

Happiness among the Youth in Tehran, Iran, A Sociological Perspective

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ABSTRACT The paper explores the quality of happiness among the youth as aspirers of joy in different dimensions. Because of increasing social networks, the youth are increasingly pursuing perpetual happiness. Happiness by itself too, motivates the youth to move better towards the goals of happiness. The present research has examined the youth of age groups 15-29 through different variables. The present research has been conducted in Tehran City, in which 489 respondents were randomly selected in different parts and neighbourhoods of the city to be approached. The paper also explores the forces responsible for not-ever-lasting happiness among the youth. The research is mainly based on the hypothesis that, "Social and economic conditions such as income, employment, general quality of life and successful marriage create happiness within the youth". The method of research used in the research is a combination of theoretical frameworks and empirical realities. The paper concludes that in the present changing and globalizing world, societies must arrange the necessary policies for the happiness and leisure of the youth in order to prevent the likely controversies.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of happiness has attracted the attention of a number of scientists, especially the social scientists in the past fifty years. People at all levels especially the youth are ever seeking happiness at different levels and dimensions. In the present research, the author is searching out what happiness is? What it means among the youth of both genders etc. in Tehran? Generally speaking, all the people, or the people of all nations are ever seeking happiness and better fortune, or so to say, satisfaction with life. The concept of happiness has captured the attention of sociologists, psychologists, economists etc. They have been analyzing and discussing the concept of happiness with special reference to the youth. So far as the youth in Iran are concerned, they are directly and indirectly searching a way of life in which they could find more and lasting happiness in their lives. Yet, satisfaction of wants do not always lead to happiness. That is, sometimes avoiding an enjoyment is more desirable than attaining it, since it may have risky and challenging consequences (Rahimi Yeganeh 2007).

Due to the appearance of more facilities, more

means in different kinds, and increase in social networks, the youth have become so concerned to find more happiness in their lives. Similarly, as more competition has emerged in the lives of different classes of people in the modern times, they have become interested to find increasing and perpetual happiness in their lives. Due to increasing social, economic and cultural change in the lives of the youth in new times, they have been very motivated about their happiness. They try their best in different ways and dimensions to get to more happiness in their lives. The two concepts of marginality and happiness are also there in the present time. The youth are doing their utmost to get out of marginality in the way they can, so that they can get to happiness. Similarly, all classes of people including the rich and the poor are trying their best, attempting the most, and investing the most in order to access to happiness. So, happiness by itself motivates the youth to move better in their lives at the levels they are. They always try to avoid misery, and instead, get to complete happiness in their lives. Therefore, the younger generations are attempting to access to more prosperity and success. Somehow or the other, happiness may be transferred to the potential younger generations in any society.

In the present research, the youth of age groups 15-29 have been examined through different variables to measure their happiness. Policy issues and the like, all play role in the quality of happiness among the youth, not only

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in Iran, but in every other country with special reference to urban areas and larger cities. In the present research, the author searches out the relevant perspectives and theories in order to revalidate the current research as much as possible.

Since 1950, postwar capitalism has led to an unprecedented standard of living with especial reference to the youth, particularly in the West. Such an atmosphere has not translated into an equal upsurge in human happiness (Layard 2005). The paper aims to find out how happiness emerges among the youth of both sex in Tehran as a dynamic urban area of the country. Researches indicate that while higher income does boost levels of happiness among the youth at poverty line, this does not hold true for the rest of the population. While sociology as a part of social science focuses on the concept of happiness, psychology instead focuses on the pathology of the issue (Nettle 2005). The paper explores what happiness is, what conditions generate it, why it seems not to last, and what we can do, to cultivate and sustain it.

However, there are two forces which do not let happiness be ever-lasting. That is, first the youth become habituated to what they get, and then carve more, or something else. Secondly, they compare what they have with others. In other words, happiness is merely an imaginary goal that gives us direction and purpose (Layard 2005).

Theoretical Perspectives

The theory that happiness is relative is based on three postulates, (1) happiness results from comparison, (2) standards of happiness adjust, (3) standards of comparison are arbitrary constructs (Veenhoven 2004). Happiness does not depend on real quality of life. Therefore, conditions create happiness; after hard times happiness is more felt. Similarly, recent investigations on happiness claim that happiness is reported to be as high in poor societies as it is in rich societies (Easterlin 2003).

