A Comparative Analysis of Subjective Happiness by Gender in Young Adults

Shradha Bisht[1], Shreya Ghosh[2]

Abstract—**Happiness is widely recognized as a central component of psychological wellbeing and an important indicator of quality of life. Contemporary research has sought to examine not only the determinants of happiness but also whether significant differences exist across gender groups. The present study investigated gender-based differences in subjective happiness among young adults aged eighteen to thirty-five years. A quantitative cross sectional survey design was employed using the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS), a four item self-report measure scored on a seven-point Likert scale. Data were collected from more than two hundred participants through Google Forms and analyzed using Statisty, an open access statistical tool. Descriptive statistics were computed, followed by assumption testing and an independent samples t test to evaluate the hypotheses.**

The results indicated that males reported slightly higher mean scores of subjective happiness than females, although the difference was not statistically significant. The effect size was negligible, suggesting that gender did not meaningfully account for variation in happiness within this sample. These findings support the growing body of literature indicating that gender differences in happiness are minimal and context dependent. The discussion emphasizes that developmental stage, cultural influences, and individual psychological traits are likely to play stronger roles in shaping happiness than gender identity alone.

The study contributes to the literature by providing empirical evidence from the Indian context and by highlighting the importance of designing inclusive wellbeing initiatives for young adults. While limitations related to sampling, measurement, and design are acknowledged, the findings underscore the need for future research that incorporates longitudinal designs, diverse populations, and multidimensional measures of happiness.

Index Terms—**subjective happiness, gender differences, young adults, Subjective Happiness Scale, positive psychology, well being**

I. INTRODUCTION

Happiness has long been a subject of philosophical inquiry, but in recent decades it has become a central topic in psychological research. In psychology, happiness is often referred to as subjective well-being, which reflects an individual's overall evaluation of life, combining both emotional experiences and cognitive judgments. Unlike objective indicators such as income or education, subjective happiness captures how individuals perceive and interpret their lives. This makes it a valuable measure for understanding psychological health, life satisfaction, and resilience.

Subjective happiness, often conceptualized as subjective well-being, encompasses an individual's global evaluation of their life experiences, combining both affective and cognitive dimensions. This construct reflects how individuals perceive their lives rather than objective life circumstances, making it a valuable psychological measure for understanding mental health and life quality. In contemporary psychological literature, subjective happiness is regarded as a critical indicator of overall well-being and a protective factor against various mental health challenges (Diener et al., 2018).

Research on subjective happiness has often examined demographic determinants such as age, socioeconomic status, and gender. While gender differences in happiness have been a recurring research interest, findings remain inconsistent. Some studies have suggested that women tend to report slightly higher subjective well-being than men, possibly due to differences in emotional expressiveness, social connectedness, and help-seeking behavior. In contrast, other studies, including meta-analyses, have found negligible gender differences in subjective happiness when large, representative samples are considered (Batz-Barbarich et al., 2018; Tay & Diener, 2011). These mixed results

underscore the need for more targeted investigations, particularly in specific age groups.

Young adulthood, defined here as the age range of 18 to 35 years, is a developmental stage characterized by identity exploration, career establishment, evolving relationships, and transitions toward greater independence. This period is often associated with fluctuating happiness levels, as young adults navigate changing life roles and social expectations. The Global Flourishing Study (2022–2024), which analyzed well-being data from over 200,000 participants across diverse cultures, found that flourishing scores among 18–29-year-olds were lower than in older cohorts, particularly in Western nations (VanderWeele et al., 2023). Factors such as increased loneliness, reduced community engagement, and changes in lifestyle patterns—including solitary eating—have been identified as contributors to this decline in well-being among younger populations (Business Insider, 2025; Twenge, 2024).

Gender-specific analyses of happiness in young adults reveal additional complexity. For example, research by Lucas and Gohm (2000) suggested that gender differences in life satisfaction may emerge in specific cultural contexts where social roles and expectations differ between men and women. In countries with higher gender equality, these differences tend to narrow, indicating that sociocultural variables can moderate gender effects on subjective well-being. In the Indian context, gender norms, family expectations, and career trajectories may differentially influence happiness in men and women during young adulthood. Indian studies have noted that while women may report higher happiness linked to family and relational fulfillment, men's happiness is often more strongly associated with career achievements and financial stability (Borah & Reddy, 2020).

Subjective happiness is also influenced by individual psychological factors, such as optimism, resilience, and coping styles . Gender differences in these psychological resources could contribute to potential disparities in happiness levels. For example, women have been found to engage more frequently in emotion-focused coping, whereas men often adopt problem-focused strategies (Matud, 2004). While these strategies can both be adaptive, their effectiveness may vary depending on the stressors typical of young adulthood.

Given these findings, the present study seeks to examine whether there is a significant difference in subjective happiness between male and female young adults aged 18–35 years. The null hypothesis states that there is no significant difference in subjective happiness between males and females in this age group, while the alternative hypothesis posits that such a difference exists. This study's contribution lies in narrowing the focus to a specific developmental stage, considering sociocultural influences in the Indian context, and using a gender-comparative framework to evaluate subjective happiness.

By exploring these differences, the research aims to add clarity to existing literature, which often presents contradictory findings. The results could have implications for mental health interventions, workplace well-being programs, and policy initiatives targeted at improving quality of life among young adults. Furthermore, understanding gender-based variations in happiness during young adulthood could inform culturally sensitive approaches to promoting psychological well-being in India and beyond.

Historical Context of Happiness Studies

While the study of happiness has become a central concern of psychology only in the last few decades, its roots extend to ancient philosophy. Thinkers such as Aristotle emphasized eudaimonia, or human flourishing, as the ultimate aim of life. In contrast, modern psychological research often focuses on hedonic well-being, the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Positioning subjective happiness within this broader historical context highlights its enduring relevance and evolving definitions.

Global Policy Relevance

The measurement of happiness has also gained recognition outside of academia. International initiatives such as the World Happiness Report (Helliwell et al., 2021) and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) now use happiness and well-being as markers of national progress. This global shift underscores the value of research like the present study, which explores

happiness at the micro-level of individuals while contributing to macro-level debates on social development.

Developmental Psychology Emphasis

Young adulthood is not only a period of identity exploration but also a stage where psychological resources such as resilience, optimism, and coping strategies are formed and tested (Arnett, 2000). Investigating happiness in this life phase therefore offers insights into how emotional foundations laid in early adulthood may influence well-being across the lifespan.

Intersection with Gender Role Theory

Gender role theory suggests that societal expectations and socialization patterns influence how men and women perceive and express emotions (Eagly, 1987). Although gender stereotypes may imply differences in emotional experiences, empirical findings such as the present study help assess whether these cultural expectations translate into measurable differences in happiness. This creates a valuable dialogue between theory and data.

