

Research Paper: Predictors of Subjective Wellbeing in Students of Medical Sciences: The Role of Orientation to Happiness and Life Goals



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ABSTRACT

Objective: Subjective wellbeing is a personal experience that points at high levels of positive affections and life satisfaction. The relationship between happiness and life goals with subjective wellbeing provides useful insight into the prerequisites of wellbeing. This study aimed to determine the role of orientation to happiness and life goals in predicting subjective wellbeing.

Methods: Using a cluster sampling method, 285 students were selected studying at first- and second-year of education at Tehran University of Medical Sciences during 2016-2017. The participants responded to the questionnaires of life satisfaction, positive and negative affections, orientation to happiness, and life goals. The obtained data were analyzed using canonical correlation model.

Results: Four significant canonical functions were identified. The first function showed that the orientation to meaning and engagement was associated with a high level of life satisfaction and wellbeing. The second function revealed that the orientation to pleasure was used along with positive and negative emotions. The third function showed that the intrinsic goals were in line with higher life satisfaction. The last function indicated a direct relationship between extrinsic goals with positive and negative affections.

Conclusion: Orientation to meaning and engagement as well as the development of intrinsic goals increases the level of life satisfaction and results in wellbeing.

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Highlights

- The orientations to meaning and engagement are related to well-being.
- The orientation to pleasure is associated with positive and negative emotion.
- Intrinsic goals are related to high level of life satisfaction.
- There was a direct relation between extrinsic goals with the positive and negative emotions.

Plain Language Summary

Subjective well-being leads to pleasing outcomes, such as better health status, more satisfactory social relationships, increased educational achievements, and happiness. On the other hand, orientation to happiness is the personal ability to pursue pleasure in life, which has three different routes: the pleasant life, the engaged life, and the meaningful life. These three orientations have been assigned positively to life satisfaction as well. In addition, one of the main reasons of people's happiness is their goals and dreams. Therefore, according to goal theory of happiness, subjective well-being is influenced by individuals' goals as well as the way they pursue goals. The first finding showed that those who have preferred meaning and engagement in their orientation to happiness, experience more life satisfaction, and therefore have a greater level of well-being than those who adopt pleasure. It also indicated that pleasure orientation is directly correlated with positive and negative affections in well-being.

1. Introduction

For a long time, philosophers and psychologists concerned about the meaning of a good life. Wellbeing refers to judgments, including cognitive evaluations about the degree of satisfaction with life and emotional responses to events and incidents (Diener, 1984). Subjective wellbeing leads to better life outcomes, such as superior health status (Maccagnan, Wren-Lewis, Brown, & Taylor, 2019).

Hedonism and eudaimonism have been proposed over distinct philosophies. Their underlying idea is what makes a good life or a good society. Accordingly, most recent two different views toward wellbeing are expressed, i.e. hedonic wellbeing and eudaimonic wellbeing (Anić & Tončić, 2013). The first perspective reflects this view that wellbeing consists of pleasure and is called hedonism. Diener considers the hedonism approach to wellbeing as a satisfying life with positive affections and without any negative affection (Seligman, Parks, & Steen 2004). Conventional wisdom suggests that hedonic happiness, conceptualized as a mere pursuit of pleasurable experiences, is unsustainable over the long term in the absence of eudaimonic wellbeing (Fisher, 2010). Accordingly, the second approach was formed. The second perspective, eudaimonism, claims that wellbeing is not only to be happy but also to flourish the human potential (Seligman, Parks, & Steen, 2004). It seems that there

is another way to happiness (Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005). This way refers to a state in which individuals are integrated into their role, physically, cognitively, and emotionally. Peterson, Park, & Seligman (2005) theory of orientation to happiness states that people have special preferences to gain happiness through three distinct orientations. Seligman defines the orientation as "a tendency to rely on one way rather than the other way" (Seligman, Parks, & Steen, 2004). Accordingly, Peterson, Park, & Seligman (2005) developed a self-report questionnaire that measures pleasure (hedonism), meaning (eudaimonism), and engagement (flow) as the sources of happiness. Initial investigations showed that the three orientations are empirically and distinctly associated with life satisfaction (Peterson, Ruch, Beermann, Park, & Seligman, 2007). According to Huta and Ryan in the hedonic perspective, wellbeing is achieved through the pursuit of enjoyment, pleasure, and comfort (Yang, Li, Fu, & Kou, 2017).

