

# THE EXPLORATION into HAPPINESS of JAVANESE CHILDREN AGED 4-6 YEARS OLD

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## Abstract

Children's happiness defined as the average satisfaction at certain period with certain frequencies of positive and negative affect. One of the most obvious questions in the literature over the last few years is the need for research on children happiness (Chaplin, 2009). Children happiness is unique due to different cognitive abilities and experiences. This current study responds to Chaplin (2009) and Thoillez (2011) impetus to explore more about children perspective of happiness.

The study conduct a qualitative to describes Javanese children's happiness form perspective of children themselves. This research involves 183 Javanese children.

This study clearly shows that Javanese children aged 4 – 6 have higher levels of life satisfaction. However, it is also the fact that some other children lie in the second to the sixth levels. This study can help parent and teacher or other educator who have concern on children's development to build plan in promoting children's happiness by focuses more on source of children's happiness at different age and gender. Limitations and implications especially for education are included.

**Keywords:** Javanese; children; happiness.

## Introduction

Based on a survey in Germany, Heady (2008) states that the ultimate goal of an individual's life is to attain happiness. His opinion is widely supported by many communities in Germany. It is then inferred that happiness plays an important role in an individual's life. Specifically, happiness is defined as a positive emotional state felt by an individual personally or subjectively (Snyder & Lopez, 2007). Veenhoven (in Abdel-Khalek, 2006) mentions that happiness is life satisfaction, and he defines it as a level of evaluation an individual give to him/her own life. This also applies to children. Happiness is of utmost importance in children's life. They have the right to bright future. They deserve to grow up happily. They are entitled to happy childhood. And cross-cultural surveys in many continents reveal that adults and parents want happiness for children (Diener & Lucas, 1999, 2004).

Positive mind and emotion are the most obvious components for happiness. Seligman (1991, 1995, 2002) argues that positive mood affects thought pattern among children, that happy children are more creative, tolerant, and constructive (Carter, 2005). Happiness in an individual's life represents an ability to grow and regulate and express feelings (Kochanska, Coy, & Murray,

2001; Gottman, 2002). That is good, since young children are expected to be able to develop coping strategies and regulate emotions (Kochanska, Murray, & Harlan, 2000).

Earlier studies on happiness are carried out in the western world. The eastern part of the world has not witness sufficient number of research on this. The concept of happiness is very much influenced by socio-cultural factors (family values). Earlier studies in five different countries (Casas, Figuer, Gonza' lez, & Coenders, 2004), reveal significant correlations between happiness in youth and the values their parents believe in.

This research involves children of Javanese. It is assumed that there are different levels of life satisfaction due to the fact that the parent's value on eastern is associated with children's value on happiness. Proved by by Casas, Figuer, Gonza' lez, and Coenders (2004), founded significant correlations between parents' and adolescents' values. This parent's value may derived from their parents in past. As mentioned by Bronfenbrenner (1979) that mother's own upbringing gave an effects on her own parenting practices.

Based on above literature reviews, the following research question and hypothesis is formulated: What are Javanese children's self-report on life satisfaction from their perspective?

### **Children Happiness**

Psychologists defines happiness as equivalent as psychological well-being or subjective well-being (Argyle, 1987; Eysenck, 1990). The exact definition of happiness itself is still debated by experts (Diener, 2009; Snyder & Lopez, 2007). Argyle et al. (1989) defines happiness as the average satisfaction at certain period with certain frequencies of positive and negative effects.

The consideration to conduct more research on the meaning of happiness that is deemed the same as subjective well-being was first proposed by Diener (1984, 1994), who has significantly revised studies conducted to measure subjective well-being and identify its causes and also its theoretical foundation. The subjective well-being is understood as "*believe that people get important things they need, including the positive effect of this believe*", (Kraut 1979, page. 178).

Based on previous theoretical framework, children's happiness that is known as subjective well-being needs to be understood as the average satisfaction at certain period with certain frequencies of positive and negative affect. Javanese children (aged 4-6 years old) reported of how happy they are in general in their everyday lives.