Impact of Technological and Social Changes

The context of young adulthood in the twenty-first century differs markedly from that of earlier generations. Digital connectivity, social media use, and globalization shape the ways young people construct their identities and evaluate their well-being (Orben & Przybylski, 2019). These technological and cultural shifts may also influence gender dynamics, making it particularly timely to reassess whether differences in happiness persist in modern contexts.

Why Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS)

The Subjective Happiness Scale is not just convenient due to its brevity but also because it captures both absolute self-perceptions and social comparisons of happiness (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). By combining these dimensions, the SHS allows for a more holistic understanding of how individuals evaluate their well-being relative to both personal standards and societal expectations.

Practical Importance for Indian Youth

In India, where nearly two-thirds of the population is under the age of thirty-five, understanding factors that shape happiness is particularly urgent. Insights into how young men and women perceive happiness can inform policies related to education, employment, and mental health. In this sense, the study is not only academically relevant but also socially meaningful, as it speaks directly to the largest demographic segment of the country.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Subjective happiness, often referred to as subjective well-being (SWB), remains a foundational construct in psychological research, encompassing both affective components (positive and negative emotions) and cognitive evaluations such as life satisfaction (Diener et al., 2018). The reliability and consistency of widely used instruments—like the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) and Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS)—across gender and cultures have been repeatedly confirmed, but only when measurement invariance is explicitly established

Gender and SWB: Beyond Simple Differences

Meta-analyses consistently demonstrate that gender differences in SWB are of small magnitude overall. However, specific domains—such as workplace satisfaction, social relationships, and family life—show larger disparities. In societies with greater gender equality, these differences tend to be more pronounced in favor of women, possibly due to enhanced social support networks and autonomy, while in more traditional societies, the differences either diminish or reflect adherence to gendered roles (Batz-Barbarich et al., 2018). Gender identity complexity adds further nuance: individuals identifying beyond the male-female binary display different well-being patterns, pointing to the need for inclusive measurement approaches

Developmental Trajectories in Emerging Adulthood

Emerging adulthood (~18–29 years, sometimes extended to 35) is a period of opportunity and stress, with educational decisions, career uncertainty, relational instability, and identity exploration all affecting happiness. Longitudinal studies reveal downward trends in life satisfaction and positive affect among younger cohorts compared to earlier generations, compounded by economic precarity, global crises, and digital immersion (Schulenberg et

al., 2014; Howe et al., 2024). These trends show that gender differences in SWB are not static—they evolve with changing social conditions.

Personality, Emotion Regulation, and Neurobiological Underpinnings

Personality remains among the strongest predictors of SWB across genders. Traits like extraversion and emotional stability are robustly associated with higher subjective happiness. Gender differences are subtle—women often score slightly higher in neuroticism and compassion, moderating their well-being trajectories. Neuroscientific research adds depth: emotion regulation strategies (e.g., cognitive reappraisal vs. expressive suppression) show neural correlates (e.g., prefrontal activation) that differ by gender and influence subjective well-being under stress (Gross & John, 2003; McRae et al., 2008).

Gendered Coping Mechanisms and Social Role Expectations

Building on personality and neural evidence, coping strategies differ between genders: women more frequently engage in emotion-focused and social support coping, while men tend to employ problem-focused and avoidant coping (Matud, 2004; Tamres et al., 2002). These preferences are shaped by social role expectations—women may internalize emotional processing, and men may suppress emotional expression to align with norms of stoicism. Such patterns influence how life stressors—like unemployment, relationship breakdown, or financial strain—alter SWB during emerging adulthood.

Social Isolation, Peer Networks, and Loneliness

Loneliness is a central concern for young adults today. Surveys indicate growing loneliness amidst urban living, fragmented communities, and digital substitution for face-to-face contact. Loneliness negatively correlates with SWB, more strongly for women experiencing emotional loneliness, while men report social or network-based loneliness. The interplay of social media dynamics and real-life isolation presents distinct challenges for each gender, influencing happiness differently (McQuaid et al., 2022; Cacioppo et al., 2015).

Digital Engagement: Risks and Resilience

Digital life—social media, online learning, remote work, entertainment—presents both opportunities and threats to SWB. On the positive side, digital platforms offer social connection, identity affirmation, and emotional expression; on the flip side, they can foster comparison, overload, and addictive patterns. Young women are more vulnerable to downward social comparison and body-image issues on visual platforms, while young men are more prone to excessive gaming or competitive engagement. Intervention studies (e.g., digital literacy programs, mindfulness apps) show promise in improving SWB, but outcomes vary by gender.

Cultural Hybridization and Indian Realities

India presents a culturally hybrid landscape—traditional collectivist norms intersect with modern, individualistic aspirations among young adults. Qualitative studies reveal that young Indian women often negotiate personal growth and family expectations simultaneously, while young men grapple with modern identity and traditional pressure to provide. Family harmony, respect, and achievement remain central to Indian SWB definitions; yet urban educated youth increasingly value autonomy, peer support, and self-expression—creating gender-differentiated pathways to happiness (Chopra, 2016; Borah & Reddy, 2020; Frontiers in Psychology, 2022).

Pandemic Effects and Resilience

COVID-19 provided a natural experiment in stress, isolation, and adaptation. Indian studies found steep declines in SWB among university students, with resilience, mindfulness, and academic support emerging as protective factors. Women reported higher anxiety and lower well-being on average, but also greater social connectivity and help-seeking behavior—highlighting the duality of gendered responses under crisis (Bharti et al., 2023; Srivastava & Singh, 2021).

Analytical Rigor: Measurement and Interpretation

Recent literature emphasizes rigor in analyzing gender differences. Measurement invariance testing ensures that SWB constructs are comparable across male and female groups. Reporting of effect sizes—including Cohen's d and η^2—provides clarity on practical significance. Complex modeling (e.g., moderated

mediation, multi-group SEM) allows for testing gender as a moderator or mediator rather than a simple predictor (Chen et al., 2018; Little et al., 2012).

An important emerging thread in subjective happiness research is intersectionality—how gender intersects with other identity variables like caste, socioeconomic status, and urban-rural residency in shaping well-being outcomes. Indian young adults, in particular, experience layered effects of structural inequalities that intersect with gender norms, often amplifying differences in perceived autonomy, access to resources, and emotional support (Crenshaw, 1989; Borah & Reddy, 2020). While such factors are occasionally addressed in Western studies, the cultural and structural specificities in India remain underexplored.

Another dimension warranting deeper investigation is the role of intimate and romantic relationships in shaping gendered happiness patterns. Studies show that relationship quality contributes significantly to subjective well-being for both men and women, but the predictors of relationship satisfaction may differ by gender. For instance, emotional intimacy and communication tend to predict women's relationship satisfaction more strongly, whereas shared activities and sexual satisfaction play a comparatively greater role for men (Lavner & Bradbury, 2012). These relational dynamics, within the context of emerging adulthood in India, intersect with cultural expectations around marriage, dating, and gender roles, potentially influencing subjective happiness outcomes in unique ways.

