A study of the Happiness of University Students in Sri Lanka and the Influencing factors

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Abstract—This study investigates the happiness of Sri Lankan university students with an emphasis on the variables affecting their quality of life. University life, a pivotal time in the lives of young adults, is full with events and difficulties that might affect students' happiness. Comprehending these elements is essential to creating environments that encourage students and help them succeed. In order to collect thorough data, the study uses a mixed-methods strategy that combines quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. Examined factors include financial stability, social relationships, academic pressure, mental health, and extracurricular activities. Through an analysis of these variables, the study seeks to pinpoint the most important elements that influence students' level of satisfaction and offer practical suggestions to college administrators. Preliminary results indicate that financial security and mental health resources also significantly contribute to overall well-being, even if social support and academic success are important factors in student satisfaction. This essay emphasises how important full assistance networks are for raising student satisfaction and boosting academic performance in higher education. In order to develop more supportive learning environments, educators, legislators, and mental health experts will find great value in the insights obtained from this study. Universities can better support their students' journeys and ensure a more joyful and rewarding time at university by addressing the aspects that have been highlighted. As a result, this research will finally propose an application that mainly aims to overcome the factors that impact the happiness of university students which lead to poor academic performance. The system is expected to be a user-friendly platform where anyone can find a set of solutions for their happiness to stay motivated for their academic performance.

Index Terms—education and research, awareness,

I. Introduction

In the fast-paced world of higher education, students' emotional health is frequently neglected in favor of academic development. This study intends to shed light on the happiness of university students, an element of life at university that is frequently disregarded yet is quite significant. A student's life is transformed throughout their time at university. This is a period of discovery, education, and growth. But due to social dynamics, financial worries, academic expectations, and the imminent threat of future obligations, it can also be a stressful and anxious period. Despite these complex obstacles, students' general contentment and well-being have a great influence on their relationships, academic achievement, and success in the workplace later on. College is a life-changing experience full of opportunities for learning, development, and self-discovery. However, a number of circumstances, including academic expectations, social dynamics, financial concerns, and the uncertainty of future career possibilities, may also make it a period of great stress and worry. Student contentment and general well-being in the face of these obstacles can have a great impact on their future success, interpersonal connections, and academic achievement.

According to the reviews of education and happiness by Diener et al. (1999) and Argyle (2002), there seems to be 'small (.12–.06) but significant (positive) correlations' between education and happiness 'assessed by number of years of education and or the level of highest qualification acquired'. This study aims to improve university students' happiness by offering important insights that might direct practices and policies at the institution towards fostering a more encouraging and supportive learning environment. The ultimate objective of this study is to highlight the significance of student happiness in postsecondary education and to make a larger contribution to the knowledge base on the cultivation of successful, happy, and healthy students. The purpose of this research paper is to investigate the many elements that go into making university students happy. It looks at how factors including scholastic success, interpersonal connections, engagement in extracurricular activities, and possibilities for personal development might affect a student's happiness. The study will also look at how colleges can create settings that support students' happiness. This study aims to improve the happiness of university students in order to offer important insights that might guide practices and policies at the institution toward fostering a

more encouraging and supportive learning environment. The ultimate objective of this study is to highlight the importance of student happiness in postsecondary education and to make a larger contribution to the knowledge base on the cultivation of successful, happy, and healthy students.

II. METHODOLOGY

Our study is a follow-up to the work of Chan, Miller and Tcha (2005) [1] and Esa Mangeloja and Tatu Hirvonen. Both papers concentrate on the happiness of university students, their study conducted in Australia and Finland focusing university students. we gathered survey data from 4 major universities in Sri Lanka. We used a questionnaire like Chan et al. (2005) Esa Mangeloja [2] used in Australia and Finland, The survey data was gathered among students attending the university during 2024.The survey was conducted through one weeklong session in April. The number of completed questionnaires was 150.Our sample size is adequate for comparative purposes in this study.

Select your University

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		1	.7	.7	.7
	SLIIT	89	58.9	58.9	59.6
	University of Kelaniya	8	5.3	5.3	64.9
	University of Peradeniya	28	18.5	18.5	83.4
	University of Sri Jayewardenepura	25	16.6	16.6	100.0
	Total	151	100.0	100.0	

Figure 1: Sample size of the survey

In April 2024, we conducted a survey of about hapiness of university students with 150 university students around in the Colombo, Sri Lanka. 8 of these students came from Peradeniya University (response rate: 5.3*/*), 28 from Kelaniya University (response rate: 18.7*/*), 25 from Sri Jayewardenepura University (response rate: 16.7*/*), and 89 from SLIIT University (response rate: 59.3*/*). The five sections of the questionnaire were created to gather information regarding university students' levels of happiness. The first section asked questions about the participant's age and gender as well as their demographic information. The primary determinants of university students' happiness—financial stress, relationship issues, social isolation, and academic pressure—are covered in the remaining four sections.

Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		1	.7	.7	.7
	Female	66	43.7	43.7	44.4
	Male	84	55.6	55.6	100.0
	Total	151	100.0	100.0	

Figure 1: gender distribution of the responders

The gender distribution in the sample was even, as 43.7*/*

were female and 55.6*/* was male. The average age was 22 years and 70.1*/* of respondents were aged 20–24 years. A five-category Likert Scale was used to score all the survey questions, in the to get the social isolation measurements we used UCLA LONELINESS SCALE VERSION 3. respondents we given 4 options to choose from one of four categories: 1 = never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often. Out of 150 responses, 41.3*/* of the students strongly agreed that they often feel isolated in the, while none strongly disagreed, 58*/* of the respondents felt social isolation sometimes and 0.7*/* were felt this rarely.

14. How do you feel isolated from others?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	1	.7	.7	.7
	3	87	57.6	58.0	58.7
	4	62	41.1	41.3	100.0
	Total	150	99.3	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.7		
Total		151	100.0		

Figure 3: reliability statistic Sample size 151.

To assess the reliability of their responses to the above statement, students were also asked to respond to similar statements.
Question 14 shows an acceptable level of reliability. a = .88

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.875	8

Figure 3: reliability statistic Sample size 151.

It was also found that question 4 feeling isolated from others positively correlated with similar manner questions on the UCLA loneliness scale 3. r (148), p = ¡.001

Correlations

		negAvg	14. How 4 do you feel isolated from others?
negAvg	Pearson Correlation	1	.344**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
	N	150	150
14. How 4 do you feel isolated from others?	Pearson Correlation	.344**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
	N	150	150

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Figure 4: Responses to the question

II. RELATIONSHIP STRUGGLES

In order to assess the relationship problems of the university students, we asked some questions related to their relationship within the university.
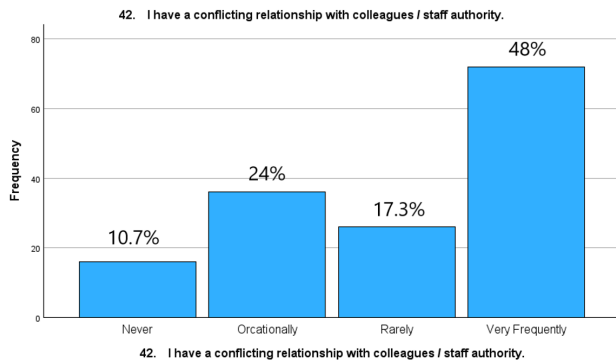

Figure 4: Responses to the question

Students were asked to respond to the statement: 'I have a conflicting relationship with colleagues / staff authority'. According to the responds we gathered 72 students (rate of = 48*/*) were agreed they have very frequently conflicts between colleagues and staffs authority. Around 36 students (rate of = 24*/*) were respond as occasionally, 26 students were (rate of 17.3*/*) responded as rarely and 16 students(rate of = 10.7*/*) were responded as never. The above responses shows that most of the university students experience the conflicts between with colleagues / staff authority during their academic years.
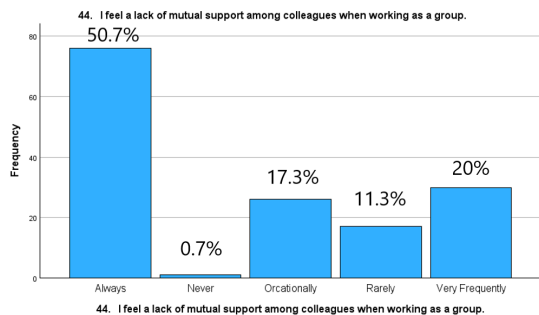

Figure 4: Responses to the question

Hence, there was another question was asked to respond the statement: 'I feel lack of mutual support among colleagues when working as a group'. The participants of the survey responded that 76 students(rate of = 76*/*) were responded as always, 26 students(17.3*/*) were responded as occasionally, 30 students(20*/*) were responded as very frequently, 17 students(11.3*/*) were responded as rarely, 1 student(0.7*/*) was responded as never. The above responses shows that most of the university students lack the communication between each other and lack support among colleagues. Due to this the performance of the teamwork were low when its come into the group activities.
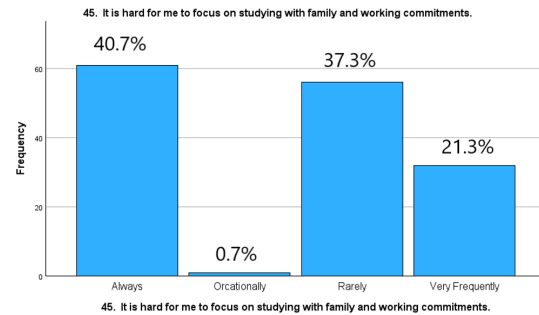

