Young Children Voices of Happiness: Learning from Urban Area in Indonesia

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Abstract

This qualitative study describes happiness of preschool children in four Islamic kindergartens in the urban area of Jakarta, Indonesia. The participant involved 353 children, including 165 boys and 188 girls, within four to six years. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews and face-scale, with the content. The result showed that children have high levels of happiness, with the majority considering play as a source of positive affect, followed by school performance, material issues, friendship, and family. In contrast, most reported sources of negative affect in children's daily lives referred to the following categories: material issues, none, family, illness or injury, and friendship. Further studies are needed to analyze the implication of children's happiness on parents, social workers, and teachers by focusing on play activity.

Keywords: happiness, affection, urban children, Indonesian

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Introduction

Cross-cultural surveys were globally carried out to determine the interest of adults and parents in children's happiness (Diener & Lucas, 1999, 2004). Several studies had been carried out on adults, while those concerning children are lacking (Andrews & Withey, 1976; Brockmann & Delhey, 2010; Chappell & Crisp, 1998; Cummins et al., 2009; Huebner, 2004; Koopmans et al., 2010; Lopez et al., 2007; Ye et al. 2014). Park and Peterson (2006) stated that studies on children's happiness are usually neglected, irrespective of the fact that there is a need for conceptual clarity in understanding the circumstances that make children happy (Chaplin, 2009; Thoilliez, 2011). This allows for a more informed discussion globally because children have unique perspectives and experiences of happiness, different from adults and their mothers (Pranoto & Hong, 2018).

From a sociological perspective, children are seen as social actors and discussed in separate process (Christensen & James, 2008; Corsaro, 1997; James & Prout, 1997; Qvortrup, 1994, 2004; Lloyd-Smith & Tarr, 2000; O'Kane, 2000). From a postmodern perspective, children are seen as individuals who have extensive knowledge, as competent members of society (Bruner, 1996; Dahlberg et al., 1999). Therefore, children view as capable, knowledgeable experts from their own lives, possessing knowledge, perspectives and special interests (Clark & Moss, 2001; Dahl, 1995; Mayall, 2000).

The limited studies concerning happiness in young children, particularly in Asian countries, are a research question that needs to be addressed. The research concerning a similar topic on young children in East Asia countries have been carried out by Kim and Kang (2008), Kim (2013) and Hong et al. (2015), however studies in Southeast Asia such as Indonesia are rare. There is a need to review the different concepts of happiness, motivations that tend to affect it, and sources in various cultures (Uchida et al., 2004).

Indonesian children have different meanings and experiences of happiness from those in the West. Western studies revealed that social relations with family (Casas et al., 2004; Chaplin, 2009; Thoilliez, 2011) and peers are the most important factor that affects the children happiness (Holder & Coleman, 2009; Holder & Klassen, 2010; McAuley & Layte, 2012). Previous studies in Indonesia, children between the ages of 3 – 8, from rural areas, reported material issues as popular source of happiness (Kurniawati & Hong, 2015; Pranoto

& Hong, 2014). It showed that these regions lack facilities because they are distant from the capital (Jakarta). People there are happier when more facilities are available and this value is passed down to their children. Previous studies showed a significant correlation between values parents and children's belief (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Casas et al., 2004; Vollebergh et al., 2001; Whitbeck & Gecas, 1988). Furthermore, it is assumed that those living in the rural area are medium to low income families. There are some evidences that socio-economic status (Proctor et al., 2009) and family income (Burton & Phipps, 2008; Knies, 2012; Main, 2014; Rees et al., 2011), affect children's subjective well-being.

Irrespective of the several findings from previous studies carried out in the West and those concerning young Indonesian children residing in rural areas, there is a need to capture a conceptual description of Indonesian children happiness lived in urban areas. This study complements previous research carried out by Kurniawati and Hong (2015), and Pranoto and Hong (2014) which emphasized on positive affection using a single open-ended question, namely "what makes you happy." Furthermore, the research also explores the cognitive aspects (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014) as well as both positive and negative affection (Argyle et al., 1989; Diener, 1984).