Orientation to happiness is the personal ability to pursue pleasure in life (Seligman, 2002). One should prepare himself or herself psychologically to experience the utmost level of happiness in life (Fredrickson, 1998). There are three different routes to happiness: the pleasant life, the engaged life, and the meaningful life. These three orientations have positively been assigned to life satisfaction (Martinez-Martí & Ruch, 2017). The researchers believe that each of these tendencies and orientations results in a different lifestyle—a pleasant life, meaningful life, and an engaged life (Selig-

man, Parks, & Steen, 2004). Happiness orientations have been identified as main pathways toward different types of wellbeing (Lorente, Tordera, & Peiró, 2019).

Pleasant life orientation is based on hedonism thinking which refers to maximizing the positive experience and minimizing the pain. The initial definition of pleasure has been defined by Peterson, Park, & Seligman (2005) as follows: in the modern western world, the pursuit of pleasure is widely endorsed as a way to achieve satisfaction: "Don't worry – be happy". Today, modern psychoanalysts such as Frederickson in his famous theory (The broaden-and-build theory) also believe that emotions play a key role in the development of thought-action repertoires and it is a prerequisite for curiosity and creativity, learning and building, and so on for connecting with and building relationships to other people (Fredrickson, 2001).

Eudaimonism emphasizes on this basic assumption that people should understand their best intrinsic virtue and then use these skills and talents for the greater good, including in particular the welfare of other people or humankind writ large (Peterson et al., 2007). This notion brings us to the second component of happiness i.e. meaning: the search for purpose that is strongly associated with the eudemonic approach to happiness (Hansen, 2009). Steger and Frazier, (2006) suggested that the sense of meaning can meet needs such as value, purpose, and self-worth. A meaningful life is based on activities that include something bigger than us-being a morally good person, not just for the sake of the individual, but also for the common good, as decent people doing good acts will benefit society (Ross & Brown, 2009).

The third orientation to happiness is the engagement that has features such as enthusiasm, passion, and interest (Baker, 2005; Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005). Flow is a Csikszentmihalyi's term for the psychological state that accompanies highly engaging activities (Dlamini, 2011). Peterson et al. (2007) propose that during flow, time passes quickly for the individual, attention is focused on the activity itself and the sense of the self as a social actor is lost. Therefore, happiness orientations have been identified as important pathways toward different types of wellbeing. All three orientations to happiness (pleasure, engagement, and meaning) are partly mediated the relationship between extraversion and positive affections. Discussion focuses on the implications of these results for understanding the connection between personality traits and subjective wellbeing (Pollock, Noser, Holden, & Zeigler-Hill, 2016). Other researchers (Biswas-Diener, Kashdan, & King, 2009) found these three components are independent of each other but simultaneously important in increasing life satisfaction. Of course, pleasure has the least predictive power in life span,

while engagement and meaning are more closely related to life satisfaction.

In addition to these orientations, one of the main reasons for people's happiness is their goals and dreams (Delle Fave, Brdar, Freire, Vella-Brodrick, & Wissing, 2011). According to the goal theory of happiness, subjective wellbeing is influenced by individuals' goals as well as the way they pursue them (Yang, Li, Fu, & Kou, 2017). Happiness means having a purpose in life and living in accordance with one's virtues and how to achieve happiness (Peterson et al., 2007). The comprehensive theory that is focused on moving people toward greater autonomy over the lifespan is self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 1991, 2000). Evidence suggests that people who are doing work on autonomous reasons, experience more wellbeing, and life satisfaction than those who do controlled activities for extrinsic reasons (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

According to Deci and Ryan (Deci & Ryan, 1991), personal wellbeing is a direct function of satisfying the basic psychological needs. Self-determination theory distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic purposes. Intrinsic goals, such as affiliation, self-acceptance, community feeling, and personal growth are defined in homogeneity and consistency with the basic psychological needs. They reflect a tendency toward self-actualization and growth, and searching for them is inherently valuable and joyful. Ryan proposed that those people who try for these goals are in close contact with their deeper inside nature and have a more chance to find happiness and wellbeing (Rijavec, & Miljković, 2011). In contrast, extrinsic goals, such as money, fame, and image are primarily associated with achieving social reward or praise. The reason is that they are typically a vehicle for other purposes or are compensations for the problems that exist in the satisfaction of needs and are less likely to be inherently satisfying (Rijavec, & Miljković, 2011). Studies have shown that people with strong extrinsic goals have more difficulty in meeting their needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Kasser, 2009; Kasser, Ryan, Couchman, Sheldon, 2004). On the other hand, fulfilling one's goals leads to an increase in wellbeing, but mostly when the targets are connected to the basic psychological needs and development desires: the intrinsic goals (Sheldon, & Elliot, 1999; Sheldon, & Kasser, 1998).

