Factors affecting happiness: marriage, health, trust and family savings

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Abstract

A secondary data analysis was carried out to explore association between happiness and other factors like marriage, trust, family savings and health. Data was obtained from World Value Survey. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics and exploratory data visualization using R. Results indicate that happiness is positively correlated with family savings, health and trust.

Keywords: happiness, health, family savings, trust and world value survey

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Introduction

Study of happiness and its causal factors has flourished in recent years. Scholars have studied the relationship between happiness and variables ranging from the political system to cultural and economic factors (Inglehart, 2009; Schyns, 1998). This project explores the relationship between happiness and some candidate variables, namely marital status, religious affiliation, level of income, status of heath, and level of trust. We use individual level survey of more than 85,000 respondents across 60 countries and societies around the world in World Value Survey Dataset 2012.
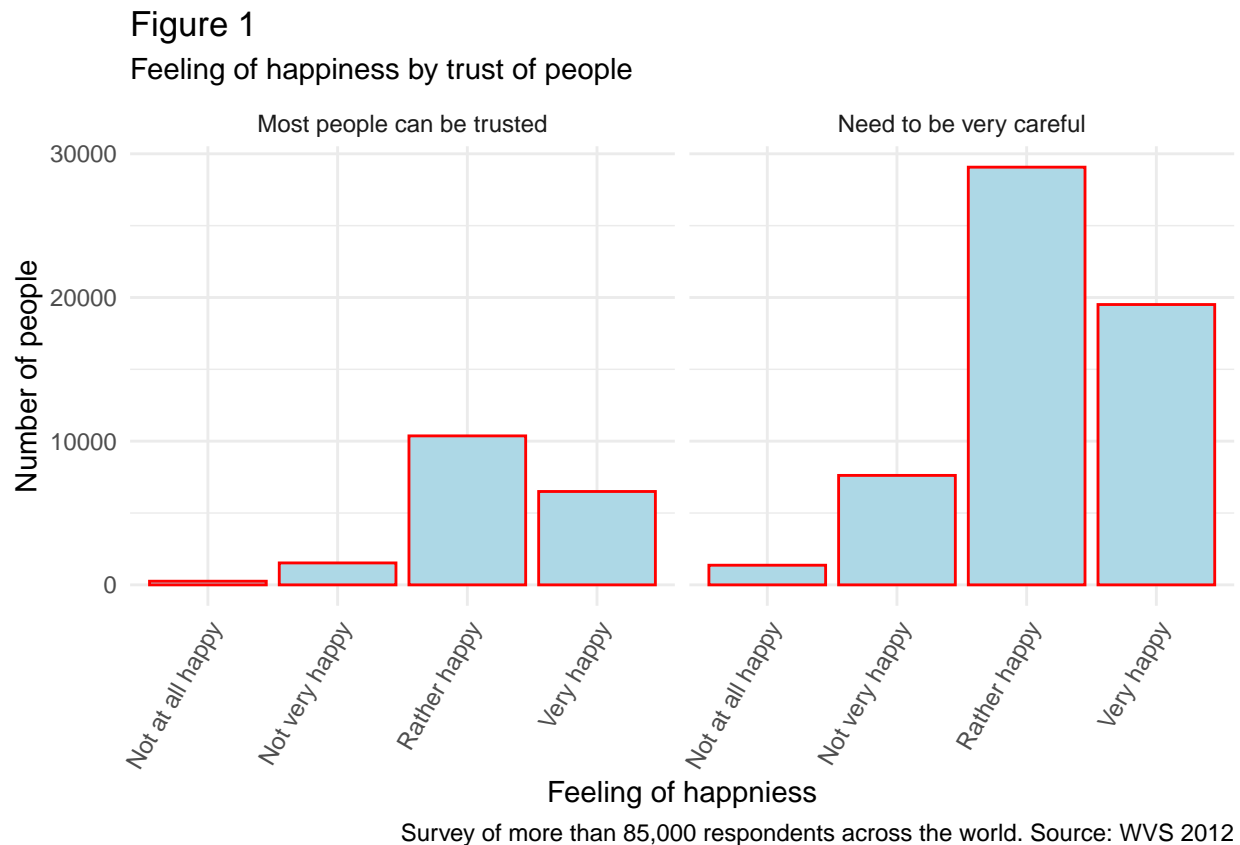
Methods