There is a logical relationship between income and happiness within countries. Income matters to happiness (Diener et al. 1993 and Oswald 1997). Deprivation and abject poverty in particular are very bad for happiness. Usually after basic needs are met, other factors such as rising aspirations increasingly become im-

portant, in addition to income. A number of happiness studies have confirmed the effects of rising aspirations and economic behaviours (Frank 1999). This process affects happiness, and the quality of happiness within the youth.

“Set point” theory of happiness in which every individual is presumed to have a happiness level that he or she goes back to overtime, even after major events such as winning a game or getting divorced (Easterlin 2003).

Happiness research has been applied to a range of issues. These include relationship between income and happiness, inequality and poverty, effects of macro policies in individual welfare etc. Happiness surveys are particularly well suited to addressing questions that revealed preferences do not answer well. Happiness surveys also facilitate the measurement of the effects of broader, non-income components of inequality such as race, gender and status, all of which seem to be highly significant (Felton and Graham 2006). These results find support in work in the health arena, which finds that relative social standing has significant effects on health outcomes (Marmot 2004).

The theory of utilitarianism, by Mills (1863) somehow reflects meaning and scope of happiness. It is often, described by the phrase “the greatest good for the greatest number of people”. It is also known as “the greatest happiness principle”. Happiness or pleasure is used versus suffering or pain. Happiness, being a state of mind or feeling characterized by contentment, love, satisfaction, pleasure, or joy, it has been defined and analyzed in sociological, biological, psychological, and religious contexts, and most measures of happiness are based on self-report. It could also be measured through facial emergence.

Subjective well being (SWB) as coined by Diener (1984) includes three components, namely life¹ satisfaction, positive effect and negative affect.

Happiness surveys may also be utilized to gauge the welfare effects of various public policies, for example how does a tax on tobacco may affect well-being (Gruber and Mullainathan 2002)? Similarly, happiness surveys can be used to examine the effects of different macro-policy arrangements on well-being. For example, most studies find that inflation and unemployment have negative effects on happiness. The effects of unemployment are stronger than those of in-

flation (Di Tella et al. 2001). For instance, in case of Iran, high levels of unemployment postpone marriage which eventually inflates unhappiness among the youth. The standard “misery index”, which assigns equal weight to inflation and unemployment, may underestimate the effects of the latter on well-being (Frey and Stutzer 2002).

On the other hand, happiness economics opens a field of research questions which still need to be addressed. These include the implications of well-being findings for national indicators and economic growth patterns; the effects of happiness in behaviour, such as work effort, consumption and investment. Similarly, unhappiness or frustration may be used for gauging the potential for social unrest in various contexts.

Health and happiness are reciprocally related to each other. Good health is linked to higher levels of happiness and vice versa. A number of studies have found that happier people are healthier. Yet, some studies have exposed paradoxes in income-happiness relationship. That is to say, advances in health conditions do not necessarily result in equivalent increases in happiness, particularly as overall health conditions improve. This relationship is known as “Easterlin paradox”. However, higher levels of happiness are associated with better health outcomes (Dolan 2006).

In these days of worldwide economic turmoil, there is a lot of talk about the “misery⁽²⁾-index” which is calculated by adding together the unemployment rate and the annual inflation rate (Okun 2008). It is a concept which attempts to gauge the negative effects that both inflation and unemployment have on welfare, and is used as a way to measure the effects of each of these two phenomena on a particular country’s citizens’ welfare. The “misery index” assumes a straightforward “trade-off¹” of one for the other; namely inflation versus unemployment. In other words, raising the inflation rate of 1% has equivalent negative effects on welfare, as does raising the unemployment rate. The assumption highly affects happiness in general with special reference to the youth.

Some other social scientists such as Di Tella and MacCulloch (2006) believe that unemployment has far greater costs for happiness than does inflation — at a ratio of about four to one, i.e. much higher than the most important vari-

ables affecting well-being or happiness is unemployment status. That is one of the most traumatic events that can happen to people. That happens obviously due to the loss of income. In addition to that, there is also a cultural stigma to unemployment that impacts happiness.

Based on research conducted in various countries around the world (Stevenson and Wolfers 2008), countries with higher levels of per capita GDP, have on average higher levels of happiness. Yet, there are cases with positive growth rates having lower happiness levels. This negative correlation between economic growth and happiness is known as the “paradox of unhappiness”. However, country-level patterns affect income-happiness relationship. Moreover, factors such as good health, social network, and intellectual curiosity contribute to happiness of the youth.