In line with goal theory, Yang and his colleagues (Yang et al., 2017) suggest that orientations to happiness may lead individuals to engage in behaviors that are congruent with their orientations, which then influence individuals' subjective wellbeing. When people's basic psychological needs are satisfied rather than suppressed, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) predicts that people will display enhanced

motivation, performance, and wellbeing (Jeno, Adachi, Grytnes, Vandvik, & Deci, 2019). According to SDT, an individual's goal and the processes involved in goal setting often represent the status of the individual's mental health and wellbeing (Davids, Roman, & Kerchhoff, 2017). Regarding the value placed on goal setting, an individual's goals and aspirations are often synonymous with mental health and wellbeing; thus, aspiring to achieve intrinsic life goals is associated with greater psychological wellbeing in the literature (Davids et al., 2017). According to Kasser and Ryan, SDT specifies two broad categories of life aspirations: extrinsic, such as wealth, fame and public image; and intrinsic, such as meaningful relationships, community contribution, personal growth, and physical fitness or health (Bespalov, Prudnikova, Nyamdorj, & Vlasov, 2017). They also stated that compared with intrinsic life aspirations, extrinsic life aspirations provide less direct satisfaction of basic psychological needs and, thus, lower psychological wellbeing. The pursuit of wealth, fame, or public image can direct individuals' energies toward these ends and away from the satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Bespalov et al., 2017). On the other hand, Ryan et al. suggested that meaningful relationships and community contribution produce experiences of relatedness. Personal growth and physical fitness develop sense-of-self and experiences of autonomy; all of these intrinsic aspirations can increase competence (Bespalov et al., 2017).

Evidence suggests that having goals leads to personal wellbeing and social behavior in different ways. The results of two large American and German (Schmuck, Kasser, & Ryan, 2000) samples suggest that those who emphasize on intrinsic goals report higher wellbeing than those who pursue extrinsic goals. On the other hand, focusing on the extrinsic goals is associated with wellbeing negatively or neutrally (Rijavec, & Miljković, 2011). According to these results, Kasser et al., (2014) in experimental research on three groups of American and Icelandic youth concluded that when people's attention is focused less on materialism and the extrinsic goals, their wellbeing improves and the change is mediated by "psychological need satisfaction". The importance of identifying predictors is that such studies contribute to the development of intervention programs that lead to high wellbeing. Moreover, it is suggested that an increased understanding of an individual's perceptions of happiness and wellbeing may also lead to an increased understanding of vulnerability factors leading to depression even in children (Street, Nathan, Durkin, Morling, Dzahari, & Carson, 2004).

According to research evidence, it seems that identifying the pre-requisites of subjective wellbeing provides useful insights into the role of important variables in promoting

subjective wellbeing. Some evidence points to the role of life goals and happiness orientation, but the role of these variables along with other variables such as forgiveness and appreciation has been investigated. This study aimed to investigate the role of orientation to happiness and life goals in predicting subjective wellbeing. Our hypotheses were as follows:

H1: There is a relationship between the components of happiness orientation, including pleasantness, meaning, and engagement with the components of subjective wellbeing such as positive affections, negative affections, and life satisfaction.

H2: There is a relationship between the components of life goals, including wealth, fame, image, growth, relationship, and community with the components of subjective wellbeing such as positive affections, negative affections, and life satisfaction.

2. Methods

Study participants

This research used a cross-sectional design. The study population included all students at Tehran University of Medical Sciences in the academic year 2016-2017 (N=2100). In the canonical analysis, if the reliability of the variables is high (0.8 or more), the ratio of cases to independent variables should be 10 to 1. According to the considerations related to test power, the sample size in this study was estimated to be 285 people. Thus, the sample consisted of 285 medical students (163 women, 122 men, age range: 18-40 years). The samples were collected by the cluster sampling method. Among the first ten faculties of the university, three faculties (medicine, dentistry, and pharmacy) were randomly selected. Next, from each faculty, three classes of first- and second-year students were randomly selected. The selection of first- and second-year students compared to older students was based on the notion that the mental wellbeing of this group of students was less dependent on intra-university factors. The canonical correlation was used to analyze the data.

Study tools

Satisfaction With Life Scale

This scale was developed by Diener et al. in 1984 (Diener, 1984). Satisfaction with life scale measures the cognitive component of subjective wellbeing. It consists of five items, which measure the individual's evaluation of satisfaction with life in general (I am satisfied with my life).

The scale measures the positive side of the experiences and is rated on a 7-point response scale (1 =strongly disagree, to 7=strongly agree). In previous studies, the Cronbach alpha of this scale was reported as 0.84 (Galanakis, Lakioti, Pezirkianidis, Karakasidou, & Stalikas, 2017). Bayani, Kouchaki, & Goudarzi (2007) reported the Cronbach alpha of 0.83 for this scale. In this study, the reliability and validity were obtained 0.83 and 0.77, respectively.