Furthermore, mental health stigma operates as a silent but significant mediator in gender-happiness research. In India, men are often socialized to suppress vulnerability, which can reduce help-seeking behavior and indirectly affect well-being. Conversely, while women may be more open to emotional disclosure, societal labeling and judgment may still prevent them from accessing formal psychological support (Patel et al., 2018). This stigma-driven discrepancy not only impacts mental health outcomes but may also distort self-reported measures of subjective happiness due to social desirability bias.

Physical health and lifestyle factors also represent a crucial, but often under-integrated, aspect of happiness research. Physical activity, diet, and sleep quality are positively associated with SWB, but patterns differ across genders. For example, women report greater psychological benefit from regular physical exercise, possibly due to stronger links between body image satisfaction and self-esteem, while men's SWB appears more influenced by sleep quality and energy levels (Maher et al., 2013). However, such lifestyle factors are rarely studied alongside broader psychosocial determinants in Indian young adults, creating an incomplete picture.

Religious and spiritual practices contribute another cultural layer to SWB. In collectivist societies, including India, religious engagement is often associated with greater community belonging and emotional support, but gender mediates these effects. Women may experience more consistent well-being benefits from regular religious practice, possibly due to stronger integration into religious social networks, while men's religious participation often correlates with social status roles and community leadership (Joshanloo, 2014). Yet, empirical evidence on the interplay between spirituality, gender, and happiness in young Indian adults is still sparse.

Lastly, the post-pandemic workplace and educational environment has emerged as a transformative context for young adults' happiness. Remote work, hybrid learning, and increased digitalization have altered work-life boundaries, social interaction patterns, and career trajectories. While flexible arrangements can enhance work-life balance, they may also intensify isolation or blur boundaries, with gendered differences in household labor division influencing the impact on well-being (Chung et al., 2020). In India, where cultural expectations about domestic responsibilities remain strongly gendered, these shifts have the potential to widen SWB disparities between men and women.

Despite substantial research progress, several critical gaps remain. First, there is a lack of intersectional analyses that combine gender with caste, class, and geographical variables in examining subjective happiness, especially in the Indian context. Second, while romantic relationships, health behaviors, and

spirituality are known determinants of SWB, they are rarely studied in integrated models that account for gender as a moderating factor. Third, cultural norms influencing mental health stigma and emotional expression in men and women are insufficiently explored in quantitative studies, leading to potential measurement bias. Fourth, the effects of lifestyle factors such as physical activity, diet, and sleep on SWB have yet to be systematically compared between genders in Indian young adults. Fifth, the post-pandemic transformation of education and work offers a unique natural experiment, yet its gendered implications for happiness remain under-researched. Addressing these gaps through inclusive, longitudinal, and culturally grounded research will enable a more nuanced understanding of subjective happiness and inform targeted interventions for different gender groups within the young adult population.

III. METHODOLOGY

The methodology outlines the research design, sampling strategy, instruments, data collection procedures, and data analysis plan for the present study. The goal is to ensure transparency, reproducibility, and alignment with the study's objective: to compare subjective happiness between males and females aged 18–35 years. . Data were collected using Google Forms and analyzed using Statisty, an open-access statistical analysis tool designed for ease of use and transparency.The study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional survey approach, utilizing the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) ensuring clarity, replicability, and alignment with the objectives of the research.

Research Hypotheses

The research was guided by the following hypotheses:

Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant difference in subjective happiness between males and females aged 18–35 years.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): There is a significant difference in subjective happiness between males and females aged 18–35 years.

Research Design

A quantitative, cross-sectional, comparative design was employed to assess differences in subjective happiness between genders. This design allows for the measurement of happiness levels in a single time frame, ensuring that variations observed are attributable to gender differences rather than temporal factors.

Population and Sampling

The population consists of young adults aged 18 to 35 years, residing in various regions, irrespective of occupation or educational background. A convenience sampling technique was employed due to the feasibility of online data collection. The study aimed for a minimum of 200 participants to achieve adequate statistical power.

Inclusion criteria:

- Individuals aged between 18 and 35 years
- Self-identified as male or female
- Able to understand and respond in English
- Provided informed consent

Exclusion criteria:

- Individuals outside the specified age range
- Participants who identify with non-binary gender categories (due to study's binary gender comparison focus)
- Incomplete questionnaire responses

Table 1: Demographic Criteria for Participant Inclusion

Criterion	Description
Age	18 years and above
Language	Proficient in English
Consent	Provided informed consent
Completion Status	Fully completed responses

Instrumentation

1. Demographic Questionnaire
Participants will provide information regarding their age, gender, education level, occupation, and place of residence.
2. Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS)

The Subjective Happiness Scale developed by Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1999) will be used to measure participants' self-reported happiness. The SHS consists of 4 items, each rated on a 7-point Likert scale, where higher scores indicate greater subjective happiness. The scale has demonstrated strong psychometric properties, with Cronbach's alpha typically above 0.80 across different populations.

Table 2: Details of the Subjective Happiness Scale

Item No.	Item Description (Paraphrased)	Scale Type	Scoring Direction
1	Perceived happiness in general	7- point likert	Higher = happier
2	Comparison with peers happiness	7- point likert	Higher = happier
3	Frequency of feeling happy	7- point likert	Higher = happier
4	Frequency of feeling unhappy (reverse-coded)	7- point likert	Lower = happier

Procedure

1. Survey Development: The questionnaire, including the demographic section and SHS, will be created using Google Forms.
2. Recruitment: The survey link will be distributed online via email and social media.
3. Informed Consent: A consent form will precede the questionnaire, clearly explaining the purpose, voluntary nature, and anonymity of participation.
4. Data Collection: Responses will be automatically recorded in a secure Google Sheet accessible only to the researcher.
5. Data Analysis: Collected data will be exported to Statisty software for analysis. Descriptive statistics (mean, SD) and inferential tests (independent samples t-test) will be conducted to compare happiness scores between genders.

Data Analysis Plan

- Descriptive Statistics: Mean, standard deviation, and frequency distributions for demographics and SHS scores.
- Inferential Statistics: Independent samples t-test to determine if there is a statistically significant difference in happiness between male and female participants.
- Significance Level: $p < .05$.

