

Happiness Analysis: World Happiness Report

Friday, July 24, 2020

Definition (Merriam-Webster)

1a : a state of well-being and contentment : [joy](#)

b : a pleasurable or satisfying experience I wish you every happiness in life. I had the happiness of seeing you— W. S. Gilbert

2 : [felicity](#), [aptness](#) a striking happiness of expression

3 obsolete : good fortune : [prosperity](#) all happiness bechance to thee— William Shakespeare



People want to be happy. It is hard to quantify and measure. But everyone prefers being happy, even without the ability to grasp what is truly is.

Some believe achieving it is important and worth the effort to work towards the goal.

Bhutan's Ministry of Happiness

Between India and China is Bhutan. In 1972, Bhutan's king Jigme Singye Wangchuck proposed gross national happiness (GNH) as a more meaningful measurement than GDP. Their metric is based on these components:

Living standards, Education, Health, Environment, Community vitality, Time use, Psychological well being, Good governance, and Cultural resilience and promotion

The United Nations employs a different methodology to measure happiness.

Components of Happiness Score

- GDP per capita
- Social support
- Healthy life expectancy
- Freedom to make life choices
- Generosity
- Perceptions of corruption

The data for the Happiness report is gathered by Gallup. Gallup World Poll conducts these surveys with sufficient responses to obtain a 95% confidence interval.

Responders are asked grade their answers between a low (Dystopia) and a high (Utopia). The ranking system is called the Cantril Ladder.

The overall score is an aggregation of the six component scores.

Cantril Self-Anchoring Striving Scale

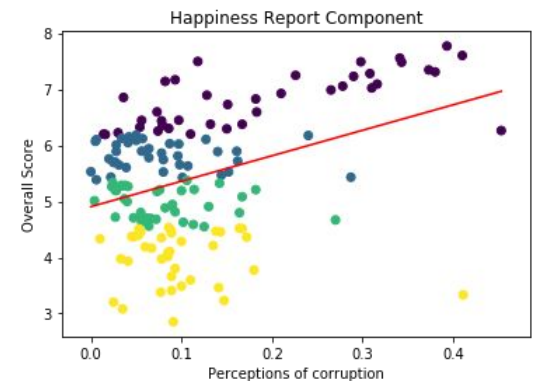
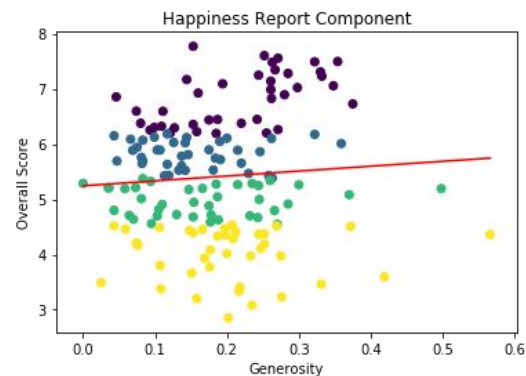
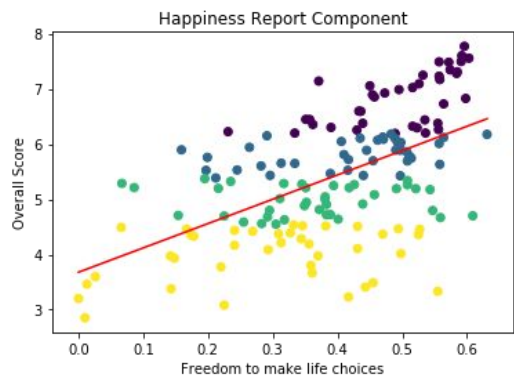
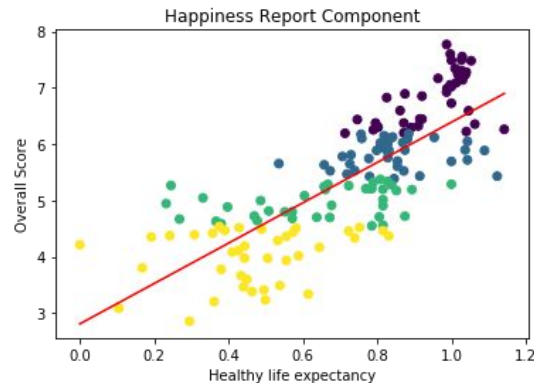
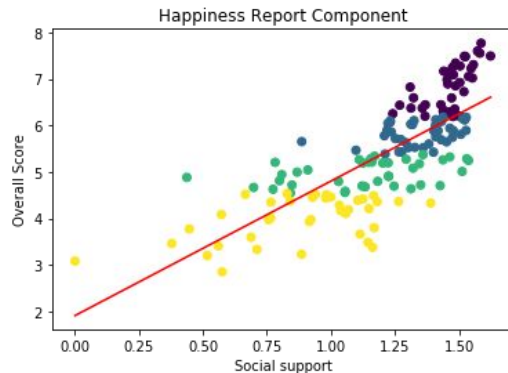
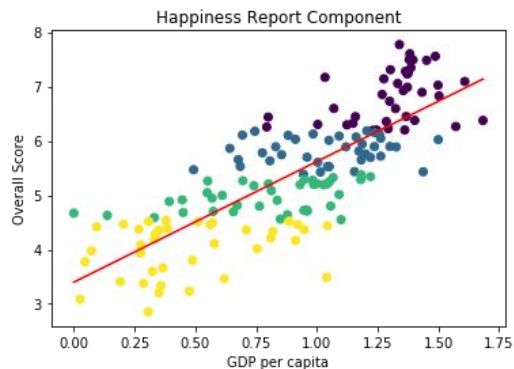
The Cantril Scale (or Cantril Ladder) uses this ranking to score responses