Happiness

Psychologists reported that happiness is equivalent to subjective well-being (Argyle, 1987; Eysenck, 1990). Subjective well-being covers affective and cognitive dimensions, which is used to evaluate one's life, including overall life satisfaction (Ben-Arieh et al. 2014).

Although, its exact definition is under debate (Diener, 2009; Lopez et al., 2007). It is a positive emotional status subjectively experienced by an individual. It is also defined *as global life satisfaction or perception of the quality of life, as well as the presence and absence of both positive and negative affect, respectively* (Diener, 1984). Argyle et al. (1989) stated that happiness is the average satisfaction derived from certain frequencies of positive and negative affects within a specific period.

According to the eudemonistic approach, it refers to a condition, not a possession. Ryff and Singer (2008) stated that results from the eudemonistic approach are humanistic and focus on individuals' values and lifestyles as reported in a narrative research (Bauer et al.,

2008) with conclusions and recommendations based on normative analysis (Sheldon & Kasser, 1998). In accordance with this approach, this research creates a platform aimed to facilitate the need to acknowledge the happiness of Indonesian children.

Based on the previous theoretical framework, children's happiness is understood as the average evaluation of life relating to certain frequencies of positive and negative affect within a specific period.

Aim and research questions

The purpose of this study was to describe happiness from young children (aged 4-6 years old). The following research questions were addressed:

1. The extent or degree of happiness experienced by children residing in urban areas?
2. The activities they derived both positive (happiness) and negative affect (unhappiness) in their everyday lives?

Methods

This qualitative study was designed to counter the study carried out by Cummins and Lau (2005, 2006), which stated that the best approach to measure children's happiness is by getting them involved rather than adults. Adhering to their own views and experiences is at the heart of developing and understanding the key factors that affect their lives. A face to face interview was carried out to assess sources of happiness, while a face-scale was used to evaluate its level in children.

Participant

The participants involved 353 children (165 boys and 188 girls), aged 4-6 years old (M=5.16; SD=.709) from four different kindergartens in Jakarta (see Table. 1).

Table 1. *Distribution of participant*

Gender		Age groups		
Boys	Girls	4yo	5yo	6yo
165	188	65	167	121

Data collection

Ethical consideration

The principals of the four public kindergartens in Jakarta gave their consent prior to data collection. Furthermore, written consent was obtained from the parents authorizing their children to participate in the study, and only the permitted ones, were involved. Subsequently, before the interview session, a brief explanation concerning the study was carried out.

Confidentiality

Documents such as informed consent, the identity of children (code names), recordings, questionnaires, notes, and transcriptions from each interview are kept in an enclosed locker, which was only accessible to the writer to ensure their safety.

Interviews

This study carried out a face to face interview with the children individually. All the participants addressed the following single open-ended question, "what makes you happy (*senang*) and unhappy (*sedih*) in your daily life?".

Based on the structure of the Indonesian emotional lexicon (Shaver et al., 2001), positive affect consists of two basic affections, namely happiness (*senang)* and love (*cinta)*. On the contrary, negative affect consists of three principal affections, including anger (*marah)*, fear (*takut)* and unhappiness (*sedih)*. In light of Harter's (1982) statement that children age 3 already understand certain emotions, as well as the structure of the Indonesian emotional lexicon, this research focuses on happiness (*senang)* and unhappiness (*sedih*) as positive and negative affect respectively.

Face scale

This study applied a modified Face Scale Test (FST) to measure the level of children's happiness using a single item scale (Holder et al., 2010). It has been widely used due to its validity and reliability (Abdel-Khalek, 2006).