Quality of Life (QoL)

QoL is known as the conditions in which one lives, his/ her standard of living; the degree of basic enjoyment of basic fulfillment in life. QoL is concerned with youth health, safety, and job satisfaction. It is associated with attempts to develop techniques and methods for improving the experience of work. These include job redesign, autonomous work groups and labour management committees (Huse and Cummings 1985). All these somehow or the other affect quality of youth happiness.

QoL constructs that are measured metrically rather than by thresholds are, in general, much more straightforward. Happiness and subjective well-being are ascertained via numeric scales by survey questionnaire. Utility is, of course, ubiquitously measured in money terms, often by per capita GNP. The most straightforward of the macro quality of life instruments is happy life expectancy (Veenhoven 1999).

QoL is an individual’s perception of his/her position in life in the context of the culture and value system in which he/she lives in relation to one’s goals, expectation, values and concerns — incorporating physical health, psychological state, level of independence, and social relations. Quality of life refers to a subjective evaluation which is embedded in a cultural, social and environmental context. An individual’s happiness is highly influenced by the above aspects.

METHOD OF RESEARCH

Method of research can be defined as the search for knowledge, or as any system of investigation to establish facts. The method of research used in the present paper relies on the application of scientific method, providing scientific information and theories for the explanation of the nature of what is to be investigated.

The focus of the present research is to present a combination of theoretic frameworks and empirical realities. For the empirical part of the study, 489 young people were randomly selected from different parts and neighbourhoods of Tehran City. They were approached through direct interviews with the help of pre-designed questionnaires. Eventually, the filled-in questionnaires were edited, electronically extracted, and presented in the form of tables. The researcher also searched and reviewed the background literature on youth from different societies of the world. In the theoretical part, the researcher tried to refer to, and make use of relevant theories within reach.

The main hypothesis of this research is, "Social and economic conditions such as income, employment, general⁽³⁾ quality of life and successful marriage create happiness within the youth". However, the research takes advantage of the analytical and research tools that are provided by new approaches in sociology, psychology as well as economics.

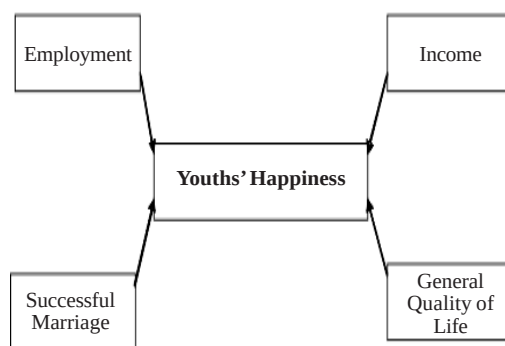


Fig. 1. Factors determining youths' happiness in Tehran city

RESULTS

Data analysis reflects findings of the research. This process of inspecting, clearing and trans-

forming data highlights useful information relevant to the given research. In this section, the data collected are exposed through an abridged table, and descriptive statistics.

Happiness that applies to the spheres of leisure, recreation, sports, education, work, romantic relationships etc., the nature of which can take different forms in different contexts. Therefore, for various people in many nations, the idea of happiness may not be the same. Anthropologically speaking, for each locality or a community in the world we could try to look at some of the characteristics of happiness. Similarly, happiness is transitory or impermanent. It is subject to mortality; it is because for one moment, a person may be extremely happy, later he/she becomes a very sad, unhappy person. So, we would say that our experiences are ever changing. However, happiness is the experience of a combination of pleasure and meaning.

Based on the above-mentioned ideas, the author could merge multiple indicators of happiness within the two sexes. Results reflect more happiness among the females in Iran than the males. In Iran, as the young females have more academic success, and can create more leisure pursuits for themselves, such atmospheres create conditions for them to prosper emotionally as well, and that keeps them at a higher level of happiness. Therefore, Table 1 is the result of various happiness variables for the two separate genders.

Another set of data regarding happiness due to marriage among the youth indicates that out of the total number of 489 respondents, 121 (24.8%) of respondents were not at all happy with their marriage, 144 or (29.5%) of the youth were happy due to their marriage, 116 (23.72%) of respondents were much happy, and lastly 108 (22.1%) of the young respondents were very much happy with the event of their marriage in Tehran City.