- *Please imagine a ladder with steps numbered from zero at the bottom to 10 at the top.*
- *The top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you.*
- *On which step of the ladder would you say you personally feel you stand at this time?*

As would be expected in surveys like this, scores do not cover the full range of 0 (dystopia) to 10 (utopia). No happiness scores are below 2, or above 8.

Hypothesis: Are we accurately seeing happiness?

This is how the six components contribute to the total:



Looking for factors that may affect happiness

Each graph included shows the countries quartile breakout by color with a “best fit” line in red.

This research was to discover if there are other life components (beyond the six in the prior slide) that contribute to happiness.

Other factors considered were:

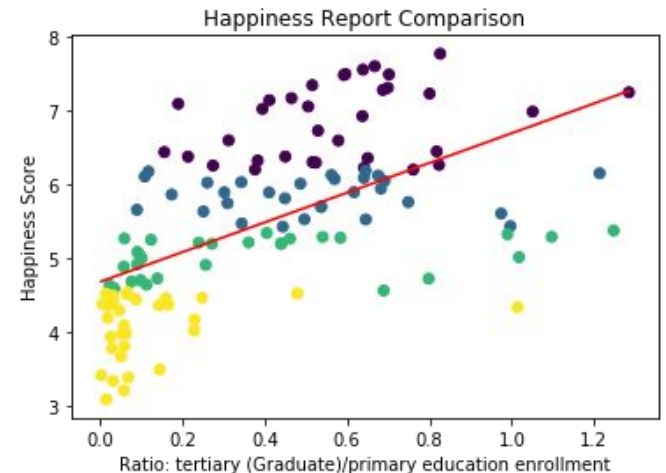
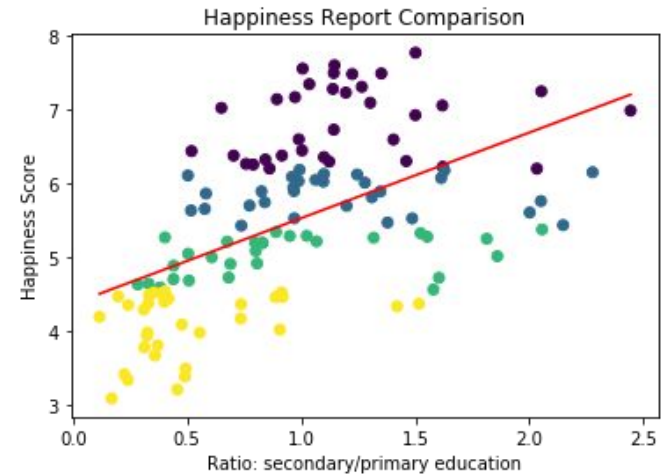
- Education
- Clean water
- Alcohol and drug use
- Employment
- Fertility
- Suicide rate

Education

Both charts look at primary Ed enrollment.
Upper compares to secondary Ed and lower to college (tertiary) enrollment.