Positive and Negative Affections

This scale was developed by Watson, Clark, & Tellegen (1988). The scale has 20 items that represent 20 feelings (10 positive feelings and 10 negative feelings) and rated on a 5-point scale (not at all=1 to very much=5). Watson, Clark, & Tellegen (1988) reported the Cronbach alpha coefficients for Positive Affections (PA) and Negative Affections (NA) as 0.88 and 0.87, respectively. In a study, the pretest measure for the general negative affections scale obtained a Cronbach alpha of 0.67, while the posttest measure obtained an alpha of 0.85. The pretest measure of the general positive feelings scale obtained an alpha value of 0.87, while the posttest measure obtained an alpha of 0.94. In another study (Najafy, Makvand Hosseini, Mohammadyfar, & Roštami, 2015) using the Cronbach alpha, the reliability values were obtained 0.81 and 0.83 for PA and NA, respectively. In this study, the Cronbach alpha was found 0.86 for PA and 0.84 for NA.

Orientation to Happiness Scale

This scale was developed by Peterson, Park, & Seligman (2005). The scale was used for the assessment of the three orientations to happiness Peterson, Park, & Seligman (2005). It consists of 18 items (six items for each subscale). Each item required a respondent to answer on a 5-point scale (1= "very much unlike me" to 5="very much like me"). They showed that the internal consistencies of the three subscales were satisfactory (pleasure=0.82, engagement=0.82, and meaning=0.72). Since the questionnaire has not been translated and validated in Iran, the statements of the questionnaire were first translated into Persian by the researchers, and then back-translated to English. After several changes in the Persian text, finally, the two questionnaires were compared and corrections were done to prepare the final form. After preparing the final form, its reliability was checked on the study subjects. Its Cronbach alpha was obtained 0.73. The reliability values for the subscales were reported as 0.76 for meaning, 0.83 for pleasure, and 0.77 for engagement.

The Life Aspirations Scale

The life aspirations scale was designed by Kasser, and Ryan (1996). SDT research on aspirations has focused on the relative strength of intrinsic aspirations versus extrinsic ones. There are 7 categories of aspirations with 5 specific items for each category. These categories include the extrinsic aspirations of wealth, fame, and image; the intrinsic aspirations of meaningful relationships, personal growth, and community contributions; and the aspiration of good health, which turned out not to be clearly either extrinsic or intrinsic. The aspiration is rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much). Anic and Tancic (Anić & Tončić, 2013) reported the Cronbach alpha values of 0.92 for extrinsic goals and 0.89 for intrinsic aspirations. It should be noted that through correspondence with Professor Kasser, the researcher has obtained the Persian version prepared by SDT (Self-Determination Theory) research group confirmed by Professor Kasser. In this study, the Cronbach alpha for intrinsic aspirations was calculated as 0.83 and for extrinsic goals as 0.80. The alpha values for wealth, fame, image, growth, relationship, and community were 0.74, 0.85, 0.91, 0.81, 0.83 and 0.80, respectively. In another study, the Cronbach alpha ranged from 0.56 for wealth to 0.70 for community and image. The reliability coefficients were strong for intrinsic aspirations ($\alpha=0.88$) and extrinsic aspirations ($\alpha=0.88$) (Bespalov et al., 2017).

Study procedure

First, the study procedure was explained for students and the consent letter was signed by them. The necessary explanations were given about voluntary participation in the study and leaving it at any time. Demographic information such as age, gender, marital status, GPA, education, and employment status was collected. Then the questionnaires were given to them. SPSS 16 software was used for data analysis. Using the canonical correlation model, the relations between variables of orientations to happiness, life aspirations, and mental wellbeing were analyzed.

3. Results

The study sample consisted of 285 medical students (163 women, 122 men, age range: 18-40 years). The mean, standard deviation, and correlation coefficients of variables of wellbeing, life goals, and orientations to happiness are seen in Table 1.

Among the various orientations to happiness, meaning had the most significant relationship with life satisfaction ($r=0.289$, $P<0.05$). Also, personal growth showed the highest correlation with life satisfaction ($r=0.324$, $P<0.05$).