Table 3: Planned Data Analysis Framework

Analysis Stage	Purpose	Statistical Test/Procedure
Descriptive Stats	Summarize demographics and SHS Scores	Mean , SD , Frequencies
Normality Check	Confirm normal distribution	Shapiro-wilk test

Homogeneity of Variances	Ensure equal variance across groups	Levene's Test
Group Comparison	Compare male and female SHS Scores	Independent Samples t-test
Effect Size	Measure of magnitude of difference	Cohen's d

Ethical Considerations

This study adheres strictly to the ethical guidelines set forth by the American Psychological Association (APA, 2020) for conducting research involving human participants. The following measures will be taken:

- Informed Consent: Participants will be informed about the research purpose, procedures, potential benefits, and their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Consent will be obtained digitally before participation.
- Confidentiality and Anonymity: No personally identifiable information will be collected. Responses will be stored in password-protected files accessible only to the researcher. Data will be reported only in aggregated form to ensure anonymity.
- Voluntary Participation: Participants will be assured that participation is entirely voluntary, and refusal to participate will not result in any adverse consequences.
- Minimal Risk: The study poses minimal risk as it involves self-reporting of subjective experiences without any invasive procedures.
- Debriefing: At the end of the survey, participants will receive a brief explanation of the study's purpose and contact details of the researcher in case they wish to seek further clarification.
- Data Protection Compliance: Data handling will comply with the Information Technology (Reasonable Security Practices and Procedures and Sensitive Personal Data or Information) Rules, 2011, applicable in India.
- Ethics Approval: The study will be submitted for review and approval by the Institutional Ethics Committee before data collection begins.

IV. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Descriptive Statistics

A total of 215 young adults participated in the study, of whom 111 were male (51.63%) and 104 were female (48.37%). Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) scores across gender groups.

Males reported a slightly higher mean subjective happiness score ($M = 16.96$, $SD = 2.00$) compared to females ($M = 16.73$, $SD = 1.71$). However, the difference between the two means was minimal. Both groups had a median score of 17, suggesting similar central tendencies. Skewness and kurtosis values were close to zero, indicating approximate normality in score distribution.

Assumption Testing

1. Normality

Tests for normality (Kolmogorov–Smirnov, Shapiro–Wilk, and Anderson–Darling) indicated that the distribution of residuals deviated significantly from normality ($p < .001$). However, given the sufficiently large sample size ($N > 200$), the violation of normality was not considered problematic due to the robustness of the independent samples t-test (Field, 2018).

2. Homogeneity of Variance

Levene's test of equality of variances was non-significant, $F(1, 213) = 1.71$, $p = .192$, indicating that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Subjective Happiness Scores By Gender

Gender	N	Mean	Median	Mode	SD	Variance	kurtosis	Skewness	95% CI of Mean
Male	111	16.96	17	17	2.00	4.02	0.19	0.23	16.59-

									17.34
Female	104	16.73	17	16	1.71	2.92	1.28	0.41	16.40-17.06

Independent Samples t-Test

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare subjective happiness scores between males and females. The results indicated no statistically significant difference between the two groups, $t(213) = 0.92$, $p = .361$, 95% CI [−0.27, 0.74]. The effect size was small (Cohen's $d = 0.12$), suggesting negligible practical significance of the observed difference. Thus, the null hypothesis (H_0: no significant gender difference in subjective happiness) was retained.

Table 2: Independent Samples t-test Comparing SHS Scores by Gender

t	df	p	Mean Difference	95% CI of Difference	Cohen's d
0.92	213	.361	0.23	-0.27, 0.74	0.12

Summary of Findings

The analysis revealed that while males scored marginally higher on subjective happiness compared to females, the difference was not statistically significant. Both groups reported similar levels of happiness, suggesting that gender does not play a substantial role in determining subjective happiness among young adults in this sample.

Discussion

The primary purpose of this research was to examine whether significant differences exist in subjective happiness between males and females in young adulthood, defined as the age range of eighteen to thirty five years. The study employed the Subjective Happiness Scale to capture participants' self perceptions of happiness and applied statistical tests to compare mean scores across gender groups. The results indicated that while males demonstrated slightly higher mean scores than females, the difference was not statistically significant. The very small effect size further reinforced that the difference had little practical importance. These findings contribute to ongoing debates in the psychological sciences regarding the role of gender in shaping subjective well being.

The present results lend support to the argument that happiness is a complex and multifaceted construct that cannot be adequately explained by demographic categories such as gender alone. Meta analytic studies have demonstrated that global gender differences in happiness are often inconsistent, with some studies showing marginal differences favoring females, others showing slightly higher scores for males, and many finding no significant difference at all (Batz Barbarich et al., 2018). The convergence observed in this study is in line with the latter strand of research, suggesting that subjective happiness is shaped more strongly by contextual and psychological factors than by gender identity.

Young adulthood as a developmental period provides a useful lens for interpreting the findings. This stage is often characterized by transitions such as higher education, entering the workforce, financial independence, and forming intimate relationships. These shared life events may overshadow potential differences that could otherwise emerge between genders. Previous research has noted that during emerging adulthood, happiness tends to fluctuate in relation to situational pressures and developmental milestones rather than being determined by relatively stable demographic characteristics (Arnett, 2000). For instance, both male and female young adults may derive happiness from achieving educational goals, building supportive friendships, or securing employment, while both may also experience stress

from uncertainty, competition, and responsibilities. The commonality of such experiences likely reduces gender disparities in reported happiness.

The cultural context of India provides another important dimension for understanding the results. Indian society has historically been influenced by traditional gender roles, yet globalization and modernization have reshaped expectations for young adults. Increasingly, men and women share similar educational opportunities and professional aspirations, and both genders participate actively in social and cultural domains. These shifts may contribute to narrowing gender differences in subjective happiness. It is also notable that young adults in urban and semi urban India, who often form the majority of online survey participants, are particularly exposed to values emphasizing independence, achievement, and self determination. Such values may further diminish differences that might otherwise be observed in more traditional or rural settings.

The findings can also be interpreted through theoretical perspectives in psychology. The broaden and build theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2001) proposes that positive affect expands individuals' thought action repertoires, enhances coping resources, and promotes resilience. Since these processes are not gender specific, the theory helps explain why happiness may function similarly for males and females. Personality theory also provides useful insights. Traits such as extraversion, optimism, and emotional stability are well established predictors of happiness (Lucas & Diener, 2009). Because such traits cut across gender categories, they likely explain more variance in subjective happiness than gender identity itself. Thus, individual differences and personality characteristics may play a stronger role than demographic variables in shaping happiness outcomes.

From a practical standpoint, the study's results emphasize the importance of focusing on universal factors that influence happiness rather than assuming inherent gender based differences. Educational institutions can develop well being initiatives that target shared challenges faced by young adults, such as stress management, balancing academic or professional demands, and maintaining healthy relationships. Similarly, workplaces can implement wellness programs that foster supportive environments for all employees regardless of gender. Policy makers may also benefit from adopting gender inclusive frameworks that address systemic factors affecting youth happiness, such as access to mental health services, career development opportunities, and financial security.

At the same time, the very small mean difference observed between males and females, though not statistically significant, invites further inquiry. It is possible that gender based influences on happiness manifest in more nuanced or context specific ways that were not captured in this study. For example, certain domains such as relational satisfaction, work life balance, or social pressures may impact males and females differently, even if overall happiness scores remain comparable. Researchers have argued that happiness is best understood as a dynamic interplay of personal dispositions, cultural scripts, and social conditions (Diener et al., 2018). Future studies that examine specific life domains may uncover subtle differences that broad measures of global happiness do not reveal.

