their children. Inside the envelopes, there was a letter from the school attached that invited to attend a session for questionnaire filling. This study required mothers to recognize face scales. Mothers were asked to give ratings as to what the level of their children's happiness was. These pictures were graded from the happiest to the least happy.

Pre-testing

There was a need to have pre-testing to examine external judgement on the questionnaire and face scale prior to its distribution to the intended children. The pilot study involved 60 children and 60 mothers who represented 20 ethnic categories. Besides, kindergarten teachers were also involved as professional experts in checking the questionnaire and the face scale. This external judgement is meant to identify any possible problem the children might face while responding to the questions asked. Teachers were considered as the best people to provide input as they were professionals who worked and actively involved in children's day-to-day life. The teachers also involved to represent all ethnicities (two for each ethnic group) in the whole process of test design and trial. Once the test was tried on some children, a discussion with those teachers would ensue, related to problems

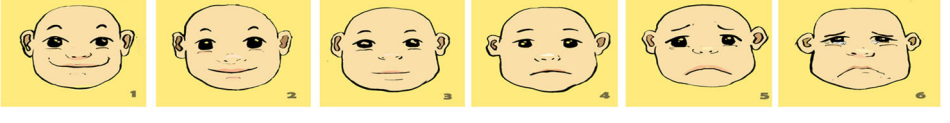

Figure 2. A modified Face scale.

experienced by the children while trying to answer the research question and give response to the face scale. Their suggestions had been taken into account.

The pilot study included a reliability test for the face scale. Since the face scale used a single-item measure, test–retest was needed to evaluate the reliability of its instrument. After the children filled out the face scale, the reliability of the face scale was examined. The reliability was acceptable with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.833. Next, the mothers filled out the face scale by recognizing their children's happiness of almost all the time. The reliability of the face scale was acceptable with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.901. Both displayed the degree to which the responses were consistent or stable over time (Pranoto & Hong, 2016).

Ethical consideration

The researcher asked for permission from the school principals of eight public kindergartens in Bandung, Yogyakarta, and Jakarta, prior to data collection. After permission was granted, the researcher (YKSP) gave the study information in written format to parents together with an invitation to attend a parent meeting at the school.

During the parent meeting, the researcher gave information about the study and gave an opportunity for parents to ask questions and make decisions to join the study and also gave consent in written format for their children to participate in the study as well. Children, under the consent of their parents, were involved. In the interview session, the researcher gave a brief explanation regarding the study conducted.

Data analysis

Chi-square analysis was used to test the response distribution of children and mothers on happiness. Furthermore, Spearman's rho analysis was used to test the agreement between children's and mothers' data on children's happiness based on age, gender, and ethnicity perspectives.

Results and discussion

The study aimed to describe happiness from the perspective of children and mothers and to investigate whether the parents and their children reported an agreement of response upon children's happiness. The merit of this research is that it involved children as active participants and parents as secondary participants.

Spearman's rho analysis showed discrepancies in response between Indonesian mothers and children on happiness. This happened either in the category of ethnicity and children's age. The frequency of distribution showed that most children reported happiness at level 1 which means very happy, whereas mothers mostly reported happiness at level 2 which means happy.

Children and mothers report on happiness

Based on Tables 1–4 below, Indonesian mothers tend to report lower level of children happiness compare to child self-report.

This result is in contrast to previous studies' result. One of them is the finding by Lagattuta et al. (2012) that tries to identify the relationship of reports from both informants (children aged 4–11 and their mothers) on (optimism) and worries. Their finding showed that parents reported higher level of optimism and lower level of worries. This was incompatible with what their children said. Other previous studies' result revealed that there was a trend of study results leading to disagreement among respondents especially in studies involving children under the age of 7 years (e.g. Durbin & Wilson, 2012; Lagattuta et al., 2012; Youngstrom et al., 1999). The results showed that parents of children under the age of 7 tend to overestimate their child's happiness level when compared to the child's private report.

Table 1. Children's and mothers report of children's happiness.

Level of happiness	Child $n = 777$ f (%)	Mother $n = 367$ f (%)	r [p]
1	559 (71.9)	143 (39.0)	n.s.
2	147 (18.9)	180 (49.0)	
3	22 (2.8)	39 (10.6)	
4	4 (0.5)	1 (0.3)	
5	7 (0.9)	4 (1.1)	
6	38 (4.9)	–	

Notes: Chi-square is applied. In each cell, the first number is the frequency of level chosen followed by percentage in the bracket. Spearman's rho is applied, significant p-value < .05.

Agreement on happiness between children and mothers

The result of analysis using Spearman's rho analysis (see Tables 1 and 4 above) showed disagreement between daughters' and mother's reports. Based on the tables above, Spearman's rho test showed that there was no statistically significant correlation between Indonesian children's self-report and mother's description on children's happiness ($r = 0.091$, $p = .080$). An agreement was found between sons' and mothers' report ($r = 0.195$; $p = .009$).

