

Happiness, Health and Work

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In 2009 more than 130 000 Finns completed an “Electronic Health Check”- test connected to a TV-series by the Finnish National Broadcasting co. The check included a Happiness Scale (HS) the validity of which was carried out the with target group representing 17-79 aged average Finns (N=2035, RR = 41%). The construct validity of the Happiness scale was studied estimating convergence with two Life Satisfaction Scales (Diener, 1985) and (Allardt, 1973). The final happiness test consisted of 10 items (1-7 scale) including eg. confidence in the future (optimism), mastering of life, meaningfulness of life, value of life, comparative happiness, and capability to forgive.

One aim of the study was to explore how happiness and is related to socio-economic variables, health-related behavior, and attitudes/coping skills in social life and work. The standardized (0-100) population mean of the HS was 66 points. Economical situation associated positively for the wealthiest fifth (OR 1.56, 95%CI 1.50-1.61) and slightly negatively for the poorest fifth (OR 0.96 , 95%CI 0.92-1.00). A negative association was found for smoking >20 cigarets/day (OR 0.53, 95%CI 0.45-0.64) and for binge drinking >once/week (OR 0.60, 95%CI 0.56-0.65) whereas a positive association for binge drinking <once/month (OR 1.29, 95%CI 1.25-1.33). Own serious illness (n= 3512) and especially dissatisfaction with own health had a strong negative association (OR 0.63, 95%CI 0.57-0.68) and (OR 0.09, 95%CI 0.07-0.10), respectively. The strongest positive predictor for happiness was “Strong confidence in the future” (OR 15.82, 95%CI 15.18-16.49) and followed by “a wish to live this very moment” (OR 10.82, 95%CI 10.38-11.29), “feelings of gratitude” (OR 8.48, 95%CI 8.17-8.81). We also performed age-adjusted logistic regression analysis, where the dichotomized outcome was agreeing or disagreeing with the statement: “Strong confidence in the future”. The disagreeing cohort “pessimists” (n= 13 396) expressed markedly more negative health behaviors as measured by smoking, alcohol, nutrition, physical exercise and social relations related factors as compared to the agreeing cohort “optimists” (n= 63 653). The main finding was that there was no difference in the education years between these two cohorts, whereas the annual earnings were 35% higher for the optimists of whom only 17% expressed harmful working stress whereas the corresponding figure for the pessimists was 46%. Further analysis revealed that the pessimists belonging to the highest income quartile were less satisfied with their income than the optimists belonging to the lowest income quartile (48% vs. 62%).