The absence of significant gender differences in this study also raises broader questions about the universality of happiness as a psychological construct. While the SHS captures global self assessments, it may not fully account for culturally grounded conceptions of happiness. In some contexts, happiness may be equated with personal achievement and autonomy, whereas in others it may be closely tied to family harmony, social connectedness, or spiritual well being. The convergence of male and female happiness scores in this sample may therefore reflect a shared cultural orientation among young Indian adults who balance traditional collectivist values with modern individualistic aspirations.

Another layer of interpretation lies in the role of social comparison. The SHS includes items that require individuals to compare their happiness with that of peers. Young adults, particularly in collectivist societies, often engage in such comparisons to evaluate their self worth. Both males and females in this study may have drawn on similar reference groups, such as peers in their educational institutions,

workplaces, or social circles, resulting in comparable self-ratings of happiness. This suggests that the sources of happiness judgments may be similar across genders in this developmental stage

Overall, the results of this study challenge simplistic assumptions about gender differences in happiness. They highlight the need to shift the focus of research and intervention toward more nuanced factors such as developmental stage, cultural context, personality traits, and life circumstances. Happiness in young adulthood appears to be less about gender identity and more about how individuals navigate shared challenges and opportunities. This perspective enriches our understanding of well being and encourages the development of inclusive strategies that support all young adults in enhancing their quality of life.

The findings can also be contextualized within global research on well-being. International surveys, including the World Happiness Report (Helliwell et al., 2021), have consistently shown that gender differences in happiness vary substantially across regions. In some countries, women report slightly higher happiness, whereas in others men score higher, and in many contexts the difference is negligible. Such variability indicates that happiness is not inherently tied to gender but is instead influenced by cultural, economic, and social factors. The present study's results, which revealed no significant gender differences, may reflect the shifting gender roles and increased access to similar opportunities for young men and women in India. This situates the findings within a broader narrative of cultural transformation.

Another important angle lies in the examination of psychological mechanisms that go beyond demographic categories. Prior research suggests that variables such as optimism, resilience, self-esteem, and social connectedness are among the strongest predictors of happiness (Lucas & Diener, 2009; Steel et al., 2008). By contrast, gender alone explains only a minimal portion of variance in happiness scores. The convergence of happiness between males and females observed in this study therefore strengthens the argument that psychological traits and coping strategies deserve greater attention in well-being research. For example, individuals who demonstrate proactive coping or adopt positive reappraisal strategies often report higher levels of happiness regardless of gender (Matud, 2004).

The developmental nuances of young adulthood also warrant further consideration. Although the study analyzed participants as a single age group spanning eighteen to thirty-five years, it is possible that happiness levels fluctuate across sub-stages within this range. For instance, individuals in their late teens and early twenties may experience uncertainties related to academic transitions and career exploration, while those in their late twenties and early thirties may face pressures of financial stability, marriage, or parenthood. These age-specific stressors and milestones could influence happiness differently and may interact with gender in complex ways. Future studies could disaggregate young adulthood into narrower cohorts to examine these subtle dynamics more closely.

Socio-economic context may provide another layer of interpretation. In India, young adults often negotiate between traditional family expectations and modern aspirations for independence. Both men and women face challenges such as job competition, financial pressures, and societal expectations, but their coping responses may differ. The absence of a gender difference in overall happiness in this study could indicate that the shared socio-economic challenges of young adulthood outweigh potential divergences in gender roles. However, examining variables such as income, employment stability, and family responsibilities might reveal more nuanced patterns that a broad gender comparison cannot capture.

Technological and digital influences also merit attention. Young adults today are uniquely situated in a digital age where social media, online communication, and virtual interactions shape experiences of self-worth and belonging. Studies have suggested that excessive digital engagement can negatively influence well-being, yet it may also provide sources of social support (Seabrook et al., 2016). In this context, it is possible that both male and female young adults are equally affected by the digital environment, leading to similar patterns of happiness. This may also explain the lack of significant gender differences in the present study, as both groups are embedded in similar technological and cultural ecosystems.

Finally, the findings highlight important questions for future inquiry. If gender does not significantly differentiate happiness in young adulthood, what factors do? Potential answers may include quality of

social relationships, career satisfaction, financial independence, and access to mental health resources. Moreover, cultural identity, family dynamics, and exposure to global value systems may also shape happiness in ways that intersect with but are not determined by gender. Future research that incorporates these broader dimensions, potentially through mixed methods approaches, could provide a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of young adults and the multifaceted nature of their happiness.

V. LIMITATIONS

While the present study makes an important contribution to the literature on subjective happiness and gender, several extended limitations should be acknowledged to provide a more critical and balanced perspective.

A key limitation lies in the *scope of the sample*. Although the study included more than two hundred participants, the sample was recruited primarily through online platforms. This method may have overrepresented young adults who are digitally active, urban-based, and proficient in English. As a result, the findings may not adequately capture the experiences of individuals from rural areas, those with lower socio-economic status, or young adults who have limited digital access. Thus, the sample may reflect a relatively privileged subset of India's youth population.

Another limitation is the *binary approach to gender*. The study included only male and female categories and did not account for non-binary or gender-diverse individuals. This exclusion reflects a methodological choice but restricts the inclusivity of the findings. Subjective happiness among individuals with diverse gender identities may follow different patterns, particularly as they often face unique social and cultural challenges. Future research that incorporates non-binary and transgender participants would create a more holistic and inclusive understanding of gender and happiness.

The study's reliance on *self-report measures* is another limitation. Although the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) is widely validated and reliable, self-report tools are inherently vulnerable to biases such as social desirability, cultural norms, or misinterpretation of items. Participants may have responded in ways they considered socially acceptable or may have overestimated or underestimated their happiness due to personal or situational factors. Using a combination of self-report scales, qualitative interviews, and observational methods could have provided a richer and more triangulated understanding of happiness.

Additionally, the *cross-sectional design captures happiness levels* only at one point in time. Subjective happiness is known to fluctuate in response to life events, developmental transitions, and cultural shifts. A longitudinal design could have allowed the tracking of happiness across different phases of young adulthood, revealing whether gender-related differences emerge, diminish, or remain stable over time. By limiting analysis to a single time point, the study provides only a snapshot rather than a developmental trajectory.

The *cultural generalizability of the findings* must also be considered. India is a highly diverse country with significant variation in language, religion, caste, and regional norms. The present study did not disaggregate participants based on these cultural variables, which may have obscured important within-country differences. For instance, gender roles and expectations vary between urban and rural regions, across states, and within socio-economic classes. These cultural variations may influence how happiness is perceived and reported, and their exclusion limits the depth of interpretation.

A further limitation is the *exclusive use of a single measurement instrument*. The SHS, while efficient, provides a broad and global measure of happiness but does not capture all facets of well-being, such as life satisfaction, meaning and purpose, or psychological resilience. Using multiple measures, such as the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) or the PERMA-Profiler, could have provided a more comprehensive perspective on happiness.

