

Happiness of Thai Youths in Kanchanaburi Province

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Abstract

Nowadays, the search for happiness and its determinants is important to be investigated among youths, which is a period of transition from childhood to adulthood, in the Thai context. This study aims to assess the level of happiness and to investigate the determinants of happiness among Thai youths in Kanchanaburi province. External and internal factors of individuals are expected to influence youths' happiness. The results showed that the average level of youths' happiness is above the neutral feeling or "not unhappy or happy." In addition, feeling not poor and having a very good perceived social environment have strongly and positively influenced the level of youths' happiness. This study suggests that youth-related policies should consider social equality and the social participation of youth in order to improve their quality of life.

Keywords: *Thai Youth, Happiness, Determinants*

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ความสุขของวัยรุ่นไทยในจังหวัดกาญจนบุรี

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บทคัดย่อ

การค้นหาระดับความสุขและตัวกำหนดที่มีผลต่อความสุขมีความสำคัญมากในปัจจุบัน โดยเฉพาะความสุขของวัยรุ่นอันเป็นวัยเปลี่ยนผ่านจากความเป็นเด็กสู่ความเป็นผู้ใหญ่ในบริบทของไทย การศึกษาครั้งนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อวัดระดับความสุขของวัยรุ่นและค้นหาตัวกำหนดที่มีผลต่อความสุขของวัยรุ่นในจังหวัดกาญจนบุรี โดยคาดว่าปัจจัยทั้งภายนอกและภายในตัวบุคคลมีอิทธิพลต่อความสุขของวัยรุ่น ผลการศึกษาพบว่าระดับความสุขของวัยรุ่นโดยเฉลี่ยจะสูงกว่าระดับความสุขปานกลาง หรือระดับที่ “ไม่สุขไม่ทุกข์” และพบว่าความรู้สึกลึกซึ้งและการรับรู้สิ่งแวดล้อมทางสังคมในระดับดีมากมีอิทธิพลต่อระดับความสุขของวัยรุ่นในเชิงบวกเป็นอย่างมาก ซึ่งการศึกษาครั้งนี้ได้เสนอให้นโยบายที่เกี่ยวกับวัยรุ่นพิจารณาในเรื่องของการเท่าเทียมกันทางสังคมและการมีส่วนร่วมทางสังคมของวัยรุ่นในอันที่จะพัฒนาคุณภาพชีวิตของวัยรุ่นต่อไป

คำสำคัญ: วัยรุ่นไทย ความสุข ตัวกำหนด

Introduction

There has been a dramatic increase in research on happiness since the 1980s on the part of researchers in various disciplines. Likewise in science, each discipline has developed its special view of happiness: psychologists see it as a matter of personality, biologists it as the result of chemical processes, philosophers see happiness mostly in a moral context, and sociologists think of it as a social condition. Remarkable for the sociological view is that it counters common understanding. Where happiness is usually defined as a purely individual or psychological phenomenon, sociologists insist that an individual state like happiness is based on social determinants.

Researchers supporting the sociological view agree that feelings of happiness are affected by external and internal factors. External factors cover the social environment, health status, family situation, and economic status (Gough and Doyal, 1991), while internal factors include peace of mind and positive attitude towards life. Empirically, the external factors have been well-established as determinants of happiness in most research, but the internal factors have not. Most popular investigation concerns the relationship between income and level of happiness. It has long been suggested in the social sciences that subjective well-being depends on relative income rather than absolute income. Economists have also discussed the relative income hypothesis, suggesting that what matters more for individuals in a rich country is their relative wealth as opposed to their absolute wealth (Diener, et al., 1993; Oswald, 1997).

Despite extensive research with adults, there have been only a limited number of studies of happiness among youths. Possible reasons for this neglect include a lack of well-validated, age-appropriate measures for youths' happiness. It has been assumed that the young population has difficulty in evaluating their happiness because they are unable to integrate evaluative information from various life domains (Huebner, et al., 2005). Youth is often considered as a period of transition from childhood to adulthood, a period which involves a number of important changes. Personality and social formation taking shape in this period can have profound impacts, lasting throughout the individual's life. On the other hand, since youths are naturally a very dynamic group of people, they can have

positive or negative impacts on the society and the world surrounding them as much as the society and the world can have on them (Santrock, 1996).