This project drew from survey data from the World Values Survey. This is a survey of more than 85,000 respondents across 60 countries and societies around the world. We used data from the most recent wave which can be accessed here. Our data analyses are descriptive and exploratory.
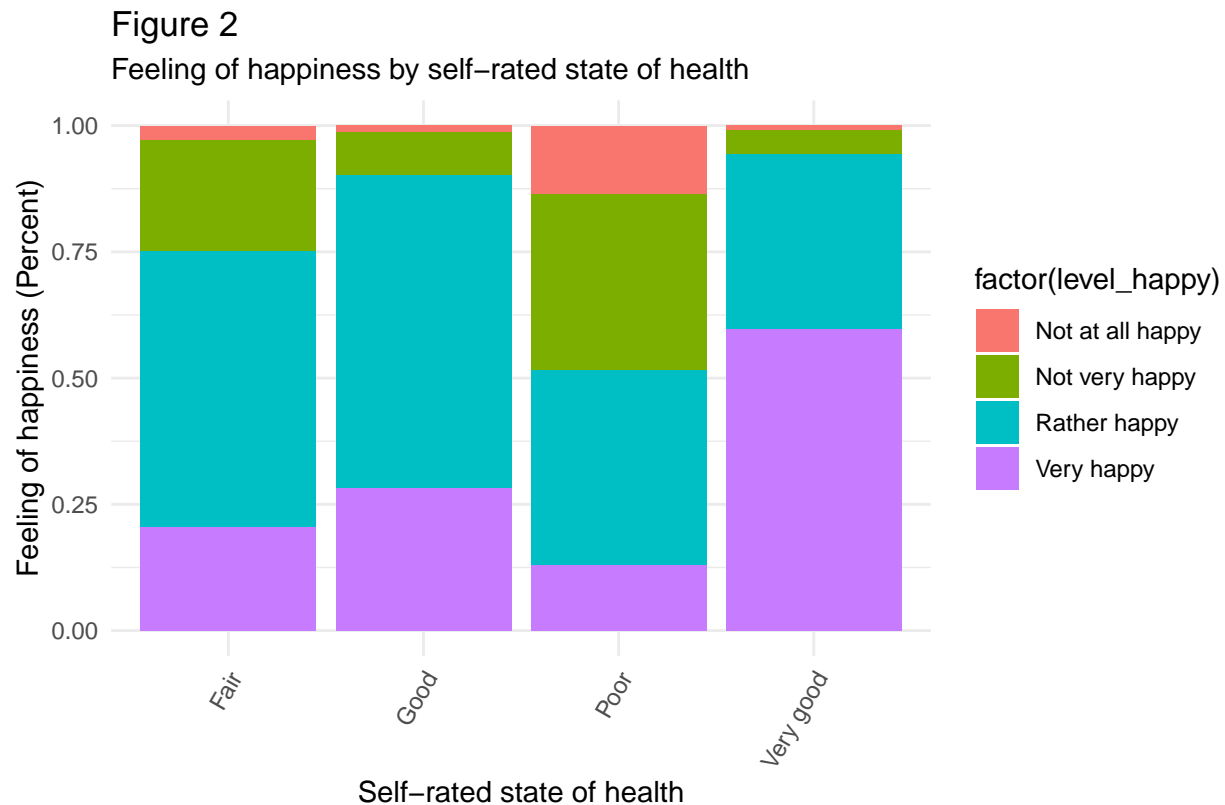
Data analysis and results

Happiness and trust.   In this section we examine the relationship between happiness and trust. Johnson (2012) finds that "trust as measured by the World Values Survey is positively correlated with experimentally measured trust".

Out of the total 76222 people, only slightly more than 24.47 percent say they can trust most of the people around them, while 75.53 are cautious about the society. Interestingly, there are more people feeling happy in life in the latter group than those in the former. Figure 1, below, indicates such difference.

Figure 1

Feeling of happiness by trust of people

Survey of more than 85,000 respondents across the world. Source: WVS 2012

Happiness and health status. Our data suggest a positive correlation between health status and perceived level of happiness. Figure 2, below, clearly indicates that most of people who rated their health status as "good" also felt happy.

Figure 2

Feeling of happiness by self−rated state of health

Survey of more than 85,000 respondents across the world. Source: WVS 2012

Happiness and family savings.   Of the 76222 survey participants, the majority (45.48) reported just getting by financially, while 28.72 saved money. The remainder spent either some (14.87) or all (10.93) of their savings.

Table 1 shows happiness levels by level of family savings. Relationships between happiness levels and family savings are explored in Figure 3. Here, we see that of those reporting the lowest levels of happiness (Not at all happy, Not very happy), most had spent all of their family savings. On the other hand, of those reporting the highest level of happiness (Very happy), the highest percentage were those in the strongest financial position - those who saved money.

Table 1

family_savings	feeling_of_happiness	n	total	percent
Just get by	Not at all happy	813	34669	2.35
Just get by	Not very happy	4650	34669	13.41
Just get by	Rather happy	18661	34669	53.83
Just get by	Very happy	10545	34669	30.42
Save money	Not at all happy	203	21889	0.93
Save money	Not very happy	1449	21889	6.62
Save money	Rather happy	11060	21889	50.53
Save money	Very happy	9177	21889	41.93
Spent savings and borrowed money	Not at all happy	400	8333	4.80
Spent savings and borrowed money	Not very happy	1577	8333	18.92
Spent savings and borrowed money	Rather happy	3867	8333	46.41
Spent savings and borrowed money	Very happy	2489	8333	29.87
Spent some savings and borrowed money	Not at all happy	207	11331	1.83
Spent some savings and borrowed money	Not very happy	1471	11331	12.98
Spent some savings and borrowed money	Rather happy	5853	11331	51.65
Spent some savings and borrowed money	Very happy	3800	11331	33.54