### **Research Method**

#### **Participant**

All participants are living in Java islands. This research involves 183 Javanese children. The proportion of the population number of tribes in Indonesia according to the Population Census in 2015 as follows:

**Table. 1 Number of ethnics in major society**

Ethnics	Population (million)	Percentage	Main area
Javanese	86.012	41.7	Yogyakarta; JawaTengah
Sundanese	31.765	15.4	Jawa Barat

Available at <http://www.datastatistik-indonesia.com>

Based on previous tables, researcher determined the population is taken from the first largest ethnic group is assumed to represent the children of Indonesia and describe the existing diversity. The study draws sample from the Javanese ethnic groups. Javanese who are origin people and living in their own place. Javanese as native are from Yogyakarta.

#### **A short brief of Javanese**

Most of Javanese as native (origin) people are living in Java Island, especially in Yogyakarta and Central Java. People who are Javanese believe that the importance of family in society is reflected in the proverb: *mangan ora mangan waton kumpul* (even if there is no food to eat, being together is the most important thing). This value might lead people to put on non-material things over everything in life (Geertz, 1961).

### **Instrument**

#### **Face scale**

Children's overall happiness is usually measured using one item scales such as the Facial Scale (Holder, Coleman, & Wallace, 2010). It has been widely used due to its validity and reliability (Abdel-Khalek, 2006).

One of the underlying reasons for the use of face scale is that facial expressions develop signals with certain emotional meanings (Ekman, et.al 1972; Lenti, Giacobbe, & Pegna, 1997). Emotional signals indicate a set of mental categories that are understood as a happy face or a sad face, and the like (Denham, et.al 1994; Markham, & Adams, 1992).

The face scale is a scale used by Andrews and Withey (1976) to measure one's perception on happiness. In this research, the face scale will be modified to look more real, in order to anticipate the fact the young children can only identify three labels of emotions. The face scale is very suitable for children aged 3 as they are already able to recognize certain emotional expressions that are schematically represented, compared to realistic pictures. Further, children aged 3 are best at labeling both happiness and sadness (MacDonald, Kirkpatrick, & Sullivan, 1996).

With the face scale, children are asked to describe the level of their happiness. Using the report of other people who know and understand children is a reliable and valid way to judge happiness or well-being (Lepper, 1998), or even personality (Funder, 1991).

This scale uses the 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) (Fig.10). Researchers ask children to value their happiness as "most of the time".

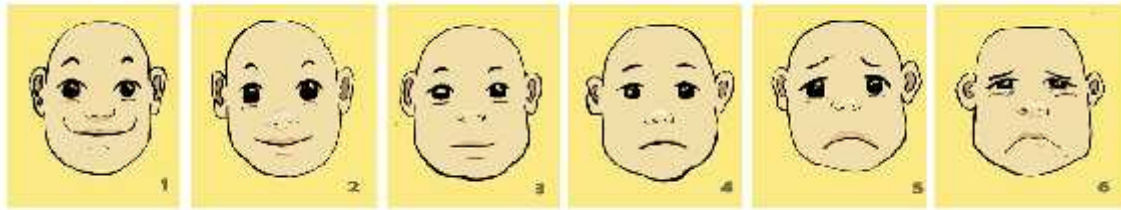


Figure 3. A Modified Face scale.

This face scale is adopted from Andrews and Withey (1976). It is adjusted to the age of current participants (4-6 years old). This is necessary as the subjects for their research were children aged 9 – 12. Adjustments are made in the form of reducing the number of pictures (from 7 to 6). This is in line with an earlier clinical study that also uses the face scale to identify pain in children. The Faces Pain Rating Scale by Wong-Baker is the dominant method nowadays to measure pain intensity in children. This scale is depicted in Fig. 1. Six faces are shown to 3 year olds or older; 0) is very happy because he is not hurt at all; 1) hurts just 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 respondent, as a graphical representation of emotions that can be recognized by children (MacDonald, et.al. 1996). Based on the boxplot and Shapiro-Wilk test, the dependent variable “life satisfaction” (which is measured by face scale) for all particular subset of individuals, was not normally distributed. The sig. value of the Shapiro-Wilk test is lower than 0.05, the data is significantly deviate from a normal distribution. However, the test-retest reliability of the face scale was acceptable with Intraclass correlations ( $ICC_{2,1}$ ) ranging from 0.659-0.795. It displays the degree to which the response are consistent or having stability over time.