FST uses the Likert type of scale with six simple pictures positioned parallel to the horizontal line; which depict varied mouth expressions, from extremely upturned (indicating great happiness) to excessively downturned (indicating unhappiness) (Fig.1).
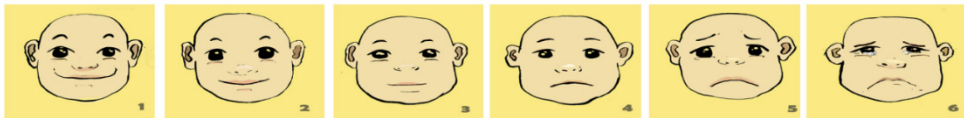

Figure 1. A Modified Face Scale

Timing, recording, and field notes

Approximately 15 to 30 minutes was spent interviewing each child. However, some of them needed longer time and had to be accompanied by their friends. This research only managed to have a session of interview per child with repeated questions in order to verify their responses.

Settings

Data collection was carried out in several settings within the school vicinity. These settings were designed to be natural and as comfortable and less intimidating as possible.

Data analysis

Content analysis of interview transcripts

The children's responses to questions were screened using content analysis to determine statements that revealed sources perceived as contributing to the children's happiness. This led to the generation of a list of statements and categories. This process involves two independent analysts, namely the fieldworker and a trained research assistant familiar with the qualitative analysis intended for children.

In order to increase the construct validity, transcripts from the interviews were independently coded by a trained research assistant. Disparities were discovered and resolved by re-coding and reviewing them simultaneously. The content analysis of the original data is applied in native Bahasa Indonesia. The process of translating it to English has been carried out and verified by a third party.

Results

Level of Happiness

Table 2 below shows the variations in the level of happiness, from excessively happy to extremely unhappy. According to the table, 75.1% or 265 children residing in urban areas reported that they are in level 1 (certainly upturned), meaning they are absolutely happy. As many as 61 children (17.3%) stated that they are in level 2, meaning they are happy despite being unhappy at times.

Table 2. Children's happiness

Level of Happiness	n=353
	f[%]
1	265 [75.1]
2	61 [17.3]
3	10 [2.8]
4	2 [.6]
5	2 [.6]
6	13 [3.7]

Note. In each cell, the first number is the frequency of level chosen followed by percentage in the bracket.

Ten out of 353 children (2.8%) stated that they are in level 3. Two children (0.6%) reported that they are in level 4. Furthermore, another two (0.6%) stated that they are in level 5 (downturned), meaning they are unhappy, while 13 of them (3.7%) reported that

they are in level 6 (certainly downturned) or feel extremely unhappy and they cry a lot.

Source of positive affect

Based on table 3, children identified five most common sources of their positive affect: play, school performance, material issues, friendship, and family. To what extent children identified the following sources of positive affect in their daily lives were described as follows:

Table 3. Source of Positive affects Perceived by Children

Source of positive affects	Total	Gender		Age		
		Boys	Girls	4	5	6
		f[%]	f[%]	f[%]	f[%]	f[%]
Play	283 [80.2]	136 [82.4]	147 [78.2]	54 [83.1]	138 [82.6]	91 [75.2]
School Performance	29 [8.2]	17 [10.3]	12 [6.4]	3 [4.6]	11 [6.6]	15 [12.4]
Friendship	7 [2.0]	1 [.6]	6 [6.2]	1 [1.5]	2 [1.2]	4 [3.3]
Family	6 [1.7]	2 [1.2]	4 [2.1]	3 [4.6]	-	3 [2.5]
Material Issues	17 [4.8]	7 [4.2]	10 [5.3]	4 [6.2]	9 [5.6]	4 [3.3]
Parties	2 [0.6]	1 [.6]	1 [0.5]	-	1 [0.6]	1 [0.8]
Spiritual	2 [0.6]	1 [.6]	1 [0.5]	-	2 [1.2]	-
Basic need	1 [0.3]	-	1 [0.5]	-	-	1 [0.8]
Recreation need	3 [0.8]	-	3 [1.6]	-	1 [0.6]	2 [1.7]
None	3 [0.8]	-	3 [1.6]	--	3 [1.8]	-

Note. In each cell, the first number is the frequency of level chosen followed by percentage in the bracket.