Research on the socio-cultural and contextual influence on children's development and previous research on cultural differences among adults raise questions about the generalizability of happiness findings from Western cultures to various non-Western socio-cultural groups. Collectivistic Asian cultures place high value on filial piety, parental control, humility, and harmony with others. In contrast, individualistic Western culture places more emphasis on the individual's interests and personal feelings. The self is considered as an independent entity in individualistic cultures, but an interdependent one in collectivistic cultures (Park, 2005).

Thailand is an interesting setting in which to explore youths' happiness determinants. The predominance of Buddhism is considered an important aspect of the Thai setting, which influences on Thai people's attitudes, thoughts, and way of life. Buddhism teaches that avoiding extreme ways of life leads to spiritual happiness (Podhisita, 1985). Concerning the Buddhist way of life in Thai society, Thai youths are growing up in a period of economic development that has been stimulated by the Thai government for many decades. Capitalism and a market economy are considered having influence on Thai youths' way of life and thinking. The situation in Thailand provides a good opportunity to study the influence of both external and internal factors on the level of happiness among Thai youths.

To our knowledge, there has been little research on these issues in developing countries. Using a sample of Thai youth, this study undertakes two research questions: (1) How do Thai youths feel about their lives?, and (2) What are the determinants influencing their level of happiness? We focus on both external and internal factors.

Determinants of Youths' Happiness

Happiness is conceived as subjective well-being, more precisely as the overall enjoyment of life. There is a long standing discussion about the measurability of this phenomenon. Recently, after decades of validation research,

it can be concluded that happiness can be measured by self-report. The answers given by individuals have been found to be valid. Survey data from different populations have been replicated and re-analyzed with respect to their theoretical significance.

The effect of age on psychological well-being is found to be inconsistent. However, it is clear that the young and the old seem to be happier than the middle aged, controlling for health and other factors (Frey and Slutzer, 2002). Self-report studies of happiness indicate that married couples are happier than the unmarried (Coombs, 1991). Unemployment seems to make young people unhappy. In an Australian survey, the highest proportion of young people who reported that they felt “mostly dissatisfied,” “unhappy,” or “terrible” when considering the quality of their lives were the unemployed (Hillman and McMillan, 2005).

Many researchers have proposed the idea that subjective well-being and happiness refer to achieving and successful handling of personal and divergent goals imposed by authority, attaining socially defined values, adapting to one’s social environment, satisfaction of everyday needs, participating in interesting activities, positive evaluation of daily events, meaningful use of time, good health, and accepting oneself (Grob, et al., 1999; Havighurst, 1972). Heady and colleagues (1984) have suggested that a positive sense of well-being appeared to depend on a wider range of personality variables—extraversion and optimism as well as personal competence and a supportive social network.

Beyond the characteristics of the young population, there are two main factors considered to influence their happiness: external and internal factors. External factors comprise the environment in which happiness is applied, while internal factors include a person’s experience and social comparison, both of which may contribute, either independently and interactively, to a person’s sense of happiness.

External Factors Contributing to Happiness

Many researches have attempted to identify the external factors of happiness. Physical health, the social environment and physical and economic

security, are also proposed as external factors of happiness (Gough and Doyal, 1991). Many studies of youth suggest that the areas of greatest importance are success in school and sport activities and involvement with peers in age-relevant social activities (Karweit and Hansell, 1983). Significant positive associations have been found between youths' reports on their subjective well-being and their perceptions of neighborhood and school belongingness (Chipuer, 2001). We expect that youths' sense of belongingness to their neighborhoods and schools will be associated with their happiness.

With regard to the relationship between happiness and income, Diener and colleagues (1993) have found a strong and positive relationship between the wealth of a nation and average subjective well-being. Gross national product per capita was found to correlate 0.50 with life satisfaction across 39 countries. People in poor countries show average subjective well-being scores close to the neutral point. Wealthier countries have a higher rating on individualism and their citizens enjoy higher subjective well-being. Economic deprivation has been linked to poor mental health through the chronic stress that deprivation creates. Clear evidence exists that poor youths experience high levels of depression (Gibbs, 1986), low levels of self-confidence (Langner, et al., 1970), and social adaptation relative to non-poor children (Kellam, et al., 1977). We expect that absolute poverty would negatively influence on youths' happiness.