There were not many researches that specifically revealed correspondence among the informants, meaning on whether parents agree with what their children have reported, in terms of happiness. There are only few studies dedicated to gain reports from both parents and their children on happiness. All these research supported this positive bias. A research by Holder et al. (2010) indicated that there was no agreement between reports from parents and those from their children. Parents tend to overrate happiness compared to what their children really feel/experience. Even for the laboratory research using bubbles (which the children play with freely), parents report more happiness compared to what their children actually feel themselves – as described by trained coders (Durbin & Wilson, 2012).

The reason as to why parents overrate the happiness of their 12-year-olds or younger children is their egocentric bias that they use as the anchor point to estimate or justify their children's emotions. The effect of egocentric bias should be put into consideration, despite the fact that mothers tend to underrate happiness of their children.

Another study emphasized that parents of children aged 5 or younger were less happy than those who have older children (Nelson, Kushlev, & Lyubomirsky, 2014). In reality, parents with younger children have more experiences in which their children are sources of happiness and pride, but they also feel the stress of their negative attitude and the many time-consuming chores and confusing situations that sometimes frustrate or irritate them (Crnic & Low, 2002, p. 243). Hence, Lagattuta et al. (2012) stated that parents can either be happier or less happy; this was where the bias stems from.

A research by López-Pérez and Wilson (2015) that investigated the agreement between parents and their children aged 12 or younger and also perceptions between them stresses this bias. Studies by Durbin and Wilson (2012) and Lagattuta et al. (2012) confirmed bias in estimation.

Table 2. Children's and mothers' report of children's happiness at different ethnicities.

	Javanese			Sundanese			Mixed ethnicity		
Level of happiness	Child $n = 183$ f (%)	Mother $n = 91$ f (%)	r [p]	Child $n = 241$ f (%)	Mother $n = 153$ f (%)	r [p]	Child $n = 353$ f (%)	Mother $n = 123$ f (%)	r [p]
1	140 (76.5)	26 (28.6)	n.s.	154 (63.9)	53 (34.6)	n.s.	265 (75.1)	64 (52.0)	n.s.
2	33 (18.0)	46 (50.5)		53 (22.0)	84 (54.9)		61 (17.3)	50 (40.7)	
3	3 (1.6)	18 (19.8)		9 (3.7)	14 (9.2)		10 (2.8)	7 (5.7)	
4	1 (.5)	–		1 (.4)	1 (0.7)		2 (0.6)	–	
5	–	1 (1.1)		5 (2.1)	1 (0.7)		2 (0.6)	2 (1.6)	
6	6 (3.3)	–		19 (7.9)	–		13 (3.7)	–	

Notes: Chi-square is applied. In each cell, the first number is the frequency of level chosen followed by percentage in the bracket. Spearman's rho is applied, significant p-value < .05.

Table 3. Children's and mothers' report of children's happiness at different ages.

	Age 4			Age 5			Age 6		
Level of happiness	Child $n = 139$ f (%)	Mother $n = 82$ f (%)	r [p]	Child $n = 390$ f (%)	Mother $n = 186$ f (%)	r [p]	Child $n = 248$ f (%)	Mother $n = 99$ f (%)	r [p]
1	98 (70.5)	36 (43.9)	n.s.	290 (74.4)	72 (38.7)	n.s.	171 (69)	35 (35.4)	n.s.
2	25 (18)	35 (42.7)		66 (16.9)	91 (48.9)		56 (22.6)	54 (54.5)	
3	7 (5)	9 (11.0)		8 (2.1)	22 (11.8)		7 (2.8)	8 (8.1)	
4	2 (1.4)	–		1 (0.3)	1 (0.5)		1 (0.4)	–	
5	1 (.7)	1 (2.4)		2 (0.5)	–		4 (1.6)	2 (2.0)	
6	6 (4.3)	–		23 (5.9)	–		9 (3.6)	–	

Notes: Chi-square is applied. In each cell, the first number is the frequency of level chosen followed by percentage in the bracket. Spearman's rho is applied, significant p-value < .05.

Table 4. Children's and mother's report of children's happiness at different gender.

	Boys			Girls		
Level of happiness	Child $n = 381$ f (%)	Mother $n = 176$ f (%)	r [p]	Child $n = 396$ f (%)	Mother $n = 191$ f (%)	r [p]
1	298 (78.2)	62 (35.2)	0.1950 [.0095]	261 (65.9)	81 (42.4)	n.s.
2	51 (13.4)	61 (51.7)		96 (24.2)	89 (46.6)	
3	11 (2.9)	20 (11.4)		11 (2.8)	19 (9.9)	
4	2 (0.5)	–		2 (0.5)	1 (0.5)	
5	2 (0.5)	3 (1.7)		5 (1.3)	1 (0.5)	
6	17 (4.5)	–		21 (5.3)	–	

Notes: Chi-square is applied. In each cell, the first number is the frequency of level chosen followed by percentage in the bracket. Spearman's rho is applied, significant p-value < .05.