Figure 4: Responses to the question

Hence in the survey, The statement was asked to the students : 'It is hard for me to focus on studying with family and working commitments'. The 61 students(40.7*/*) were responded as always, 1 student responded as occasionally for hard to focus due to working commitments. Very frequently 32 students feel hard to focus when its come to family and working commitments and rarely 56 students feel family and working commitments impacts their academic performance. Relationship problems are prevalent among university students survey indicating a very frequent level of conflict. There exists a significant proportion of students who feel a lack of mutual support among colleagues, with 76 students expressing this view. Students perceive a moderate level of difficulty in focusing on studying due to family and working commitments, with equal terms expressing both agreement and disagreement on this statement.

III. ACADEMIC STRUGGLES

Academic struggles encompass a broad range of challenges that students face during their educational journey. These struggles often include difficulties in understanding complex course material, managing time effectively, preparing for exams, and achieving satisfactory grades. According to Smith and Jones (2020), these challenges are exacerbated by the demands of balancing multiple responsibilities, such as part-time jobs, extracurricular activities, and personal commitments. The literature indicates that academic struggles are a significant predictor of academic performance and overall student wellbeing.

1. TIME MANAGEMENT AND PROCRASTINATION
One of the most cited academic struggles is time management. Effective time management is crucial for students to balance the various demands placed upon them. Procrastination, a common behavior among students, is often linked to poor time management skills. Tuckman (1991) found that procrastination negatively affects academic performance and leads to increased stress and anxiety levels. Strategies to improve time management, such as setting clear goals, prioritizing tasks, and using planners, have been shown to enhance academic performance and reduce stress (Macan et al., 1990).

2. UNDERSTANDING COURSE MATERIAL

Another critical area of academic struggle is the difficulty in understanding course material. This struggle is often related to teaching methods and the complexity of the subject matter. Felder and Silverman (1988) highlighted that mismatches between teaching styles and students' learning preferences can hinder comprehension. Interactive and student-centered teaching approaches, such as problem-based learning and active learning techniques, have been suggested to improve students' understanding and engagement (Prince, 2004)

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4. EXAM PREPARATION AND TEST ANXIETY

Exam preparation is a significant source of stress for students. Test anxiety, characterized by extreme fear and worry about exams, can impair students' ability to perform well. Zeidner (1998) noted that test anxiety affects cognitive processes, such as memory and concentration, leading to lower exam scores. Techniques such as systematic desensitization, cognitive-behavioral therapy, and relaxation training have been effective in reducing test anxiety (Hembree, 1988). Performance Anxiety Performance anxiety refers to the psychological distress experienced in anticipation of or during performance situations, including academic assessments. It is characterized by feelings of apprehension, fear, and self-doubt regarding one's abilities. Performance anxiety can manifest in various forms, such as test anxiety, public speaking anxiety, and general academic anxiety

5. ACADEMIC PRESSURE AND FEAR OF FAILURE

Academic pressure, stemming from high expectations set by oneself, parents, or educational institutions, is a major contributor to performance anxiety. Fear of failure, a related concept, involves the dread of not meeting these expectations and the subsequent consequences. Conroy et al. (2002) found that fear of failure is associated with increased levels of anxiety and decreased academic performance. This fear often leads to avoidance behaviors, such as procrastination and withdrawal from challenging tasks.

6. PERFECTIONISM

Perfectionism is another psychological factor closely linked to performance anxiety. Perfectionists set excessively high standards for themselves and are overly critical of their performance. Frost et al. (1990) identified two dimensions of perfectionism: adaptive and maladaptive. While adaptive perfectionism can motivate students to achieve their best, maladaptive perfectionism is associated with chronic anxiety, fear of failure, and academic underachievement. Interventions aimed at promoting self-compassion and realistic goal-setting can help mitigate the negative effects of maladaptive perfectionism (Neff, 2003)

7. IMPACT ON MENTAL HEALTH

The relationship between academic struggles and performance anxiety has significant implications for students' mental health. Chronic stress and anxiety can lead to mental health disorders, such as depression and generalized anxiety disorder. Eisenberg et al. (2007) reported that college students experiencing high levels of academic stress are more likely to suffer from mental health issues. This highlights the importance of providing adequate mental health support within educational institutions

8. INTERVENTIONS AND SUPPORT STRATEGIES

Given the significant impact of academic struggles and performance anxiety on students' well-being and academic success, various interventions have been proposed to address these issues.