Internal Factors Contributing to Happiness

Internal factors are considered to strongly influence individual happiness. Several studies have found that the personality and self-esteem strongly affect the young population. It was found that an extraverted personality predisposed young people to favourable life events, which in turn led to a high level of positive well-being and to increases in extraversion (Headey, et al., 1985). Although there is an assumption that the influence of personality on happiness could be attributed to short-term mood states that affect responses to personality measures (Schwarz and Clore, 1983), Costa and McCrae (1980) conclude that the long-term stability of extraversion of young people contributes to happiness. Considering economic concern, an economic comparison has been made by many studies

that have strongly influenced on happiness rather than an absolute economic. Differences in the relationship between happiness and the economic situation emerged: teenagers from Eastern and Central Europe, whose economies were much weaker than those of Western countries, felt in general worse than those from Western countries (Grob, 1998). However, it has been found that an increase in income does not necessarily lead to a higher level of happiness. For instance, social comparison, particularly with regard to relative income, has not yet been tested as a predictor of happiness (Layard, 2005). Comparison can influence happiness levels. When people engaged in downward comparisons (comparing themselves with other people that less well off), they often feel better about themselves compared to engaging in upward comparison (comparing themselves with other people that better off). The concept of comparison groups directly applies to the young population in that there will always be someone that is doing better, similar to, or worse off than oneself, and choosing whom to compare oneself to can influence happiness.

Data and Methods

Data

This study uses data from the “Geographical Integrated Research on Poverty Prevention in The Western Thailand: Happiness Indicator,” or “Happiness Indicator Survey,” conducted in Kanchanaburi province, in 2005 by the Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University. This survey was designed to measure happiness indicators and components corresponding to the goal of the 10th National Economic and Development Plan, which considers “happiness” as a goal of national development. The following components were included in the instrument: population and family, education, working, income, health, social capital, good governance, culture, emotion, and happiness. The questionnaire is based on 13 focus group discussions of people in the study site, expert recommendations, and literature reviews. A stratified two-stage sampling design by the National Statistical Office was used to generate a representative sample of the provincial population aged 15 and over. Four hundred and thirty-three members of this population were selected for this study, and all respondents in the sample are Buddhists.

Kanchanaburi is a province in the central region of Thailand, which is diversified in social, economic, and ecological features. It has a mixed economy, including both industrial and agricultural sectors. Kanchanaburi is close and easy to reach to Bangkok.

Measures

Dependent Variable: Happiness. The dependent variable “happiness” is measured by the level of happiness of individuals. Happiness in this study refers to people’s subjective assessment of their feeling at the time of the survey, deriving from the question, “At present, how are you feeling?” The respondent can reply in the range of an eleven-point scale (0-10) to rate their feeling, with 0 being the “unhappiest,” 5 being “not unhappy or happy,” and 10 being “happiest.”

Independent Variables

External Factors

External factors cover illness within 1 month, currently exercising, perceived social environment, amount of household pollution, number of household possessions, and religious practice in 1 year. We include health status and health behavior in the analysis. Illness within 1 month before the interview used as a measurement for youths’ health status, while currently exercising is used as the health behavior determinant in order to examine whether currently exercising has affected the youths’ happiness.

Perceived social environment is employed as one of the determinants of the level of youths’ happiness. We measured perceived social environment based on the individual’s feelings with regard to their social environment, neighbors, and their property. The respondent was asked a number of questions related to his or her perception of his or her social environment: (1) how well they knew their neighbors, (2) how much they trusted other people, (3) how their neighbors would react if they needed help, and (4) how safe they felt in terms of life and property. This determinant can be categorized into “very good,” “good,” and “poor.”

Amount of household pollution is derived from household pollution variables, whether the household faces a certain amount of pollutions, for example, noise, smoke, odors, dust, water, and garbage pollution. Our study uses the number of household possessions as one of the predictors of the level of happiness, which are derived from the four dummy variables: telephones, washing machines, air conditioners, and cars/van/pickups. This variable has 0 to 4 items, which is an absolute household poverty that we expected to affect the level of happiness.