Play

The majority of children identified play as the most preferred source of positive affect. Play here refers to having or given enough time and opportunity to carry out activities at home, outside, and school. Previous study comprising of young children (3-5 years old) indicated that young children felt happy when they are engaged in their favourite play (Hong et al., 2015).

I feel excited when I play the role of a chef.   (Sy, 4 years old, girl)

I love playing with toy cars, bikes, planes, watching television and also playing games on tablet.

(Fd, 6 years old, boy)

School Performance

The second most popular source of positive affect is school performance such as going to school, enjoying the various activities, and school achievements. In line with previous study by Hwang, Kim, and Tak (2013) stated that 5 years old children are happy when they experience achievements.

I feel happy at school because I can learn to write and arrange blocks there.   (Ih, 5 years old, boy)

I feel excited when I learn and read story books at school.   (Ma, 5 years old, girl)

In this study, children at age of 6 stated that they were happy with their school performance than those younger ones. This is associated with the fact that most parents residing in urban areas such as Jakarta emphasize on children's upbringing and high educational aspiration especially when they are 6 years old and close to entering primary school. Studies on parental educational aspirations reported varying demographic aspects such as ethnicity (Chowdry et al., 2010; Oketch et al., 2012; Spera et al., 2009). Furthermore, according to Spera et al. (2009), and Sy and Schulenberg (2005), when parents support and spend enough time and resources in children's learning activities, it instills the spirit of professional achievement in them (Benner & Mistry, 2007; Kirk et al., 2011; Rutchick et al., 2009; Villiger et al., 2014).

Material Issues

Children are happy when rewarded with clothes, veil, flowers, dolls, shoes, bags, new toys, money, cars, and a new house by their parents. This is accordance with the research carried out by Kim (2013) on the meanings of happiness perceived by five-year-olds through interviews and drawings with material affluence as one of their perceived happiness in daily life.

I feel happy when gifted with a new set of Lego and a miniature of Harry Potter.

(Al, 5 years old, boy)

I feel excited when gifted with a Barbie doll.　　　　　(Ny, 5 years old, girl)

Friendship

Friendship refers to the act of being recognized, accepted and involved in playing with peers, and having lots of friends.

I feel very happy when all my friends are nice to me.　　　(Ne, 6 years old, girl)

I feel happy seeing my friends and playing with them.　　　(Ft, 5 years old, girl)

Family

The family is associated with the love, attention, and care bestowed on children within their family (parents, siblings, relatives, grandparents, aunts and uncles).

I feel very happy when my brother comes home, then takes a shower, and nap with me.

(Fz, 6 years old, boy)

I feel happy whenever I see my mom happy.　　　　　(Ad, 6 years old, girl)

Recreational Need

Recreational need refers to traveling to certain tourist sites such as beaches or city parks, visiting other towns like Bandung, or resort.

I feel happy traveling.　　　　　　　　　　　(Ag, 6 years old, girl)

I feel glad and excited going for a walk.　　　　　　(Kh, 6 years old, girl)

Relph (1976) stated that places hold personal and cultural significance which reflects individual experiences and views of certain environments. Young children need attractive places where they can act freely, be protected, and have their curiosity stirred (Chawla, 1986). They feel happy in places where they are able to have self-directed experiences, fulfil their fun related-needs, and share pleasant experiences with their families.

Parties

Children look forward to celebrations such as birthday parties, and national festivals.

I feel happy celebrating my birthday.   (Az, 6 years old, boy)

None

These set of children had no knowledge of what makes them happy. Some children decided not to provide answers to positive affect. Mills (2017) stated that deciding not to answer such questions is an expression of voice, which is similar to going away and sitting under a table.

I don't know   (Hs, 6 years old, girl)
…(silent)…   (Sh, 6 years old, girl)

Spiritual Need

Spiritual need here includes conducting spiritual activities like reading Al-Qur'an and observing prayers.