Occupation also as one of the variables of this research came to reach such conclusions, Out of the total number of 489 respondents, 90 or (18.4%) of the respondents showed no happiness because of their access to occupations. Similarly, 85 (17.4%) of the young respondents were to some extent happy to have access to occupations, 144 (29.5%) were much happy and finally 170 (34.8%) expressed their utmost happiness to have access to jobs.

Income indicator plays a determining role in

Table 1: The rate of happiness among youth by various variables in Tehran City (No./Percent)

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Not at all</i>		<i>To some extent</i>		<i>Much</i>		<i>Very much</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>1 Educational Achievements</i>										
Males and Females	92	18.81	202	41.31	107	21.88	88	18.0	489	100.0
Males	45	9.2	57	11.66	17	3.48	14	2.86	133	27.2
Females	47	9.61	145	29.65	90	18.4	74	15.13	356	72.8
<i>2 Going to Pilgrimage</i>										
Males and Females	59	12.07	156	31.9	142	29.04	132	27.0	489	100.0
Males	34	6.95	50	10.22	25	5.11	24	4.91	133	27.2
Females	25	5.11	106	21.68	117	23.93	108	22.09	356	72.8
<i>3 Care for Their Parents</i>										
Males and Females	43	8.79	148	30.27	158	32.3	140	28.63	489	100.0
Males	19	3.89	46	9.41	32	6.54	36	7.36	133	27.2
Females	24	4.91	102	20.86	126	25.77	104	21.27	356	72.8
<i>4 Participation in Charities</i>										
Males and Females	35	7.16	168	34.36	155	31.7	131	26.79	489	100.0
Males	14	2.86	54	11.04	37	7.57	28	5.73	133	27.2
Females	21	4.29	114	23.31	118	24.13	103	21.06	356	72.8
<i>5. Medical Services</i>										
Males and Females	137	28.02	251	51.33	82	16.77	19	3.89	489	100.0
Males	53	10.84	56	11.45	20	4.09	4	0.82	133	27.2
Females	84	17.18	195	39.88	62	12.68	15	3.07	356	72.8
<i>6. Counseling Services</i>										
Males and Females	274	56.03	152	31.08	48	9.82	15	3.07	489	100.0
Males	81	16.56	34	6.95	13	2.66	5	1.02	133	27.2
Females	193	39.47	118	24.13	35	7.16	10	2.04	356	72.8
<i>7. Marriage Facities/Services</i>										
Males and Females	259	52.97	173	35.38	40	8.18	17	3.48	489	100.0
Males	71	14.52	42	8.59	16	3.27	4	0.82	133	27.2
Females	188	38.45	131	26.79	24	4.91	13	2.66	356	72.8
<i>8. Housing Facilities</i>										
Males and Females	258	52.76	130	26.58	72	14.72	29	5.93	489	100.0
Males	79	16.16	29	5.93	15	3.07	10	2.04	133	27.2
Females	179	36.61	101	20.65	57	11.66	19	3.89	356	72.8
<i>9. Low and Order for the Youth</i>										
Males and Females	136	27.81	233	47.65	87	17.79	33	6.75	489	100.0
Males	44	9.0	51	10.43	26	5.32	12	2.45	133	27.2
Females	92	18.81	182	37.22	61	12.47	21	4.29	356	72.8
<i>10. Educational Facilities for the Youth</i>										
Males and Females	96	19.63	230	47.03	118	24.13	45	9.2	489	100.0
Males	41	8.38	55	11.25	22	4.5	15	3.07	133	27.2
Females	55	11.25	175	35.79	96	19.63	30	6.13	356	72.8
<i>11. Social Security for the Youth</i>										
Males and Females	252	51.53	155	31.7	56	11.45	26	5.32	489	100.0
Males	75	15.34	38	7.77	13	2.66	7	1.43	133	27.2
Females	177	36.2	117	23.93	43	8.79	19	3.89	356	72.8
<i>12. Monthly Income of the Youth</i>										
Males and Females	193	39.47	192	39.26	75	15.34	29	5.93	489	100.0
Males	56	11.45	48	9.82	23	4.7	6	1.23	133	27.2
Females	137	28.02	144	29.45	52	10.63	23	4.7	356	72.8
<i>13. Food Conditions of the Youth</i>										
Males and Females	52	10.63	180	36.81	179	36.61	78	15.95	489	100.0
Males	17	3.48	50	10.22	44	9.0	22	4.5	133	27.2
Females	35	7.16	130	26.58	135	27.61	56	11.45	356	72.8
<i>14. Health Conditions of the Youth</i>										
Males and Females	83	16.97	226	46.22	139	28.43	41	8.38	489	100.0
Males	34	6.95	67	13.7	24	4.91	8	1.64	133	27.2
Females	49	10.02	159	32.29	115	23.52	33	6.75	356	72.8

the happiness of the youth. The present research shows that 193 (39.5%) of the respondents were very much happy due to their individual in-

comes, and 75 (15.3%) of the respondents were to some extent happy due to their incomes.