Religious practices are also used for predicting happiness. We hypothesized that those that practiced religion were happier than those that did not. This study uses a number of questions related to Buddhist religious practices in the question “During 1 year, have you ever...” in the activities as follows: (1) praying, (2) offering food to a monk, (3) offering stuff to a monk, and (4) meditation. If the respondent answers “yes” for at least one activity, this indicated that they have engaged in this activity.

Internal Factor

A feeling of relative poverty, poverty comparison with others, is the internal factor that relates to happiness. The hypothesis is that those that did not feel poor were more likely to be happier than those that felt poorer than others. The respondents were asked, “Do you feel poor compared to your neighbors?” Three answers were “feeling poorer than neighbors,” “feeling just as poor as neighbors,” and “not feeling poor.”

Control Variables

Demographic Factors

The present study uses age, gender, marital status, working and studying status, living arrangement, household size, and residential area as control variables. We hypothesized that different characteristics of people exhibit differences in the level of happiness. This study assigned each youth to 1 to 4 mutually exclusive types of living arrangements: living with their spouse, living with parents (known as nuclear family), living with parents and others (known

as extended family), and living with non-parent adults. We do not include living alone because very few cases ($n = 3$) occurred.

Method of Analysis

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) and multiple classification analysis (MCA) were employed in order to examine the relationship between independent and control variables and the continuous dependent variable. The dependent variable is the level of youths' happiness, which is continuous. The independent variables include external factors (illness, currently exercising, perceived social environment, amount of household pollution, number of household possessions, and religious practice) and internal factor of relative poverty (feeling of poverty). The control variables cover demographic factors (age, gender, marital status, working and studying status, living arrangement, household size, and residential area).

Results

In Table 1, the mean happiness of the population aged 15-24 was 5.6, which was a little above the feeling of neutral (5). The highest mean happiness was among those whose household owned four household possessions, while the lowest mean happiness was among those that had not practiced religious within 1 year.

Fifty-two percent of the youths were aged 15-19 and 53% of the youths were females. About 68% of the youths were single, while only 2% were widowed, divorced, or separated. Nearly half of youths were working and 30% of the youths were still in school or college. Nearly half of the youths were living with parents (45.3%) and 32.8% of the youths were living with parents and others, i.e. in an extended household. About 15% of the youths had their own family, while 7.2% of the youths were living with non-parent adults. Most of the youths were living in a small household size (70%), which was less than five persons per household, and 70% of the youths were residing in a rural area.

Regarding the independent variables, about 13.6% of them had had an illness within 1 month before being interviewed, and 46% of the youths had exercised recently. Most of the youths reported perceived social environment at

the “good” level (64.2%). Nearly half of the samples had no pollution in their household and 4.8% of the youths acknowledged 4 types of pollution and over.

About 37% of the youths’ households owned one household possession and also 37% of the youths’ households had no household possessions, such as telephones, washing machines, air conditioners, or cars/van/pickups. Eighty-three percent of the youths had practiced religion by themselves. About 44.8% of the youths reported that they were not poor compared with their neighbors, while 19.4% of the youths thought that they were poorer than their neighbors.

Table 1: Percentage distribution of independent and control variables, mean happiness, and standard deviation of youth, Kanchanaburi province, 2005 (N = 433)

Independent Variables	Percent	Mean Happiness	S.D.
Demographic factors			
Age			
15-19	52.4	5.8	2.3
20-24	47.6	5.5	2.4
Gender			
Male	46.7	5.7	2.5
Female	53.3	5.6	2.2
Marital status			
Single	68.1	5.7	2.5
Married	29.6	5.7	1.9
Widowed/Divorced/Separated	2.3	4.7	1.9
Working and studying status			
Not working and studying	17.3	4.6	3.0
Working	47.1	5.6	2.2
Studying	30.5	6.2	2.0
Working and studying	5.1	6.4	2.2
Living arrangement			
Living with their spouse	14.8	5.7	1.8
Living with parents	45.3	5.7	2.7
Living with parents and others	32.8	5.6	2.2
Living with non-parent adults	7.2	5.2	2.2

Table 1: Percentage distribution of independent and control variables, mean happiness, and standard deviation of youth, Kanchanaburi province, 2005 (N = 433) (continued)