I feel happy when I recite Al-Qur'an.   (Kr, 6 years old, girl)
I feel happy when I reciting Al-Qur'an and observing prayers.   (Ys, 6 years old, boy)

This study revealed, three children, as early as 5 years old, were able to interpret spiritual activities. Previous study in the areas of happiness in perspective of Muslim children, those that are 11 years and above were able to interpret spiritual activities (Abdel-Khalek & Eid, 2011; Abdel-Khalek, 2013). Children of parents that rate their family as very religious have a higher score on the Spiritual Life Size of Children (Moore et al., 2016). Based on the conceptualization of the spiritual development of Boyatzis (2012), children with more opportunities to interact in a highly religious and spiritual context, have a more nurtured and supported spiritual life.

Basic Need

Only one child out of 353 (0.3%) children considered basic need as positive affect. To her, she felt happy when having delicious food.

I am glad when I eat delicious food.   (Ky, 6 years old, girl)

Source of negative affect

Table 4, identified the top five sources of negative affect in children's daily lives based on their responses, namely material issues, none, family, illness or injury, and friendship.

Table 4. Source of Negative affects Perceived by Children

Source of negative affects	Total	Gender		Age		
		Boys	Girls	4	5	6
		f[%]	f[%]	f[%]	f[%]	f[%]
Play	4 [1.1]	3 [1.8]	1 [0.5]	-	2 [1.2]	2 [1.7]
School Performance	1 [0.3]	-	1 [0.5]	1 [1.5]	-	-
Friendship	20 [5.7]	8 [4.8]	12 [6.4]	3 [4.6]	11 [6.6]	6 [5.0]
Family	49 [13.9]	23 [13.9]	26 [13.8]	12 [18.5]	24 [14.4]	13 [10.7]
Material Issues	174 [49.3]	76 [46.1]	98 [52.1]	26 [40.0]	84 [50.3]	64 [52.9]
Illness/Injury	44 [12.5]	20 [12.1]	24 [12.8]	6 [9.2]	23 [13.8]	15 [12.4]
Morality	3 [0.8]	2 [1.2]	1 [0.5]	-	2 [1.2]	1 [0.8]
Self Esteem Need	2 [0.6]	2 [1.2]	-	1 [1.5]	-	1 [0.8]
Basic need	1 [0.3]	-	1 [0.5]	-	-	1 [0.8]
Recreation need	1 [0.3]	-	1 [0.5]	-	-	1 [0.8]
None	53 [15]	31 [18.8]	22 [11.7]	16 [24.6]	21 [12.6]	16 [13.2]
Other	1 [0.3]	-	1 [0.5]	-	-	1 [0.8]

Note. In each cell, the first number is the frequency of level chosen followed by percentage in the bracket.

Material Issues

Children reported that material issues are the most popular sources of negative affect in their daily lives such as lack of possession for certain items, inability to get any present, losing one's veil, and broken or obsolete toys. It is possible that this starts with changes in parents' perceptions of children's happiness. It is strengthened by many advertisements on social media and companies create "things that make children happy" as a promotional

medium to increase sales of their products, which therefore encourages parents to buy toys for their children (Stearns, 2019).

I feel unhappy when my robot is broken.   (Az, 5 years old, girl)

I feel upset when my doll is damaged or ugly.   (At, 6 years old, girl)

None

None here refers to statements from children that claimed that they did not experience any unhappiness. It includes response from children that do not say anything. When asked "what makes you unhappy (*sedih*) in your daily life?", a total of 53 children claimed that they never felt sad, and others just shook and bowed their head. The expression of negative emotions is severely restricted by cultural values in Javanese, as the majority ethnic group in Indonesia, (Garna, 1984). This value seems to penetrate the whole Indonesian way of life (Shiraisi, 1997). Geertz (1961) ethnographic study associated with emotional expression, found that a family in Java underscores the value "*rukun*" (harmonious interaction) where excessive emotional expression need to not expressed.

I have never felt unhappy.   (Sn, 6 years old, boy)

Family

The context of family as a negative affect refers to bad experiences such losing a family member or relative, seeing a relative fall ill, worrying of being left or uncared for or unloved by their parents, missing siblings, witnessing the death of parents, siblings or relatives.