Observation:

While higher education does not indicate happiness, lacking education makes happiness unlikely.

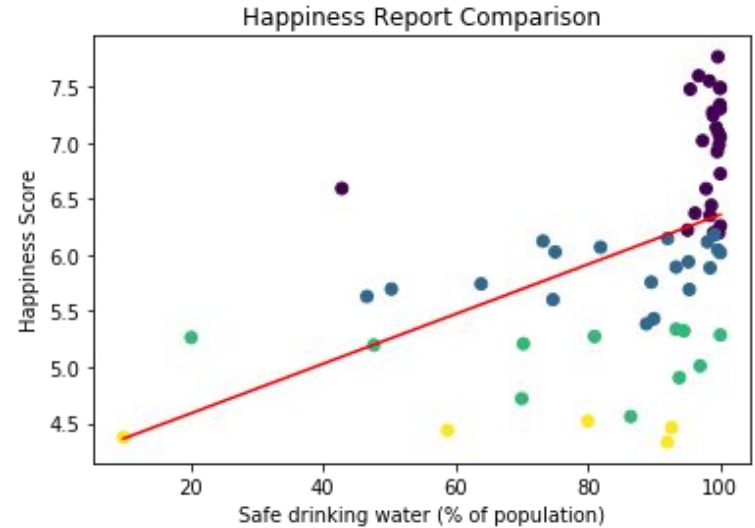


Clean water

Fewer countries report this statistic, especially in the bottom quartile.

Observation:

Clean water is common in the happier countries.

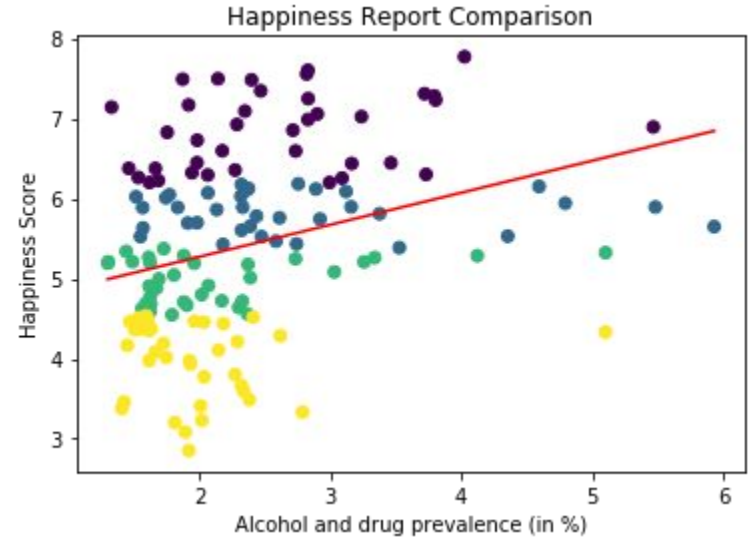


Alcohol and drug prevalence

Countries are collected along the same prevalence measure. Notably, the lower right corner is sparse.

Observation:

Alcohol and drugs clustered around the 1 to 3 percent. Higher rates seem less likely in the most unhappy countries.