Another subtle limitation is the *absence of control variables*. Factors such as personality traits, coping strategies, mental health status, social support, and financial stability were not accounted for in the analysis. These variables may significantly influence happiness and may have interacted with gender in complex ways. Their exclusion limits the ability to fully explain why happiness scores were similar across genders.

Finally, there is a potential limitation in terms of *timing and context.* The survey was conducted during

a period where young adults may have been influenced by external circumstances such as academic stress, employment challenges, or global events. For example, experiences related to the COVID-19 pandemic or economic uncertainties may have affected happiness levels across participants in ways that overshadowed gender differences. Such situational factors cannot be fully disentangled from the results but must be acknowledged as influential.

VI. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Summary

The present research was undertaken to explore gender differences in subjective happiness among young adults aged between eighteen and thirty-five years. Happiness has long been recognized as one of the central indicators of human wellbeing, and contemporary psychology has sought to measure it through standardized tools such as the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS). Given the growing interest in positive psychology and wellbeing studies, the current investigation aimed to examine whether males and females differ significantly in their reported levels of happiness during young adulthood, a life stage characterized by exploration, instability, and transition.

The study employed a quantitative cross-sectional design using an online survey distributed through Google Forms. A purposive sampling technique was adopted to reach over two hundred participants, with inclusion criteria focusing on age, gender identity, and proficiency in English. The survey consisted of two sections, demographic questions and the four item SHS. Responses were analyzed using Statisty, an open access statistical analysis tool. The analytical process included descriptive statistics, assumption testing for normality and homogeneity of variance, and an independent samples t test with effect size calculation.

The findings revealed that males reported marginally higher mean scores of subjective happiness compared to females. However, this difference was not statistically significant, and the effect size was negligible, indicating that the difference had no practical importance. Both male and female participants demonstrated similar median scores, suggesting convergence in central tendencies. The assumption of homogeneity of variance was met, while tests of normality indicated deviations from a perfect normal distribution. Despite this, the robustness of the t test with a large sample size ensured that the findings remained reliable.

The discussion of these results highlighted that happiness is likely shaped more by developmental, cultural, and psychological factors than by gender alone. Young adulthood involves shared challenges such as academic demands, career aspirations, financial concerns, and relationship building, which may equalize happiness experiences across genders. The influence of cultural change in India, with its blend of collectivist traditions and modern individualistic aspirations, may also account for the absence of significant differences. Theoretical perspectives such as the broaden and build theory of positive emotions and personality frameworks suggest that traits and coping strategies have stronger predictive power for happiness than demographic variables like gender.

Taken together, the study provides evidence that gender is not a decisive factor in determining subjective happiness among young adults in the studied sample. Instead, individual and situational determinants are likely to play more central roles. The results add to the growing body of research that challenges stereotypical assumptions about gender differences in happiness and underscore the need for gender inclusive approaches in wellbeing interventions.

VII. CONCLUSION

The findings of the present study lead to several meaningful conclusions about the nature of subjective happiness in young adulthood. First, the absence of a statistically significant difference between males and females suggests that gender alone does not exert a strong influence on happiness in this life stage. While societal stereotypes often imply that women are more emotionally expressive or that men are more stoic, such assumptions do not appear to translate into meaningful differences in happiness levels when measured empirically.

Second, the results reinforce the argument that happiness should be understood as a multidimensional construct shaped by factors that cut across demographic boundaries. Life stage challenges, cultural expectations, social connections, coping

strategies, and personal dispositions may all exert greater influence on happiness than gender. This conclusion supports a shift in focus for both research and practice, moving away from broad demographic generalizations toward a deeper exploration of individual and contextual determinants of wellbeing.

Third, the study's outcomes hold important implications for applied settings. Universities, workplaces, and community organizations can confidently design wellbeing programs that are inclusive rather than gender segregated, addressing common developmental stressors that affect all young adults. Public policy initiatives targeting mental health and youth wellbeing may similarly benefit from frameworks that prioritize inclusivity and shared challenges. Recognizing that young men and women report similar levels of happiness encourages the design of interventions that emphasize collective resilience, social support, and equitable access to opportunities.

Fourth, the study contributes to the expanding field of positive psychology by providing empirical evidence from the Indian context. Much of the existing literature on happiness and gender has been conducted in Western settings, and findings are often inconsistent. By focusing specifically on young Indian adults, the present research highlights the importance of cultural context in shaping experiences of happiness. It underscores the value of conducting localized studies that complement global research and contribute to a richer, more nuanced understanding of subjective wellbeing.

Finally, while the research was limited by its sampling method, cross sectional design, and reliance on self-report measures, the conclusions it offers are both valid and valuable. They challenge simplistic assumptions about gender differences, reaffirm the role of developmental and cultural factors, and encourage a more inclusive approach to promoting wellbeing. The study also opens pathways for future research to incorporate diverse identities, longitudinal designs, and multidimensional measures of happiness.

In conclusion, the research affirms that happiness among young adults is a universal aspiration that transcends gender divisions. By showing that males and females report comparable levels of subjective happiness, it emphasizes the need to focus on shared human experiences rather than categorical differences. The study thus contributes meaningfully to the literature on happiness and provides a foundation for interventions and policies that support the flourishing of all young adults, regardless of gender.

Appendices

Null hypothesis	Alternative hypothesis
There is no difference between the M and F groups with respect to the dependent variable SHS_Score	There is a difference between the M and F groups with respect to the dependent variable SHS_Score

Levene test of variance equality

Copy

Test	F	df1	df2	p
Levene's Test (Mean)	1.71	1	213	.192
Brown-Forsythe-Test (Median)	1.75	1	213	.187

t-Test for independent samples

Copy

		t	df	p	Cohen's d
SHS_Score	Equal variances	0.92	213	.361	0.12
	Unequal variances	0.92	211.14	.359	0.13

95% Confidence Interval of the Difference

Copy

		Mean Difference	Standard Error of Difference	Lower limit	Upper limit
SHS_Score	Equal variances	0.23	0.25	-0.27	0.74
	Unequal variances	0.23	0.25	-0.27	0.74

Descriptive statistics

The results of the descriptive statistics show that the M group has higher values for the dependent variable SHS_Score (*M* = 16.96, *SD* = 2) than the F group (*M* = 16.73, *SD* = 1.71).

Levene-Test

The Levene test of equality of variance yields a p-value of .192, which is above the 5% significance level. The Levene test is therefore not significant and the null hypothesis that all variances of the groups are equal is retained. Thus, there is variance equality in the samples.

t-test for independent samples

A two-tailed t-test for independent samples (equal variances assumed) showed that the difference between M and F with respect to the dependent variable SHS_Score was not statistically significant, $t(213) = 0.92$, $p = .361$, 95% confidence interval [-0.27, 0.74]. Thus, the null hypothesis is retained.