Table 1. Zero-order correlation between variables (n=285)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Life satisfaction	1												
2. Positive affection	-0.03	1											
3. Negative affection	-0.14*	0.57**	1										
4. Pleasure	-0.01	0.17**	0.16**	1									
5. Meaning	0.28**	-0.01	0.02	-0.01	1								
6. Engagement	0.10	0.01	0.06	0.19**	0.45**	1							
7. Wealth	0.11	0.10	0.17**	0.37**	0.09	0.19**	1						
8. Fame	0.06	0.16**	0.17**	0.26**	0.17**	0.11	0.56**	1					
9. Image	-0.01	0.14*	0.15*	0.44**	0.02	0.10	0.65**	0.65**	1				
10. Growth	0.32**	0.00	-0.01	0.08	0.52**	0.35**	0.34**	0.29**	0.18**	1			
11. Relation	0.27**	0.11	0.05	0.18**	0.36**	0.20**	0.35**	0.22**	0.24**	0.58**	1		
12. Community	0.24**	0.13*	0.09	0.03	0.55**	0.26**	0.21**	0.24**	0.14*	0.56**	0.56**	1	
13. Health	0.14*	0.09	0.04	0.24**	0.38**	0.22**	0.37**	0.26**	0.26**	0.55**	0.59**	0.49**	1
Mean	22.31	30.83	32.94	28.16	29.49	27.68	68.16	58.12	61.28	80.05	82.29	76.21	82.79
Standard Deviation	6.29	4.98	4.85	6.18	5.50	4.61	13.08	16.11	15.28	10.96	12.02	12.55	11.63

* P < 0.05; ** P < 0.01

The relationship between orientation to happiness and wellbeing, and also the relationship between life goals and wellbeing were analyzed using canonical correlation model (Table 2).

First, a relationship was assumed between the components of happiness orientation of pleasantness, meaning, and engagement with the components of the subjective wellbeing of PA, NA, and life satisfaction. The first and second canonical correlation coefficients between variables were significant as 0.30 and 0.19 respectively. For the first canonical function in the left set variables (the latent variable of orientation to happiness), meaning had the highest canoni-

cal load. Next, the engagement had the second-highest canonical load. Therefore, the latent variable of orientation to happiness in the first canonical function had been saturated with meaning and engagement. In the other dimension, for the right set of variables (latent variable of wellbeing), life satisfaction had the highest canonical load. Thus, the latent variable wellbeing in the first canonical function had been saturated by life satisfaction. The adequacy and redundancy coefficients of canonical function are reported in Table 3.

These relationships indicate that high levels of orientation to meaning and engagement are associated with greater life

Table 2. Measures of overall model fit for canonical correlation analysis (n=285)

Canonical Function	Canonical Correlation	Canonical R ²	Wilks' Lambda	χ ²	df	Probability
1	0.301	0.090	0.874	37.796	9.000	0.000
2	0.192	0.036	0.961	11.218	4.000	0.024

Table 3. Redundancy and adequacy coefficients

Function	Adequacy		Redundancy	
	Orientation to Happiness	Wellbeing	Orientation to Happiness	Wellbeing
1	0.389	0.312	0.035	0.028
2	0.348	0.530	0.013	0.020

Table 4. Standardized canonical coefficients and raw canonical coefficients

Variables	Wellbeing				Variables	Orientation to Happiness			
	Function 1		Function 2			Function 1		Function 2	
	Standard-ized	Raw	Standard-ized	Raw		Standard-ized	Raw	Standard-ized	Raw
Satisfaction with life	1.003	0.159	0.045	0.007	Pleasure	0.068	0.011	-0.989	-0.160
Positive affections	-0.166	-0.033	-0.617	-0.124	Meaning	1.028	0.187	0.053	0.010
Negative affections	0.335	0.069	-0.502	-0.103	Engage-ment	-0.066	-0.014	-0.043	-0.009

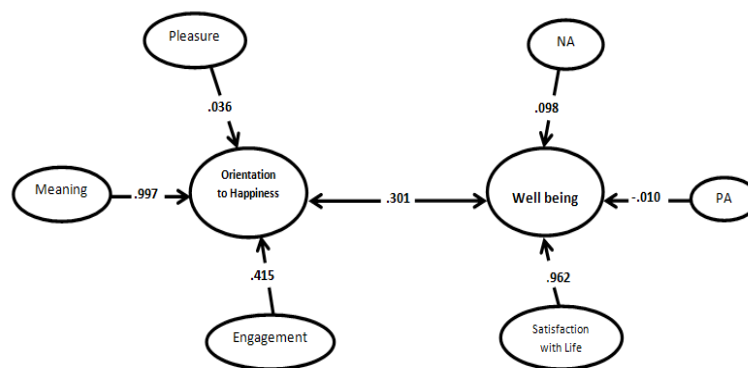


Figure 1. The first canonical function between orientation to happiness and wellbeing
Canonical loadings were reported.