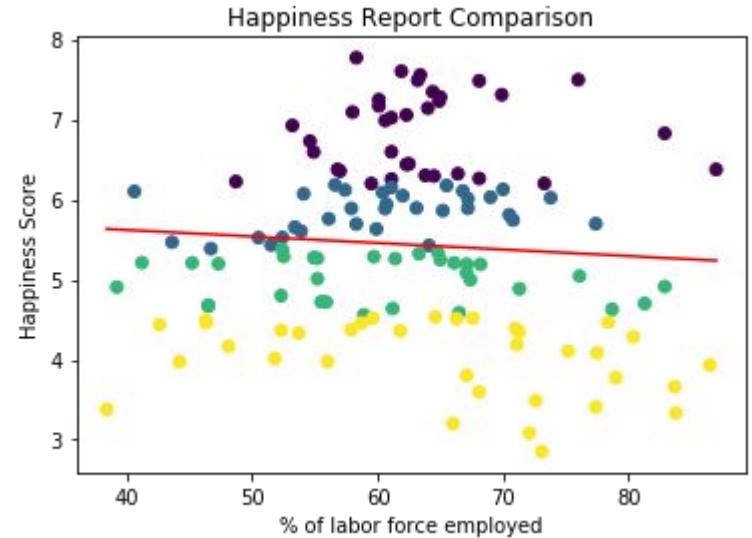


Labor force employment

Employment rates are not significantly located on the chart.

Observation:

While unemployment is not expected to lead to happiness, employment does not have a large effect.

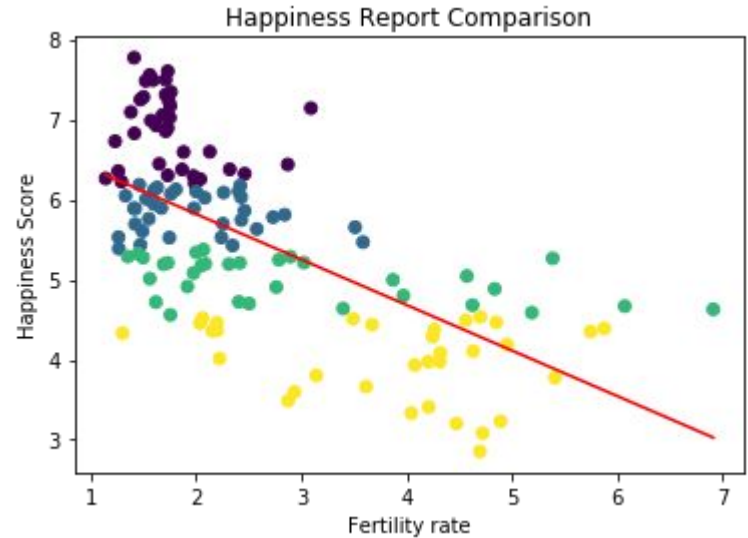


Fertility

The collection of data in the upper left is significant.

Observation:

It would seem that happier countries are likely to have a declining population.

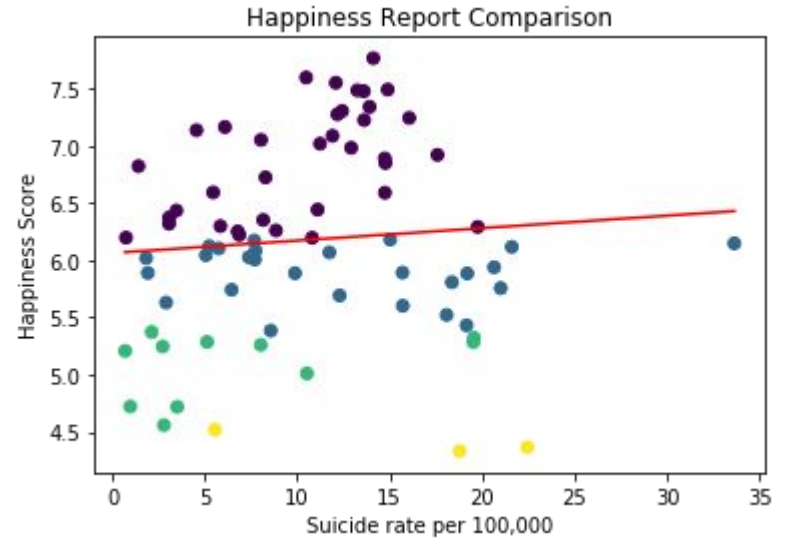


Suicide rate

The highest value is from an “average happiness” country.