Independent Variables	Percent	Mean Happiness	S.D.
Household size			
Less than 5	69.5	5.7	2.3
5 and over	30.5	5.6	2.5
Residential area			
Urban	29.6	5.8	2.4
Rural	70.4	5.6	2.4
External factors			
Illness within 1 month			
No	86.4	5.7	2.4
Yes	13.6	5.4	2.3
Currently exercising			
No	53.3	5.3	2.5
Yes	46.7	6.1	2.1
Perceived social environment			
Poor	13.9	6.3	2.1
Good	64.2	6.2	1.6
Very good	21.9	6.4	1.5
Amount of household pollution			
None	48.0	5.7	2.4
One type of pollution	26.3	5.7	2.1
Two types of pollution	15.2	5.5	2.7
Three types of pollution	5.5	5.4	2.6
Four types of pollution or more	4.8	5.3	2.6
Number of household possessions			
None	37.0	5.2	2.5
1 item	37.4	5.9	2.0
2 items	15.0	5.6	2.8
3 items	8.3	6.4	2.4
4 items	2.3	6.6	2.3

Table 1: Percentage distribution of independent and control variables, mean happiness, and standard deviation of youth, Kanchanaburi province, 2005 (N = 433) (continued)

Independent Variables	Percent	Mean Happiness	S.D.
Religious practices within 1 year			
Have practiced	82.7	6.2	1.6
Never practiced	17.3	4.0	3.4
Feeling of relative poverty			
Poorer than neighbors	19.4	5.3	1.8
As poor as neighbors	35.8	6.1	1.5
Not poor	44.8	6.5	1.6
Total	100.0	5.6	2.4

Table 2 proposes the frequency of happiness among 433 youths in Kanchanaburi province. It was found that most of the youths (33%) reported not unhappy or happy (scale 5). About 3% reported they were happiest, while 10% of youths reported unhappiest, and no one in the sample answered on scale 1.

Table 2: Level of youths' happiness in Kanchanaburi province, 2005 (N = 433)

Level of Youths' Happiness	n	Percentage
Unhappiest (0)	41	9.5
1	0	0.0
2	3	0.7
3	6	1.4
4	19	4.4
Not unhappy or happy (5)	142	32.8
6	54	12.5
7	78	18.0
8	58	13.4
9	20	4.6
Happiest (10)	12	2.8

Considering the pattern of happiness between male and female youths (Figure 1), it was found that most of them had a level of happiness slightly above the feeling of neutral (5). The level of happiness was quite similar among the younger youths between males and females, while the pattern of happiness quite fluctuated among older male youths (20-24 years). Thus, test of the interaction between age and male were examined.

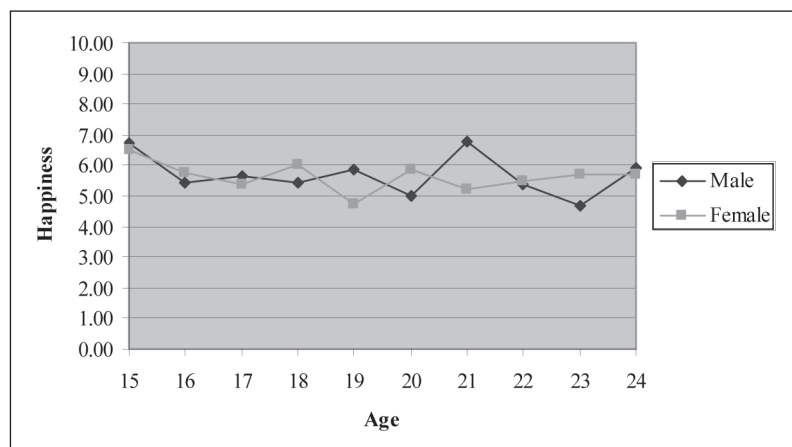


Figure 1: Mean happiness across gender and age, Kanchanaburi province, 2005 (N = 433)

Table 3 shows an analysis of the variance between independent variables, control variables, and dependent variable, while Table 4 shows the multiple classification analysis of the external factors influencing youths' happiness, in order to examine which external factors affected on the level of youths' happiness. There are three models to analysis: the first model includes only external factors, the second model includes only internal factor, and the third model includes both external and internal factors. All models are controlled with control variables, which are demographic factors.