While having a baby is expected to bring

about happiness, the research reached different and unexpected conclusions. In that, out of a total of 489 respondents, 170 (34.8%) were not at all happy with having a baby/child, 140 (28.6%) were happy with that to some extent, 96 (19.6%) of the respondents were much happy with having a child, and lastly, 82 extent, 96 (19.6%) of the respondents were much happy with having a child, and lastly, 82 (17%) were very much happy with that. However, the reaction towards the questions was different so far as male/female child is concerned.

Services such as medical insurance have impacts on youth happiness not only in Iran, but around the world. It acts as a means of security for the individuals. In this question, the researcher identified that out of 489 respondents, 104 (21.3%) of the addressees responded that insurance services did not make them happy at all. Another group, that is, 236 (48.3%) of the respondents were to some extent satisfied with the issue. Similarly, 123 (25.2%) were much benefited from the medical insurance and lastly 26 (5.3%) which somehow or the other indicate the youth happiness.

In the present research, the author has referred to two different figures that represent youths' happiness. In Figure 1, four major variables such as employment, income, successful and general quality of life are supposed to influence youths' happiness in Tehran, Iran based on Iranian standards. However, the deprivation of the four important factors may negatively impact upon the happiness levels of the youths. Similarly, in Figure 2 which comes next, other factors including health security, social relations,

type of occupation, recreation, accommodation, education and wealth overall influence youths' happiness in Iran. They are all motivated to access such goals. All the above-mentioned factors which form the lifestyles of the youths, indicate their various social classes. However, the less privileged groups in the society face less happiness.

Other issues and facilities which contribute to the happiness among the Iranian youth, and the ones which are relevant to the Iranian standards could be listed as, counseling services to the youth, marital financial facilities for the youth and housing facilities for them. Similarly, creation of law and order for the youth, educational facilities, social security, satisfaction with monthly income, food and health conditions and the like were among the variables measured to evaluate the scale and quality of happiness among the youth in the present research based on the data as reflected in Table 1.

DISCUSSION

As found out, happier people perform better in the labour market and in general in their careers. They could even invest more in their children's future. Happier people are generally healthier. It also matters to their future outcomes. Many social psychologists argue that happier people earn more income in later periods than do their less happy cohorts (Diemer 2008).

However, there are a lot of variables responsible for happiness in general among the youth. That is, the factors and variables which play role in the appearance of happiness among them in