Happiness by family savings: percentage
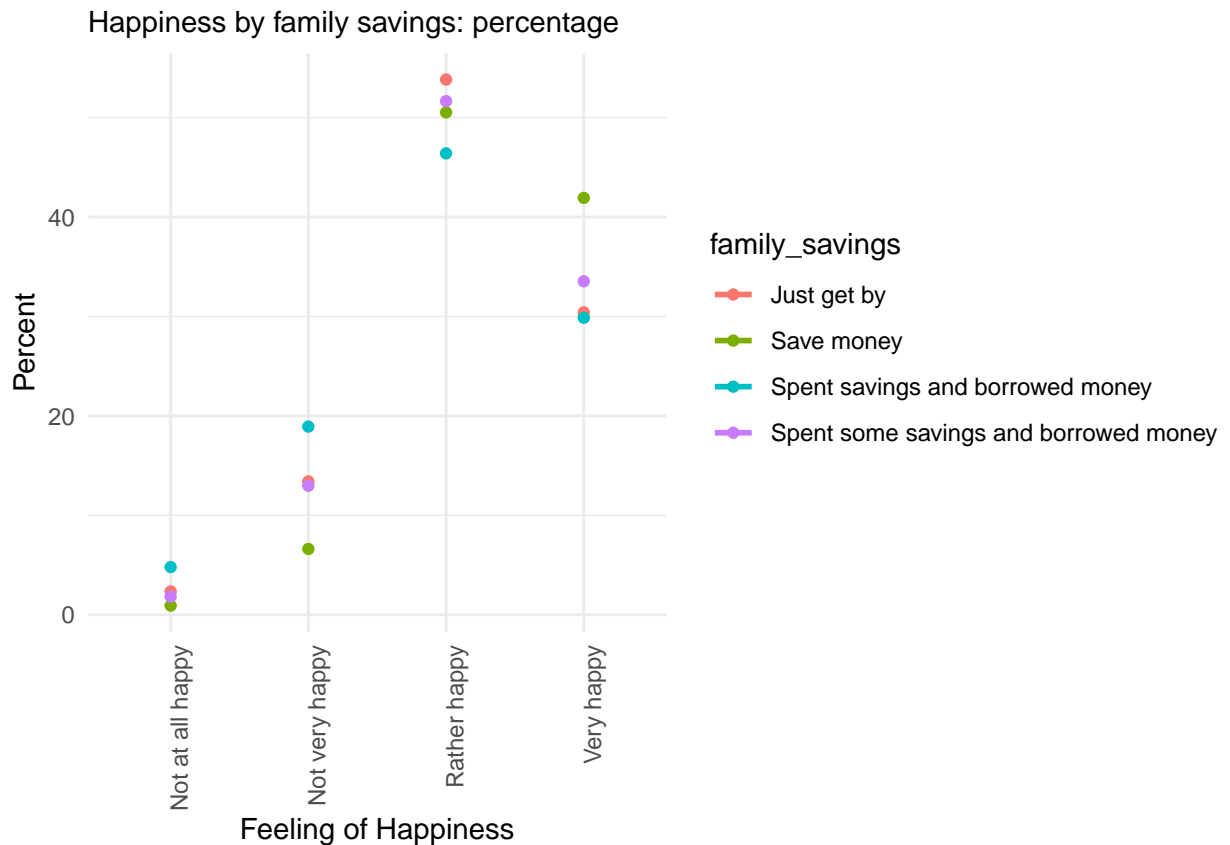
Discussion

Our results illuminate a number of connections between happiness levels and other life factors such as trust of others, family financial status, and health.

Data for happiness levels overall were normally distributed, with the majority of participants reporting a moderate level of happiness, and fewer reporting very low or very high levels of happiness. This pattern continued to be evident when data were grouped by our independent variables.

Contrary to the conventional belief that people who feel happy they can trust people around them should feel more secured, hence happier. The data shows somewhat the opposite. Those who say they should be careful with the fellows surrounding them indicates higher level of happiness.

Results indicate that good health is associated with greater feelings of happiness. This affirms prior research by Gandelman and Hernández-Murillo (2013) which found a strong

relationship between self-rated health status and perceived life quality.

Results also suggest a positive relationship between family financial circumstances and happiness. Prior research has demonstrated a positive association between income and well-being, although the mechanisms for this remain unclear (Diener, 2010). Our results build on this work by indicating that degree to which families are able to save money, or the degree to which they must deplete savings and/or take out loans, are areas worthy of further study.

Our results should be interpreted with caution. Because we are beginners in using R, data analyses are, so far, only descriptive. Linear models are needed to explore whether the relationships suggested here are statistically significant. Furthermore, even if they were, these data are cross-sectional, so findings cannot be interpreted as indicating causality.

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