Table 5. Measures of overall model fit for the canonical correlation analysis (n=285)

Canonical Function	Canonical Correlation	Canonical R ²	Wilks' Lambda	χ ²	df	Probability
1	0.366	0.133	0.798	62.937	18.000	0.000
2	0.254	0.064	0.922	22.721	10.000	0.012

Table 6. Standardized canonical coefficients and raw canonical coefficients

Variables	Aspirations				Variables	Wellbeing			
	Function 1		Function 2			Function 1		Function 2	
	Standard-ized	Raw	Standard-ized	Raw		Standardized	Raw	Standard-ized	Raw
Wealth	0.264	0.020	-0.253	-0.019	Satisfaction with Life	0.990	0.157	0.194	0.031
Fame	0.142	0.009	-0.510	-0.032					
Image	-0.378	-0.025	-0.201	-0.013	Positive affections	0.120	0.024	-0.515	-0.103
Growth	0.452	0.041	0.904	0.083					
Relations	0.372	0.031	-0.141	-0.012	Negative affections	0.211	0.043	-0.568	-0.117
Community	0.245	0.020	-0.507	-0.040					

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Table 7. Redundancy and adequacy coefficients

Function	Redundancy		Adequacy	
	Wellbeing	Aspirations	Wellbeing	Aspirations
1	0.04	0.05	0.32	0.38
2	0.03	0.01	0.53	0.21

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satisfaction and the strength of this canonical relationship is 0.30 (Figure 1).

For the second canonical function on the left set of variables (latent variable of orientation to happiness), orientation to pleasure had the most canonical load. Thus, the latent variable of orientation to happiness was saturated by orientation to pleasure in the second function. The adequacy and redundancy coefficients of this function are reported in Table 3. In the right set of variables (latent variable of wellbeing), positive affections and negative affections had the highest canonical load, respectively. This relationship indicates that high orientation to pleasure was associated with a high degree of positive and negative affections and the strength of this relationship was 0.192 (Figure 2). Raw and standardized coefficients are reported in Table 4.

Second, a relationship was assumed between the components of life goals of wealth, fame, image, growth, relationship, and community with the components of the subjective wellbeing of PA, NA, and life satisfaction. In this study,

the relationship between life goals (intrinsic and extrinsic) and wellbeing was analyzed using the canonical correlation model (Table 5). Canonical correlation of life goals with wellbeing was found 0.366. Regarding the latent variable of life goals, the personal growth owned most of the canonical load, then the relationships, and finally the community (Table 6).

On the other hand, there is the latent variable of wellbeing where the satisfaction with life and positive affections had 0.956 and 0.205 canonical loads, respectively. Canonical adequacy and redundancy coefficients are reported in Table 6. Thus, the high levels of intrinsic life goals such as personal growth, relationships, and community were associated with higher levels of life satisfaction (Figure 3).

In the fourth canonical function, the left set of variables (latent variable of life goals) was observed where extrinsic goals had the greatest canonical load. The fame, image, and wealth had the highest canonical load, on the descending order. On the right, there was the latent variable of wellbe-

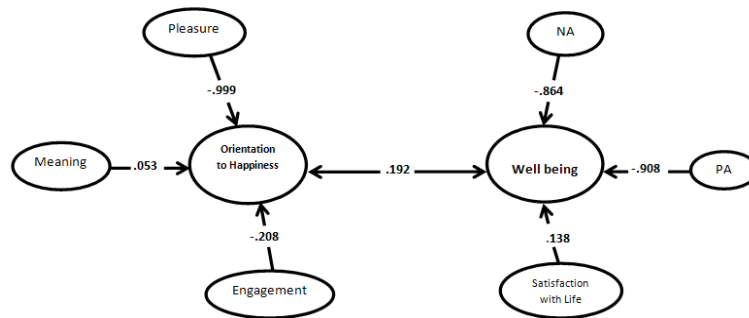


Figure 2. The second canonical function between orientation to happiness and wellbeing

Note: canonical loadings were reported.

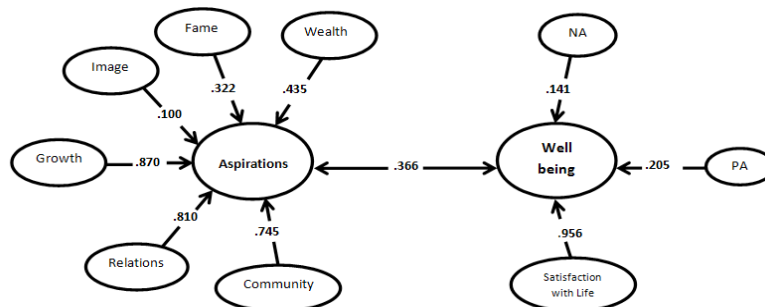


Figure 3. The first canonical function between the aspiration to wellbeing

Canonical loadings were reported.

ing. The negative affections and positive affections were the most loaded canonical variables. Thus it can be concluded that high levels of fame, image, and wealth were associated with more NA and more PA, and the strength of this relationship was found 0.25 (Figure 4). Table 6 presents the adequacy and redundancy coefficients of this function. Raw and standardized coefficients are also reported in Table 7.