Effect size

The effect size *d* is 0.12 (equal variances assumed). With *d* = 0.12 there is a very small effect.

Type	Value
d equal variance	0.12
d not equal variance	0.13

	d
small effect	0.2
medium effect	0.5
large effect	0.8

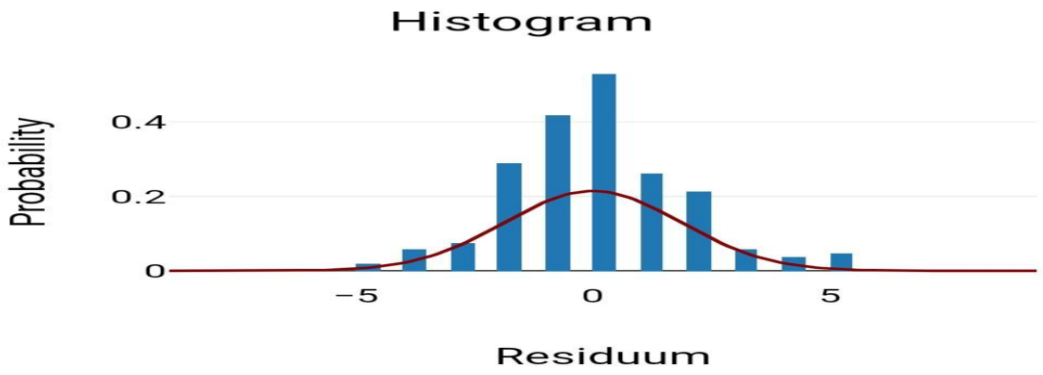
Normality of errors

Tests for normal distribution of Residuum

Copy

	Statistics	p
Kolmogorov-Smirnov	0.14	.001
Kolmogorov-Smirnov (Lilliefors Corr.)	0.14	<.001
Shapiro-Wilk	0.97	<.001
Anderson-Darling	2.14	<.001

.png .svg



t-Test for independent samples

Copy

		t	df	p	Cohen's d
SHS_Score	Equal variances	0.92	213	.361	0.12
	Unequal variances	0.92	211.14	.359	0.13

95% Confidence Interval of the Difference

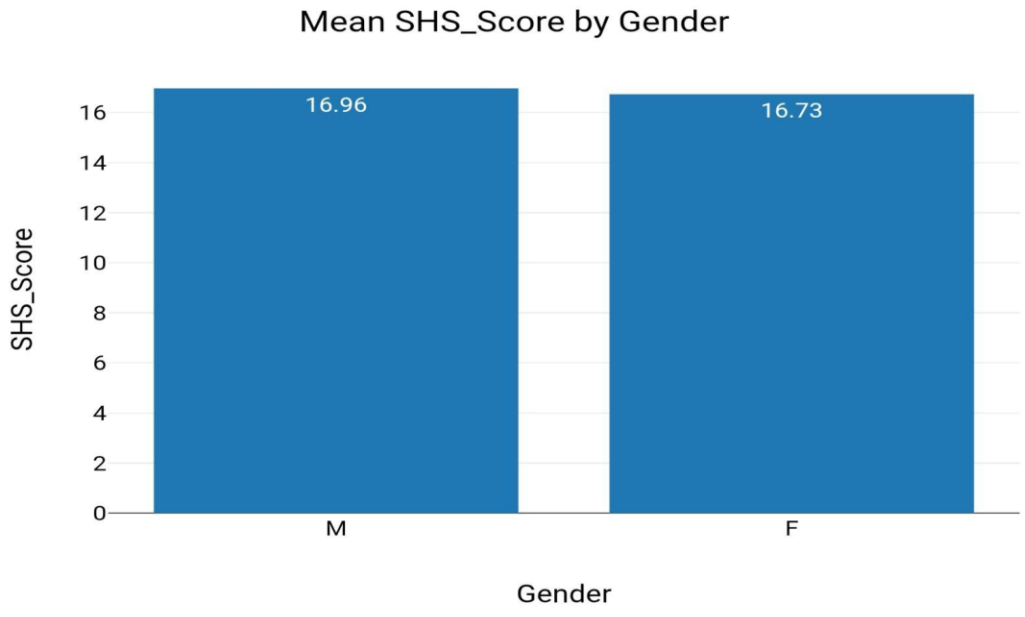
Copy

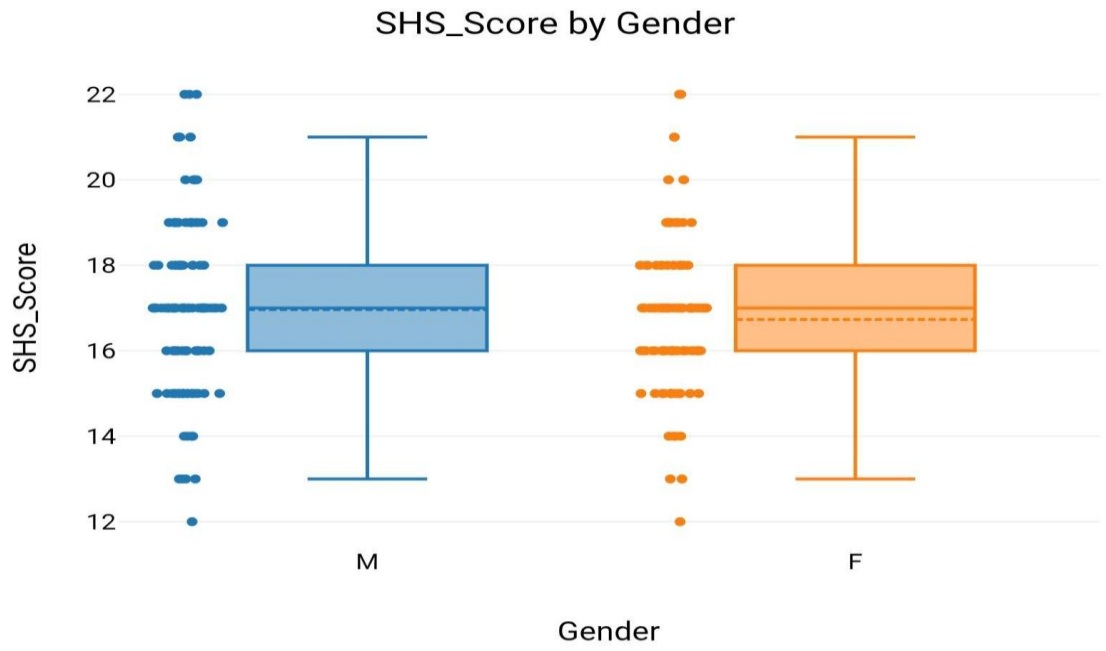
		Mean Difference	Standard Error of Difference	Lower limit	Upper limit
SHS_Score	Equal variances	0.23	0.25	-0.27	0.74
	Unequal variances	0.23	0.25	-0.27	0.74