Through the analysis of variance, Table 3, it was found that differences in working and studying status, currently exercising, perceived social environment, number of household possessions, religious practice, and feeling of relative poverty correspond to different levels of youths' happiness in all three models. The independent variables, both external and internal factors, can explain the youths' happiness level at the significant level of 0.00, while the control variables can explain the youths' happiness level at the significant level of 0.05. In addition, both independent and control variables can explain the youths' happiness level at the significant level of 0.00

Table 3: Analysis of variance between independent variables, control variables, and dependent variable of Thai youths' happiness, Kanchanaburi province, 2005 (N = 433)

Sources of Variation	Model 1 (External Factors)				Model 2 (Internal Factor)				Model 3 (External and internal Factors)			
	Hierarchical Method				Hierarchical Method				Hierarchical Method			
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
Co-variables												
(Combined)	43.2	6	7.2	2.3*	43.2	6	7.2	2.0*	43.2	6	7.2	2.6*
Interaction (Age x Male)	2.8	1	2.8	.9	2.8	1	2.8	.8	2.8	1	2.8	1.0
Marital status	.2	1	.2	.1	.21	1	.2	.1	.2	1	.2	.1
Working and studying status	28.2	1	28.2	8.9***	28.2	1	28.2	8.0**	28.2	1	28.2	10.2***
Living arrangement	24.9	1	4.9	1.5	4.9	1	4.9	1.4	4.9	1	4.9	1.8
Household size	.3	1	.3	.1	.25	1	.25	.1	.3	1	.3	.1
Residential area	6.8	1	6.8	2.1	6.8	1	6.8	1.9	6.8	1	6.8	2.4
Main Effects	1067.4	13	82.1	25.8***					1236.8	15	82.5	29.6***
Illness within 1 month	3.9	1	3.9	1.2					3.9	1	3.9	1.4
Currently exercising	75.9	1	75.9	23.9***					75.9	1	75.9	27.3***
Perceived social environment	840.4	2	420.2	132.2***					840.4	2	420.2	151.1***
Amount of household pollution	1.7	4	.4	.13					1.7	4	.4	.15
Number of household possessions	35.2	4	8.8	2.8*					35.2	4	8.8	3.2**
Religious practice in 1 year	110.2	1	110.2	34.7***					110.2	1	110.2	39.6***
Feeling of relative poverty					874.0	2	437.0	123.0***	169.5	2	84.7	30.5***
Main Effects												
Model	1110.6	19	58.5	18.4***	917.2	8	114.7	32.3***	1280.0	21	61.0	21.9***
Residual	1312.7	413	3.2		1506.1	424	3.6		1143.2	411	2.8	
Total	2423.2	432	5.6		2423.2	432	5.6		2423.2	432	5.6	

Note: *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

By multiple classification analysis, Table 4 proposes three models to explain the relationship between independent variables and level of youths' happiness. In the first model, only external factors, it was found that youth that currently exercised had a higher level of happiness (.1) than those that had not (-.1). Youth that had a very good perceived social environment were happiest (.7) and those that had a poor perceived social environment were unhappiest (-2.8). Youth in households which had a higher number of household possessions had a higher level of happiness. Nevertheless, youth in households which has the highest number of household possessions, 4 items, had a lower level of happiness than those that resided in households which had 3 items of household possessions. Youth that had practiced religion in one year had a higher level of happiness (.3) than those that had never practiced religious in the year before being interviewed. Among the external factors, perceived social environment had the strongest power to explain the level of youths' happiness (Beta = .5).

In the second model, only internal factor, a feeling of relative poverty strongly influenced youths' happiness. Youth that felt that they were not poor when compared with their neighbors had the highest level of happiness (.9), while youth that felt that they were poorer than their neighbors had the lowest level of happiness (-2.9).

In the last model, both external and internal factors are considered. The relationship of independent variables and dependent variable remained the same as in the previous models. Considering all independent variables, perceived social environment had the strongest power to explain the level of youths' happiness (Beta = .4), followed by feeling of relative poverty, religious practice in one year, number of household possessions, and currently exercising, respectively. The independent variables in the model, both external and internal factors, influenced the level of youths' happiness at about 70 percent (Multiple R = .7). It can be concluded that perceived social environment and feeling of relative poverty were the factors that were most influential on the level of youths' happiness.