4. Discussion

Subjective wellbeing is a personal experience that points at high levels of positive emotions and high life satisfaction. Since the ultimate goal of psychology is human wellbeing, the findings of this study attempt to determine the predictors of this crucial variable in the field of orientation to happiness and life goals.

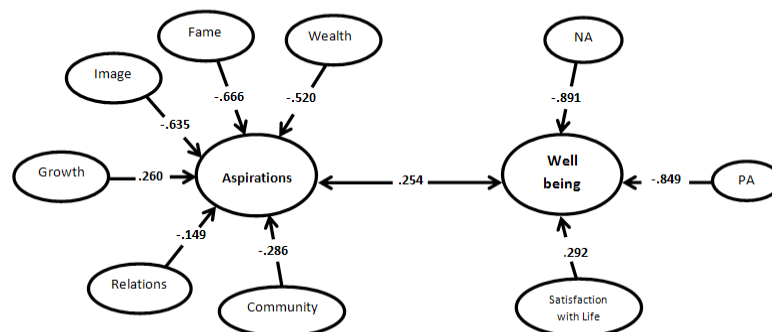


Figure 4. The second canonical function between the aspiration to wellbeing

Canonical loadings were reported.

The first finding showed a significant relationship between the variables of wellbeing and different orientations to happiness. Thus, the first hypothesis was confirmed. In accordance with the expectations of the researcher and consistent with the results of previous research, the findings showed that those with preferred meaning and engagement in their orientation to happiness, experience more life satisfaction, and therefore have a greater level of wellbeing than those who adopt pleasure. This result was consistent with previous research findings in the field of improving life satisfaction that found the meaning and engagement stronger than the pleasure (Biswas-Diener, Kashdan, & King, 2009; Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005). For instance, in a study (Yang et al., 2017), the life of meaning and life of pleasure were positively associated with Chinese adolescents' subjective wellbeing.

The most important explanation for this finding is that people who pay more attention to the meaning and are deeply engaged in activities that foster their talents, skills, and interests, feel more gratified because these activities are a rich source of genuine satisfaction, and promote the wellbeing. Besides, Steger and Frazier (Steger & Frazier, 2005) concluded that the sense of meaning could result in the fulfillment of needs such as value, aspiration, self-efficacy, and self-value that ultimately end in self-satisfaction. As Seligman (2002) showed, each of the orientations could uniquely be related to wellbeing, which was in line with the second finding of this research. This fact indicates that pleasure orientation is directly correlated with positive and negative affections in wellbeing.

It seems that most people, who always want to experience more enjoyable and various activities, gain more positive and negative affections. This finding depicts the type of relationship between pleasure orientation and wellbeing that is not as strong as the first but is undeniable. One explanation for this finding is that, according to Seligman (Seligman, 2004), those who prefer life full of pleasure, love positive affections as much as possible, and foster the skills that maximize these moments of joy for them. Besides, the enjoyable and fun experiences are the source of positive affections and hence it improves wellbeing. However, this question comes to mind that exactly how long these positive affections will last. Do they have permanent effects on wellbeing? Undoubtedly, the satisfaction of enjoyable desires and experiencing fun does not always lead to wellbeing. Therefore wellbeing cannot simply mean the experience of pleasure.

Pleasure seeking is an incorrect approach to increase the long-term wellbeing because the short duration of most enjoyable experiences and some negative affections (such

as sadness from the loss of good times and repetition of it as before) lead to not increasing wellbeing just by pleasure orientation. As Huta & Ryan (2010) proposed, orientation to pleasure is more beneficial to wellbeing in a short time, while the orientation to engagement and meaning leads to increase wellbeing in the long term (3 months).

Another finding of this study shows that intrinsic life goals that include personal growth, relations, and community are significantly associated with wellbeing, especially the component of life satisfaction. Thus, the second hypothesis was confirmed. This result is consistent with previous research results. For example, in a study, the results of the hierarchical regression analysis suggest that the emphasis put on intrinsic goals and aspirations predicts psychological wellbeing and accounts for 8% of the variance (Davids et al., 2017). It also highlights the role of intrinsic goals and aspirations in predicting the psychological wellbeing of adolescents. The researcher believes that the findings are supported by the theoretical assumptions of SDT (Davids et al., 2017). Similar studies by Brdar, Rijavec, Miljkovic, (2009).