There was a clear difference between mothers' estimation and that of the children's (Durbin & Wilson, 2012). This research, however, was not focused on the life satisfaction of mothers. Hence, it was not intended to measure egocentric bias. Instead, this would be a challenge for further research.

Comparison analysis on ethnicity, age, and gender differences

Overall, this study found disagreement between children's and mothers' report in view of ethnicity and age differences. From the gender point of view, it was mothers and their boys who had an agreement in response on the issue of happiness ($r = 0.195$; $p = .009$), not daughters ($r = 0.039$; $p = .590$).

Gender played a significant role in the level of agreement between parents and children. Mothers had different expectations for their sons or daughters. Nonetheless, previous studies showed no gender differences in the level of agreement between parents and children (Duhig, Renk, Epstein, & Phares, 2000; Hughes & Gullone, 2010; Langberg et al., 2010).

Gender differences on the level of agreement was perhaps because mothers tend to recognize boys' emotion expressed better compared to girls, due to an emotional display norm (Saarni, 1993). Emotional display norm was understood by girls that they learnt to hold back emotions. Boys, on the contrary, were allowed to express themselves more. This explained why mothers know the emotions of their boys better.

Emotional display norm that usually applies to girls prevent them from doing self-retrospect and understand emotional changes within themselves. According to Kraemer et al. (2003), self-retrospect and self-monitoring skills were factors that influence the level of agreement. This is consistent with what other experts have reported (i.e. Renouf & Kovacs, 1994).

For Indonesian young girls, they experience limited emotional expression as this is against the norms for the majority in Indonesia (Garna, 1984). The philosophy of harmonious integration prevents any intense feelings of resentment to manifest itself. Less expressive win-win solution is the norm in cases of conflicts. This value has seemed to penetrate to the whole Indonesian way of life as well (Shiraisi, 1997).

Although studies are rare in examining ethnic differences in socialization of emotions, it appears in all the different groups or ethnicity involved in the research. For example, the results of study by Markus and Kitayama (1991) proved that these overt emotional expressions correlated with individual orientation on individuality and had character independence as it was owned by people of European American in the United States, when compared to the individual-oriented collectivist or family orientation in which the expression of emotions tend to be suppressed.

Some literature reviews as submitted by Dunsmore and Halberstadt (1997) and Eisenberg, Cumberland, and Spinrad (1998) emphasized that the importance of parental emotion beliefs affect emotion socialization practices. Wong, Diener, and Isabella (2008) in their research indicated that parents who accepted and appreciated their children's emotions tended to support on displaying negative emotions, and parents tended to treat their children less hostile or dismissive in response to the negative emotions of children. In fact, Halberstadt, Thompson, Parker, and Dunsmore (2008) found that these types of parents who preferred to discuss any event occurred with the child could potentially trigger negative emotions. Similarly, research by Leerkes (2010) found that mothers who had positive beliefs about the importance of negative emotions in the infant tended to be sensitive to the child's condition, especially when they were in distressed conditions.

In Indonesian setting, mothers tend to accept emotional expression of sons than daughters because of the cultural values that have been believed. In Indonesian culture, the position of the wife (mother) is lower than the husband. In Indonesia, a wife must respect the man. Koentjaraningrat (1994) states that a wife must 'respect', showing respect for her husband. Based on the study by Liliani and Sari (2010), even modern women found that they still have an obligation to please their husbands, being obedient and submissive to the husband's orders. The value which a wife believes is manifested in her role as a mother and how she builds the relationship with her children. Mothers tend to accept and appreciate emotions of sons than daughters because the value of sons within the patriarchal society is higher than daughters.

Conclusions and implications for research

Spearman's rho analysis showed discrepancies of response between Indonesian mothers and children on happiness. An agreement was found only between mothers and sons. The frequency of distribution showed that most children reported happiness at level 1 which means very happy, whereas mothers mostly reported happiness at level 2 which means happy. Practically, the findings of this study can help parents, social workers and education professionals, and researchers in the field of educational and children's development to develop a parenting programme and seminar to educate mothers to build better communication with their daughters.

Future researchers should consider involving mothers and fathers at the same time, in order to get a better portrayal of how father–children and mother–children agreement or disagreement looks like. This measure has been earlier attempted by Treutler and Epkins (2003) who revealed that there was a difference in the level of agreement between children with their mothers and children with their fathers.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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