Observation:

Although it may seem counterintuitive, a country's suicide rate does not seem connected to its happiness.



Other analysis

In gathering data, this was the most surprising analysis:

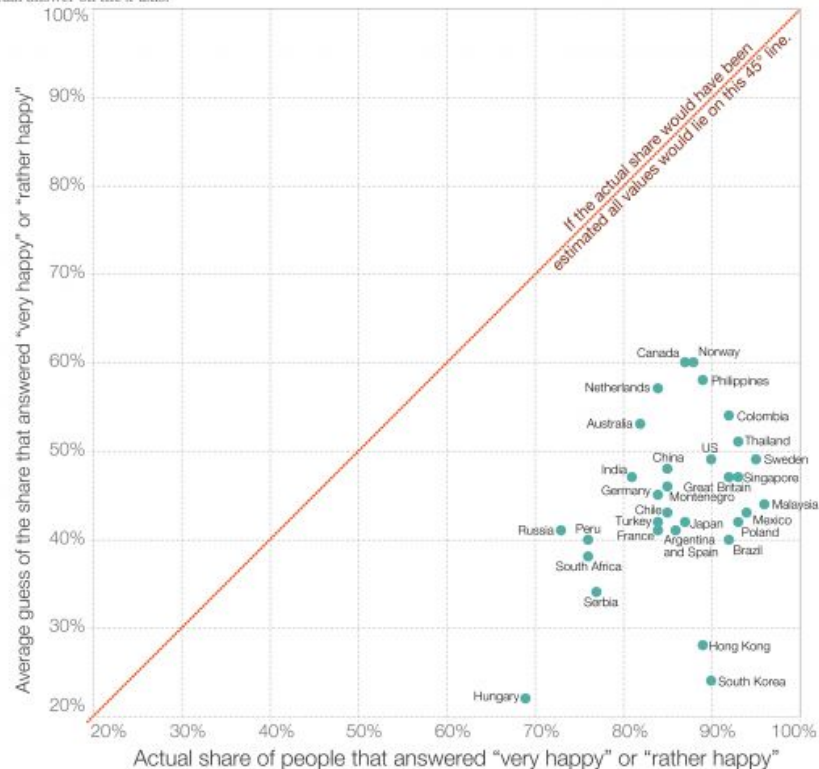
“using data from Ipsos’ [Perils of Perception](#)—a cross-country survey asking people to guess what others in their country have answered to the happiness question in the World Value Survey.”

“people in every country underestimated the self-reported happiness of others”

<https://ourworldindata.org/happiness-and-life-satisfaction>

In every country people think that others are less happy than they themselves say. People were asked the following question “When asked in a survey, what percentage of people do you think said that, taking all things together, they are very happy or rather happy?”. The average answer is plotted on the y-axis against the actual answer on the x-axis.

Our World
in Data



Data source: Perils of Perception by IPSOS-MORI
This visualization is available at OurWorldinData.org. There you find the research and more visualizations on happiness and life-satisfaction. Licensed under CC-BY-SA by the author Max Roser.

Next steps

- Examine why Ipsos got such unusual results
- Search for happiness analysis under similar names
- Understand the Gallup methodology better

Conclusions

Are we accurately seeing happiness?

It is not likely. But it is possible that the Ipsos poll is flawed.

- Happiness is a subjective term that may be disconnected from aspects expected to bring about happiness.
- It is surprising that happiness of others is something we are less aware of.
- A goal, such as happiness, may be difficult to quantify, but effort to achieve it can yield results.

"I'd far rather be happy than right any day."

"And are you?"

"No. That's where it all falls down, of course."

"Pity. It sounded like rather a good lifestyle otherwise."

-- The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy

Questions



Thank you

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References

World Happiness Report dataset

<https://www.kaggle.com/>

World Happiness Report FAQ

<https://worldhappiness.report/faq/>

UN Data

<http://data.un.org/>

Our World in Data

<https://ourworldindata.org/drug-use>

Our World in Data (chart image)

<https://ourworldindata.org/happiness-and-life-satisfaction>

The World Bank

<https://www.worldbank.org/>