Anić & Tončić, (2013) showed that people with the highest wellbeing, gave more value for intrinsic aspirations and these goals have a greater contribution to wellbeing compared with extrinsic goals. Waterman, Schwartz, & Cont, (2008) believed that wellbeing was not just about being happy, but was found in the understanding of the human potential and fulfilling it, too. In general, the students who attempted to meet intrinsic goals such as personal growth (increasing meaning and competence in life), relationships (close contact with the friends) and community (helping to build a better world and life with others) show a higher level of life satisfaction. In accordance with the view of Deci, & Ryan (2000) and Kasser, (2002), the intrinsic aspirations reflect a tendency toward self-actualization and growth. Besides these goals are inherently worthwhile and satisfying, hence seeking them is pleasing. This pattern of results is expected for subjective wellbeing as well because the progress toward these goals or obtaining them plays a key role in wellbeing. Also, Sheldon, & Kasser, (2001) proposed that intrinsic goals promote wellbeing because they satisfy basic psychological needs. The truth is that pure happiness is dependent on the expression of moral virtues and living in the fullest potential in line with the intrinsic values of the person. Intrinsic aspirations should get closer to the reality of people because they are (unlike extrinsic goals) defined by the person and not the views of others.

The latest finding on the effect of extrinsic goals of life on wellbeing indicates that the extrinsic goals create a change in wellbeing somehow, though not as strong as the previous relationship. Therefore, the people who prefer the extrin-

sis goals also experience more positive and negative affections. Following the views of Deci, & Ryan (2000) as well as Kasser (2002), achieving extrinsic goals (such as money, fame, and image) depends on reaction and judgment of other people; and these goals are typically a device to gain reward or social praise that are less likely to be inherently joyful and cheerful. However, we can explain the relevance of these goals with positive affections by the effects of cultural conditions on the lifestyle. It is quite normal that young students of our study noticed extrinsic goals such as fame, popularity, desirable image, and financial success which are dependent on culture.

In the collectivistic culture of Iran, creating a good image and living up to the welfare standards lead to experience a lot of positive affections, which would, in turn, somehow improve the level of wellbeing. To explain the relationship of experiencing negative affections with extrinsic aspirations, we can say that people who are highly focused on extrinsic goals make themselves dependent on and even be captured by topics such as fashion, social status, and entertaining pastimes which are associated with high levels of stress. The constant seeking for extrinsic goals can contribute to a series of painful conditions, controlling and competitive experiences that are stressful and lead to a lot of negative affections (Kasser, & Ryan, 1996).

In line with this result, Sheldon, Gunz, Nichols, & Ferguson, (2010) documented that some people would overestimate the benefits from the excitement of achieving extrinsic goals such as good image, reputation, and financial success compared with the potential harms. It seems that these people lack the correct perspective of the theory of happiness. Therefore, they may ignore their basic psychological needs to pursue extrinsic goals not necessarily lead to increased wellbeing. Also, over-investment on the long-term extrinsic goals (even when obtained) leads to a lower level of wellbeing because it keeps the individuals away from investment on intrinsic objectives (Kasser, & Ryan, 2001).

It is important to notice that according to some limitations, we should be more cautious in the interpretation of the findings. One of the limitations of the study refers to the correlational design. In this study, the relations are evaluated using a correlational method and thus there is no possibility of causal interpretations. In addition, although the majority of studies in this area rely on self-reported data, the use of these tools may reduce the generalizability of the findings to the society because of inherent limitations such as measurement error, lack of introspection in response, and so on. On the other hand, in the interpretation of the results, some factors such as cultural, social, and environmental values of study people should be taken into account compared

to studies in other cultures, because these factors are undoubtedly very powerful in forming the orientations to the happiness of people, setting goals for their lives, and their wellbeing.

Considering these findings and the positive psychology and its focus toward interventions that foster wellbeing, the authors believe that interventions that enhance meaning or engagement may be much more effective. However, it may not be true to reject the efforts to increase pleasure. According to Peterson, Park, & Seligman (2005), there may be a way in which the techniques of increasing pleasure be combined with techniques that enhance engagement and meaning, and thus, perhaps increased pleasure can occur as a happy by-product of such interventions. The question that may be necessary for future research is whether people can change their orientation to happiness. And whether this change can lead to changes in wellbeing.

5. Conclusion

An important prerequisite for wellbeing is the orientation to happiness. People who experience a higher level of satisfaction in life have an orientation to meaning and engagement and pursue intrinsic goals such as personal growth, relationship, and community. High levels of positive and negative emotions are seen in people who have an orientation to pleasure and are looking for extrinsic goals such as wealth, fame, and image.

Ethical Considerations

Compliance with ethical guidelines

All ethical principles were considered in this article. The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and its implementation stages; they were also assured about the confidentiality of their information; Moreover, They were allowed to leave the study whenever they wish, and if desired, the results of the research would be available to them.

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Authors' contributions

All authors contributed in preparing this article.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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