I will be devastated when my mom dies, because she will leave me for good. Grandma has already

gone too.   (Rk, 6 years old, girl)

I am unhappy because I don't have a grandpa like my friends.   (Rd, 6 years old, boy)

Bad treatments (i.e. getting punishment) from parents or other members of the family also make children unhappy. Psychological control from parents, refers to shaming, which typically occurs in some Asian countries. According to Aunola et al. (2013) mothers' and

fathers' psychological control in daily interactions increases the negative emotions of their children.

> I am unhappy because my dad pinched my ears, while mom and grandma were mad.
>
> (Ad, 5 years old, boy)

Moreover, witnessing a divorce and miscommunication within family also makes a child unhappy.

> I feel unhappy when dad is arguing with mom.   (Nw, 4 years old, girl)

Illness/Injury

Being physically hurt made children sad.

> I feel unhappy when I fall while playing.   (Rf, 6 years old, boy)
> I am most unhappy when I am sick.   (Ad, 5 years old, girl)

Research on chronically ill children showed that they often expressed sadness over missing out on school, and having limited chance of socializing with their friends or peers, parents, and siblings (Angström-Brännström et al., 2008). Hospitalized children tend to engage in less play activities, and when they eventually do, it is characterized by repetitive and solitary themes (Haiat et al., 2003).

Friendship

Friendship can have negative affect on children when associated with lack of friends and being rejected, treated unfairly by peers, and scared of losing friends. Several studies have been carried out to analyze the negative and positive aspects of friendship (Berndt, 2004; Goswami, 2009; Holder & Coleman, 2009, 2015). The negative aspects such as conflict, distress and rejection are inclined to decrease children's well-being.

> I feel unhappy when I don't have any friends or when I quarrel with them.   (Sv, 5 years old, boy)
> I feel unhappy when I cannot visit my friends.   (Dz, 6 years old, boy)

Play

Play here means children do not have moments when they are free to carry out activities at home and school.

> I feel upset when I am told not to play, especially when it rains. (Mi, 6 years old, boy)

Morality

Feeling guilty after making a mistake or having empathy for other misfortunes, such as witnessing a friend falling down, watching emotional reality programs on TV, and listening to sad news.

> I feel unhappy whenever I watch some emotional Korean drama. I get carried away.
> (Dr, 6 years old, girl)
> I feel unhappy when someone tells me a saddening story. (Kv, 5 years old, boy)

Self-Esteem

Unfulfilled self-esteem acts as a negative source in their daily lives, with the inability to fulfill the needs of getting praised for what they have achieved, after losing a game. Instead, they receive mocking and insult for what they did or for not having a car.

> I feel really upset being insulted and mock for not having a car. (Kz, 5 years old, boy)

School performance

A child reports that she is unhappy when she fails to succeed in learning or writing assignments at school.

> I felt unhappy when my agenda book was broken due to my inability to use it for coloring at school. (Ky, 6 years old, girl)

Basic need

Children are sad when they are unable to enjoy their favorite food or drink, when they are thirsty, and hungry.

I become upset when I am not given enough food.   (Vn, 6 years old, girl)

Recreational Need

Children are unhappy when recreation or picnic to a certain destination is not granted, with the inability to fulfill the need to travel outside town.

I feel unhappy when my parents do not take me on a picnic.   (Ms, 6 years old, girl)

Others

Others here refer to responses not included in above mentioned categories such as having a nightmare.

I feel really unhappy when I have nightmares.   (Ky, 6 years old, girl)

Discussion

This study aims to describe happiness from the perspectives of preschool children in the urban area of Jakarta, Indonesia. According to findings, children aged 4 to 6 show high happiness levels, while as many as 75.1% reported that they are in the extremely happy (upturned) level. Previous studies also stated that young children are categorized as having higher levels of happiness than older children (Casas et al., 2004; Thoilliez, 2011).

This study revealed that young children tend to have similar level of happiness, however, they focus on various sources for its realization. Play and material issues are the most commonly reported source of positive and negative affect, respectively.