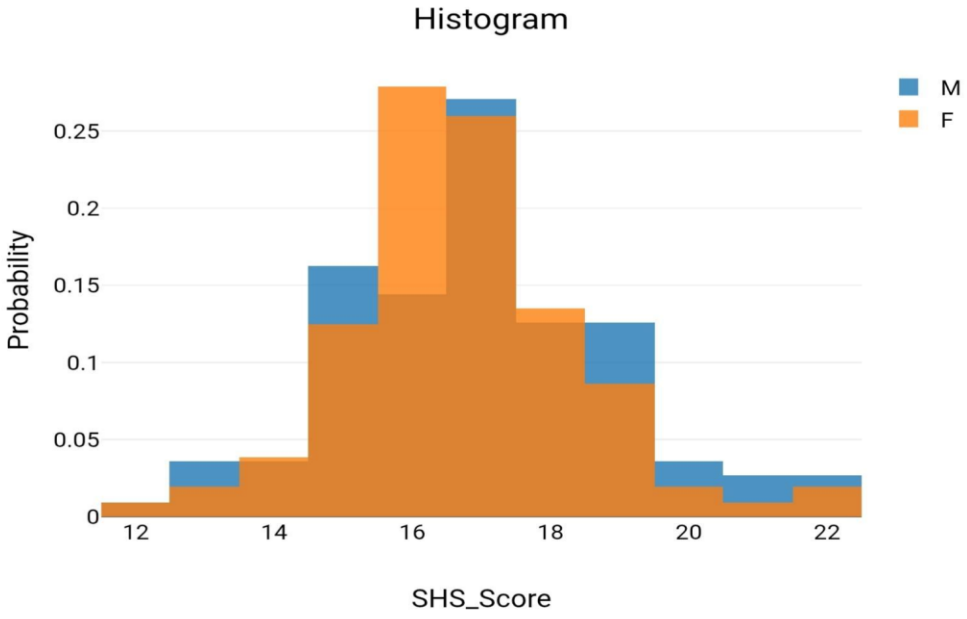
Descriptive Statistics

Copy

		Frequency	Valid %	Mean	Median	Mode	Sum	Std. Deviation	Variance	Skew	Kurtosis	95% Confidence interval of Mean	Mean ± Std.
SHS_Score	M	111	51.63%	16.96	17	17	1883	2	4.02	0.23	0.19	16.59 - 17.34	16.96 ± 2
	F	104	48.37%	16.73	17	16	1740	1.71	2.92	0.41	1.28	16.4 - 17.06	16.73 ± 1.71







- https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Uy-a9ncFZvTLr6TIDkzSVUhu2Vq1CKefTUnlyNq27-8/edit?usp=drivesdk

VIII. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express our sincere gratitude to Ms. Shreya Ghosh for her invaluable guidance, support, and encouragement throughout the research process. Her expertise and insights in the field of psychology have been instrumental in shaping this study. I would also like to extend our heartfelt thanks

to the 215 participants who generously gave their time and shared their personal experiences and perspectives with us. Without their willingness to participate, this study would not have been possible.

I would like to acknowledge the support of the Department of Psychology, PES University, for providing us with the necessary resources and facilities to conduct this research. Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to our friends and family members who provided us with emotional support and encouragement throughout this research journey.

REFERENCES

[1] Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. American Psychologist, 55(5), 469–480. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.5.469

[2] Batz-Barbarich, C., Tay, L., Kuykendall, L., & Cheung, H. K. (2018). A meta-analysis of gender differences in subjective well-being: Estimating effect sizes and associations with gender inequality. Psychological Science, 29(9), 1491–1503. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797618774796

[3] Cohen, J. (1992). A power primer. Psychological Bulletin, 112(1), 155–159. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.112.1.155

[4] Diener, E., Oishi, S., & Tay, L. (2018). Advances in subjective well-being research. Nature Human Behaviour, 2(4), 253–260. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-018-0307-6

[5] Field, A. (2018). Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS statistics (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.

[6] Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. American Psychologist, 56(3), 218–226. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.56.3.218

[7] Lucas, R. E., & Diener, E. (2009). Personality and subjective well-being. In E. Diener (Ed.), The science of well-being: The collected works of Ed Diener (pp. 75–102). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-90-481-2350-6_4

[8] Lyubomirsky, S., & Lepper, H. S. (1999). A measure of subjective happiness: Preliminary reliability and construct validation. Social Indicators Research, 46(2), 137–155. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1006824100041

[9] Hawkley, L. C., & Cacioppo, J. T. (2010). Loneliness matters: A theoretical and empirical review of consequences and mechanisms. Annals of Behavioral Medicine, 40(2), 218–227. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12160-010-9210-8

[10] Helliwell, J. F., Layard, R., Sachs, J., De Neve, J.-E., Aknin, L. B., & Wang, S. (Eds.). (2021). World Happiness Report 2021. Sustainable Development Solutions Network. https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2021/

[11] Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T. B., Baker, M., Harris, T., & Stephenson, D. (2015). Loneliness and social isolation as risk factors for mortality: A meta-analytic review. Perspectives on Psychological Science, 10(2), 227–237. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691614568352

[12] Keles, B., McCrae, N., & Grealish, A. (2020). A systematic review: The influence of social media on depression, anxiety and psychological distress in adolescents. International Journal of Adolescence and Youth, 25(1), 79–93. https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2019.1590851

[13] Marino, C., Gini, G., Vieno, A., & Spada, M. M. (2018). The associations between problematic Facebook use, psychological distress and well-being among adolescents and young adults: A systematic review and meta-analysis. Journal of Affective Disorders, 226, 274–281. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2017.10.007

[14] Matud, M. P. (2004). Gender differences in stress and coping styles. Personality and Individual Differences, 37(7), 1401–1415. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2004.01.010

[15] Orben, A., & Przybylski, A. K. (2019). The association between adolescent well-being and digital technology use. Nature Human Behaviour, 3(2), 173–182. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-018-0506-1

[16] Seabrook, E. M., Kern, M. L., & Rickard, N. S. (2016). Social networking sites, depression, and anxiety: A systematic review. JMIR Mental Health, 3(4), e50. https://doi.org/10.2196/mental.5366

[17] Steel, P., Schmidt, J., & Shultz, J. (2008). Refining the relationship between personality and subjective well-being. Psychological Bulletin,

134(1), 138–161. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.134.1.138

[18] Tay, L., & Diener, E. (2011). Needs and subjective well-being around the world. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 101(2), 354–365. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0023779

[19] VanderWeele, T. J., et al. (2024). The Global Flourishing Study: Study profile and initial results on flourishing. Social Science & Medicine (study profile and open data; see the Global Flourishing Study website for datasets and documentation). https://globalflourishingstudy.com

[20] Weinstein, A. M. (2023). Problematic social networking site use and mental health among adolescents and young adults: A systematic review and meta-analysis. JMIR Mental Health, 10(4), e33450. https://doi.org/10.2196/33450