## Result

That table below illustrates how life satisfaction varies in everyday life, from very happy down to very unhappy. Based on that table, 76.5% or 140 of 183 Javanese children say that they are in level 1 (very upturned), meaning they are very happy. As many as 33 children (18%) state that they are in level 2, meaning they are happy despite feeling sad at times.

Three of 183 children (1.6%) say they are at level 3. One of 183 children (0.5%) state they are at level 4. Six of 183 children (3.3%) mention they are at level 6 (very downturned) or feel very unhappy and they cry a lot.

Table.2 Children’s life satisfaction (CLS)

Level of CLS	Children’s report
	n=183
	f(%)
1	140 (76.5)
2	33 (18.0)
3	3 (1.6)

4	1 (.5)
5	-
6	6 (3.3)

## Discussion

One of the most important things to underline in the theory of education is that “*the final purpose of education should be happiness*” (Naval & Altarejos, 2000). Therefore, it can be inferred that education will not directly make individuals happy, but it should provide an environment that enables individuals to gain happiness.

It should be noted once again the importance of the findings in this research in terms of research in children’s happiness in Java, Indonesia. The findings in this research enrich psychological theories on child development, especially on self-concept and happiness. Those findings support the theory of the early social construction of the self-concept, and in turn, affect the model of autobiographical memory. Autobiographical recall which develops when children at 3 to 8 years consists of memories that connect children and their past. At the same time, these memories tell children stories of themselves (Nelson, 1993).

In term of children’s level of happiness, most Javanese children are at the level of very happy (very upturned). In line with western study that young children has higher levels of happiness (Park and Peterson, 2006; Thoilliez, 2011). However, it is also the fact that some other children lie in the second to the sixth levels. They still differ in the way they evaluate life satisfaction. Indonesian children might focus on different source to reach the same level of happiness.

On life satisfaction, Javanese children (76.5%) of them say they are at the level of very happy (very upturned). As it is noted, that children from the age of 4 years has started to learn the values prevailing in the family (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993). Specifically, In this case Javanese children learn about values such as *ikhlas*, *sabar*, and *narima* in daily life (Geertz, 1976, p.241). This value might influence children’s emotional regulation which caused able to control emotions even for example of being mistreatment of family or friends or even other people.

## Conclusion

This study clearly shows that Javanese children aged 4 – 6 have higher levels of happiness. Most Javanese children state that they are very happy, but further analyses of the data suggest that they still differ in the way they evaluate life satisfaction. Even though the current result is in line with western study that young children has higher levels of happiness, Javanese children might focus on different source to reach the same level of happiness, with gender and ethnic difference in those result.

## Recommendation for further study

The analysis and results reported in this study have offered ways of thinking about how happiness might be explored with children and thoughts on what to notice when looking for clues about children’s happiness.

The results of this study provide an understanding about the happiness of children. However the discussion on children happiness and developmental issues is not yet comprehensive. This is due to the limited age range of the children involved. As children progress through the life cycle,

their perspectives might change. What is of concern and what is of greatest importance may change over time. It should be a challenge for further research to explore the issue of developmental changes in the wider age range. As this study uses interviews to explore the children's sources of positive and negative affection have the significant impact that researchers can simultaneously observe changes in children's ability to express their emotions with age, as it has been submitted by Shipman et al, (2003).

In spite of the findings from current research, a conceptual description of sources of children happiness still blurs. This research only focus on how happy the children are instead of what make the children happy and sad are. It would be beneficial that source that lead to children's happiness is explored through further research.

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