A. Academic Support Services

Enhanced academic support services, including tutoring, academic advising, and skills workshops, can help students manage their academic challenges more effectively. For example, time management workshops can equip students with strategies to organize their schedules and prioritize tasks (Britton and Tesser, 1991). Additionally, tutoring services can provide personalized assistance in understanding complex course material, thereby improving comprehension and reducing anxiety.

B. Mental Health Resources

Access to mental health resources is crucial in helping students cope with performance anxiety. Counseling services, stress management programs, and peer support groups can offer students the necessary tools to manage their anxiety and improve their mental health. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) has been particularly effective in treating performance anxiety by helping students reframe negative thoughts and develop coping strategies (Hofmann et al., 2012).

C. Promoting Work-Life Balance

Encouraging a balanced approach to academics, extracurricular activities, and personal commitments can reduce the overall stress burden on students. Educational institutions can promote work-life balance by offering

flexible scheduling options, promoting physical activity, and encouraging participation in recreational activities. Research has shown that students who engage in regular physical activity and maintain a healthy lifestyle are better able to manage stress and perform academically (Biddle and Asare, 2011).

D. Addressing Perfectionism

Interventions aimed at addressing perfectionism can help students set realistic goals and develop a healthier attitude towards their academic performance. Programs that promote self-compassion and emphasize the value of effort over perfection can reduce the negative impact of maladaptive perfectionism. Neff (2003) suggests that self-compassion training can help students develop a more balanced and less selfcritical perspective, thereby reducing anxiety and enhancing well-being.

IV. Financial Burdens

Financial burdens refer to the economic challenges that students encounter during their educational journey. These challenges often include the high cost of tuition, fees, textbooks, and other educational materials, as well as living expenses such as rent, food, and transportation. To understand the impact of financial burdens on students' academic and personal lives, analyzed from the student feedback survey. The survey items focused on various aspects of financial stress, including the impact of loans, membership fees, financial strain on academic focus, worries about loan repayment, feelings of insecurity due to financial comparisons, the inability to afford leisure activities, balancing part-time work with academics, and the fear of missing out on opportunities due to financial constraints.

Descriptive Statistics revealed that a significant portion of students regularly experience financial stress. For example, 42% of students indicated that taking out loans to cover expenses adds to their financial worries either "Often" or "Sometimes." Similarly, 38% reported that financial strain frequently affects their ability to focus on their studies. These statistics highlight the prevalence of financial stress among the student population.

Reliability Analysis was conducted to assess the internal consistency of the survey items related to financial burdens. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.89, indicating high reliability and suggesting that the items consistently measure the underlying construct of financial stress.

Correlation Analysis further explored the relationships between different aspects of financial stress and overall student well-being. The analysis showed a significant positive correlation between financial strain affecting study focus and mental health issues ($r = 0.56$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that students who experience financial strain are more likely to report mental health challenges. Additionally, comparisons with peers' financial situations and feelings of insecurity were significantly correlated with overall mental health ($r = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that students who feel financially inadequate compared to their peers are more likely to experience negative mental health outcomes.

According to a study by Johnson, O'Neill, Worthy, Lown, and Bowen (2016), financial stress significantly impacts students' academic performance and mental health. The study utilized a sample of 4,109 undergraduate students from seven universities across the United States. The researchers employed various statistical methods to analyze the data, including descriptive statistics, regression analysis, and structural equation modeling.

In another study, Broton and Goldrick-Rab (2018) conducted a survey of 43,000 students at 66 institutions to explore the prevalence and impact of financial challenges on student success. The study used logistic regression to examine the likelihood of students experiencing food and housing insecurity. Results showed that 36% of students experienced food insecurity and 36% faced housing insecurity. These conditions were associated with a higher likelihood of dropping out (Odds Ratio = 1.52, $p < 0.01$) and lower academic performance (Odds Ratio = 1.42, $p < 0.01$) .

These findings underscore the significant impact of financial burdens on students' academic outcomes and overall well-being. Addressing these challenges through comprehensive financial support systems, including scholarships, grants, and affordable housing initiatives, can help mitigate the negative effects of financial stress. Furthermore, integrating financial literacy programs into the educational curriculum can equip students with the necessary skills to manage their finances effectively, thereby enhancing their academic and personal success.

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