This study shows that play is the most reported source of positive affect among children. This is in line with previous research that Korean young children feel happy when engaging in their favorite play (Hong et al., 2015: Hwang et al., 2013). This result is inconsistent with the outcome of the studies carried out in the West, which reported that social relations with family (Casas et al., 2004; Chaplin, 2009; Thoilliez, 2011) and peers are the most important factor that affects the children happiness levels (Holder & Coleman, 2009; Holder & Klassen, 2010; McAuley & Layte, 2012). Furthermore, a semi-structured

interview carried out in Africa by Eloff (2008), on children aged 6 to 13 years, showed that relationships, recreation, and receiving material possessions from others are factors that make them happy.

These differences reflect the upbringing of children. Indonesian parents have several ways of raising children below three and the older ones. Parents tend to be emotionally supportive, lenient, and permissive with children below 3 years old, while they apply stricter rules and punishments for the older ones (Zevalkink & Riksen-Walraven, 2001). These authoritarian rules influence above 3 years old children's perceptions of their parents and families. This causes them not to perceive the family as a source of positive affect. Likewise, when asked "what makes you unhappy?", the family became the second most popular response from children.

Furthermore, the inconsistencies in the studies carried out in the West are interpreted by the fact most Indonesian mothers tend not to believe in the importance of play for the development of their children, unlike Euro-Americans (Farver & Howes, 1993; Parmar et al., 2004), thereby, preventing children from meeting their needs. Most Indonesian parents did not believe play helps prepare children for school, rather they stressed that the idea is associated with getting a head start in early academics, which is important for the cognitive development of children in their preschool years (Parmar et al., 2004). While, those at early age always look for opportunities to play, either alone or with others (Glenn et al., 2013).

Most children residing in urban areas reported material issues as sources of negative affect. They feel unhappy when they are unable to buy certain things. In the 20th century, and especially with the rise of the toy industry, parents started buying toys and the companies used the theme "things that make children happy" to attract parents to fulfill their duties or roles in ensuring happy children (Stearns, 2019). This is indeed unavoidable, because studies from cross-country studies in many continents showed that adults and parents need happiness for children (Diener & Lucas, 1999, 2004).

Children are currently more materialistic compared to those from previous generations. A survey in the UK reported that children identify life with materialism (GfK Social Research, 2007), differs from those raised in 1967 and 1997 (Kortan, 1999). In developing countries such as India, younger generations tend to be more materialistic than their older counterparts (Gupta, 2011).

The increase in the level of materialism also relates to the media with several marketers spending money on advertisements intended for children (McNeal, 1999). Advertisements tend to adversely affect children with unrealistic obsessions (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2003). This exposure makes them susceptible to the external environment (Achenreiner, 1997). This is stated in a report regarding a girl in Jakarta that felt unhappy due to a lack of clothes with cartoon characters and themes.

Previous studies on materialism stated that this tendency positively correlates with dissatisfaction and unhappiness in children (Ahuvia & Wong, 1995; Belk, 1984; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2003; Chaplin & John, 2007; John, 1999; Vandana & Lenka, 2014). This is made worse because it affects parent–children relationships by creating conflicts in the family (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2003; Roper & Shah, 2007). Children feel discontent when parents do not give them the things they desire (Goldberg & Gorn, 1978).

Conclusion

This study showed that Indonesian children living in the urban area of Jakarta reported high levels of happiness. However further analyses of the data showed that they differ in the evaluation of positive and negative affect. In terms of positive affect, play is commonly reported by children, while material issues are stated in terms of negative affect.

Implications and recommendation for future research

This study provided ways of thinking on how to explore happiness in children and thoughts on what to notice when looking for clues. The findings help parents, social workers, and education professionals to understand urban children and promote happiness by focusing on play activity. Furthermore, material issues are becoming the most mentioned sources of negative affect, therefore, it needs to be given more attention by parents, teachers, and other educators. One possible effort is by keeping them away from media, which according to some experts, highly correlate to their materialism.

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