Table 4: Multiple classification analysis of the determinants influencing Thai youths' happiness in Kanchanaburi province, 2005 (N = 433)

Variables and Category	N	Model 1 (External Factors)				Model 2 (External Factors)				Model 3 (External & Internal Factors)			
		Predicted mean		Deviation		Predicted mean		Deviation		Predicted mean		Deviation	
		Unadj.	Adj.	Unadj.	Adj.	Unadj.	Adj.	Unadj.	Adj.	Unadj.	Adj.	Unadj.	Adj.
Illness within 1 month		Eta = .1, Beta = .0											
No	374	5.7	5.7	.1	.0					5.7	5.7	.1	.0
Yes	59	5.4	5.4	-.3	-.3					5.4	5.5	-.3	-.2
Currently exercising		Eta = .2, Beta = .0											
No	231	5.3	5.6	-0.4	-.1					5.3	5.6	-.4	-.0
Yes	202	6.1	5.7	0.5	.1					6.1	5.7	.5	.0
Perceived social environment		Eta = .6, Beta = .5											
Poor	60	2.0	2.9	-3.6	-2.8					2.0	3.6	-3.6	-2.1
Good	278	6.2	6.0	.5	.4					6.2	5.9	.5	.3
Very good	95	6.4	6.4	.8	.7					6.4	6.1	.8	.5
Amount of household pollution		Eta = .0, Beta = .0											
None	208	5.7	5.7	.0	.1					5.7	5.7	.0	.1
One type of pollution	114	5.7	5.6	.1	-.1					5.7	5.5	.1	-.1
Two types of pollution	66	5.5	5.6	-.2	-.1					5.5	5.6	-.2	-.0

Table 4: Multiple classification analysis of the determinants influencing Thai youths' happiness in Kanchanaburi province, 2005
(N = 433) (continued)

Variables and Category	N	Model 1 (External Factors)				Model 2 (External Factors)				Model 3 (External & Internal Factors)			
		Predicted mean		Deviation		Predicted mean		Deviation		Predicted mean		Deviation	
		Unadj.	Adj.	Unadj.	Adj.	Unadj.	Adj.	Unadj.	Adj.	Unadj.	Adj.	Unadj.	Adj.
Three types of pollution	24	5.4	5.4	-2	-3					5.4	5.4	-2	-3
Four types of pollution or more	21	5.9	5.7	.2	.1					5.9	5.7	.2	.0
Number of household possessions		Eta =.2, Beta =.1								Eta =.2, Beta =.1			
None	160	5.2	5.5	-.5	-.2					5.2	5.6	-.5	-.0
1 item	162	5.9	5.7	.3	.1					5.9	5.6	.3	.0
2 items	65	5.6	5.6	-.1	-.1					5.6	5.5	-.1	-.2
3 items	36	6.6	6.5	1.0	.8					6.6	6.3	1.0	.7
4 items	10	5.4	5.0	-.2	-.7					5.4	4.7	-.2	-1.0
Religious practice in 1 year		Eta =.5, Beta =.1								Eta =.5, Beta =.2			
Never	75	3.0	4.3	-2.6	-1.3					3.0	4.7	-2.6	-.9
Ever	358	6.2	5.9	.6	.3					6.2	5.8	.6	.2
Feeling of relative poverty						Eta =.6, Beta =.6				Eta =.6, Beta =.3			
Poorer than neighbor						2.8	2.7	-2.9	-2.9	2.8	4.1	-2.9	-1.6
As poor as neighbor						6.1	6.1	.5	.5	6.1	5.8	.5	.1
Not poor						6.5	6.5	.9	.9	6.5	6.2	.9	.6
Multiple R		.7				.6				.7			
Multiple R Square		.5				.4				.5			

Discussion

This paper examines the level of happiness and the determinants influencing happiness among Thai youths by using a survey data collected in Kanchanaburi province. In the first research question, it was found that the mean level of happiness of the respondents was 5.6, which is above the neutral feeling or “not unhappy or happy.” It can be said that Thai youths reflect the Buddhist teaching about a moderate path, which is the way of Thai culture. In the American context, Huebner and colleagues (2005) assessed the level of overall life satisfaction among middle school students and found that most students reported their life satisfaction as above the neutral point and, as in this study, with about 10 percent of them reporting dissatisfaction, thus indicating a “terrible” or “unhappy” overall life. In addition, Michalos (1991) carried out a large-scale survey among university students in 39 nations (N = 18,032) in order to study life satisfaction and happiness. The range of scores on both variables (questions) ranged from a minimum of 1 to a maximum of 7. Among students, the averages were 4.6 and 4.8, respectively. Differences across nations were predicted and actually found. The score on the happiness item varied between 4.0 (Cameroon) and 5.3 (USA).

For the second research question, which concerned about the determinants of happiness, we examined the effect of external and internal factors by using the ANOVA and MCA. The independent variables were more influential than control variables on the level of youths' happiness. Work and study status was the only control variable that related to the level of youth's happiness. Youths that are not working or studying have a lower level of happiness when considering the mean happiness. Unemployment may cause distress or unhappiness among young people. It is necessary to consider the length of unemployment in which previous studies found to have a negative correlation with happiness. People that have been unemployed for a long time show less distress than those that have recently lost their jobs. However, voluntary unemployment should be considered because large numbers of people, in Britain, were choosing to be unemployed (Clark and Oswald, 1994).

Considering the external factors of youths' happiness, current exercising increased their happiness. Haarasilta (2003) found an association between low frequency of physical exercise and adolescent depression, and also suggested as a possible explanation the positive impact of physical exercise—that activity mediates increased locus control and self-esteem. However, it might be that happier youths are more likely to exercise than less happy youth.

As expected, perceived social environment emerged as a strong influence on the level of youths' happiness, which is consistent with the idea that young peoples' sense of community belonging in the place where they grew up plays an important role in the development of a healthy adjusted self and subjective well-being (Hay, 1998). Having a sense that one is part of larger network may protect youths by increasing their feelings of worthiness, thus impacting on their happiness. The findings highlight the importance of the social environment, an external factor, as influential on youths' happiness.

Previous studies, as in this study, have found positive relationships between aspects of religiosity and happiness; especially, religious activity yielded stronger relationships than other measures of religiosity (Francis, et al., 2004). Religious involvement provide social and coping skills that helped them to avoid and overcome common causes of strain and may also buffer youths from delinquent involvement (Smith. 2003).

This result supports the hypothesis that happiness depends on absolute and relative wealth. Happiness appears to be increasing among youths who live in richer households. Recent research finds that a certain level of economic well-being would seem to be a necessary condition of happiness, but after people reach a certain level of income, more money does not lead to greater happiness (Moller, 2005). Thus, the association of economic well-being and the happiness of youths is unclear and needs to be further investigated. The results also provide preliminary support for the feeling of relative poverty. The feeling of relative poverty, poverty comparison with others, seems to be a more important determinant of happiness. Youth that report not being poor or not as poor as their neighbors are happier than those that feel poorer than neighbors. Easterlin (2001) has argued that economic growth does not raise well-being and he

suggested that we should think of people as getting from a comparison of themselves with others close to them, and he concluded that happiness is relative.

Overall happiness is influenced by many factors and the search for its determinants is still on-going. With respect to theoretical arguments, there are two different lines of thinking: the level of living and social comparisons. Many different people usually compare individuals with, for example, family members, neighbors, average people in the country, people in foreign countries, and so on.

This study highlights the need for paying special attention to the feeling of relative wealth and the perceived social environment among youths. Some youths may compare themselves with others in terms of material goods. The effects of modernization processes on psychological well-being essentially depend on social equality. Thus a feeling of relative poverty could influence their happiness, particularly among poor youths living in the country where there is high inequality in economic status among the people. In addition, social participation should be promoted in young people in order to increase their community connectedness, livelihood, and well-being. This study suggests that youth-related policies should consider social equality and the social participation of youths in order to improve their quality of life.

The data employed in this study were not originally designed to answer the research question of this study. As a consequence, they contain some design problems. There were no data on the determinants of schools and peer relations, which are considered to influence the level of youths' happiness. This analysis can be regarded as a preliminary step in studying the determinants influencing Thai youths' happiness. Further investigations using qualitative studies or longitudinal studies would be helpful in order to identify the determinants of youths' happiness accurately.

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