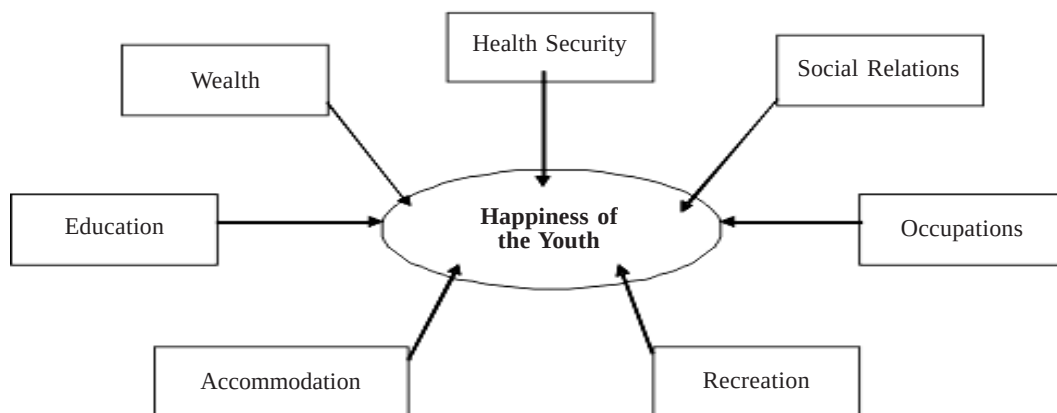


Fig. 2. Objective indicators leading to happiness within the youth

Iran. In the present research, out of the a thousand and one factors which play part in the creation of happiness, the researcher has selected a few among all. Gallup data for Latin America also find a positive relationship between per capita income levels and average happiness levels (Inter-American Development Bank 2008). Happiness may appear among the youth followed by their access to educational aims. A number of happiness studies since the mid-20th century have confirmed the effects of rising aspirations, and have also noted their potential role in driving excessive consumption and other perverse economic behaviours (Frank 1999). It may also appear among them because of getting the ritual opportunities based on Iranian standards. There is some recent research that shows that higher levels of participation in religious organizations are linked to higher levels of happiness (Clarck and Lelkes 2009). It also somehow or the other seems within the youth when they are satisfied with giving care and support to their parents.

Similarly, based on the varied culture, happiness sometimes appears among the youth through donating charities. In Iran, happiness is widely created because of the marriage among the youth. Likewise, as many youth attain employment, they get happy. Other variables which add to the happiness among the youth, are followed due to increase in income, or access to regular income. In fast-growing developing countries, frustration and unhappiness is often higher for upwardly mobile middle income respondents than it is for the very poor (Knight and Gunatilaka 2007).

So far as the Iranian youth of both genders are concerned, they become highly happy when they get a baby, or a baby is born in a young family. Similarly, social services and the counseling services are somehow or the other responsible for creating happiness within the youth. That is, when they have it, they are happy, and when they lack it, they are less happy. As getting married is somehow financially hard for the youth to manage in these days in Iran, so when they get the facilities such as loans for their marriage arrangements, they become happy. Long before the economics of happiness was established, Duesenberry (1949) noted the impact of changing aspirations on income satisfaction and its potential effects on consumption and savings rates. Another variable which is highly

responsible for a durable happiness among the youth is securing accommodation/housing.

In another part of the research, the researcher found out how law and order contribute to the happiness among the youth. In Iran, many youth get the happiness because of having access to higher education. Among other factors which are responsible for the youth happiness, we can point to social security, unemployment insurance, and opportunities like that. The behavioural economics literature usually shows that individuals value losses more than gains (Kahneman 1999). As it was discussed before, poverty in socio-economic contexts is largely responsible for the appearance of unhappiness by the youth. On the other hand, satisfaction with monthly income highly contributes to the happiness among the youth.

Access to food sufficiency also as examined, adds to the happiness of the youth so far as the universe of study is concerned. In another question, the researcher could find out the quality of happiness among the youth because of the local health conditions, or the health status. However, sufficient income, or so to say financial security, leisure possibilities or services, largely contribute to the emergence of happiness among the youth. However, urban migrants who are materially much better off than they were in their pre-migration stage, yet they report higher levels of frustration with their material situation. Once they migrate, their reference norm quickly becomes other urban residents rather than their previous peers in rural areas (Whyte and Hun 2006).

CONCLUSION

The present research looked at several fundamental relationships, happiness and income, happiness and economic development levels, happiness and health, happiness and quality of life etc. The youth have become more concerned to get more happiness due to increase in social networks. Youth not only in Iran, but around the world are expecting increasing means of happiness. The paper concludes that under such circumstances, societies must be prepared to do everything possible to arrange the necessary policies for the youth in order to prevent controversies. In the globalized world of today, the youth are prone to more changes as compared with ever before. Factors such as unem-

ployment and inflation highly affect happiness among the youth, and instead, it adds to stress, conflicts and challenges within them. Similarly, under an atmosphere of peace and lasting happiness, development in general will be attainable and sustainable.

The data collected for the present youth research are reflected through tables and descriptive statistics. In that, various variables have been analyzed, and through which the scale of happiness among the youth have been measured. For example, though having a baby is a part and parcel of the Iranian value system, under the present socio-economic conditions, about one-third (34.8%) of the respondents declined, and were not at all happy with having a baby. Similarly, variables such as monthly income, educational status and the like, were measured to determine the scale and quality of happiness among the youth in Tehran City. The research reached the conclusion that many youth were less happy because of their deterred marriages under the unemployment crisis in the society. At the end, it is concluded that sufficient income and leisure services highly contribute to the happiness of the youth in Iran.

NOTES

- 1- *Life Satisfaction*, It is a measure of an individual's perceived level of well-being and happiness. It is frequently assessed in surveys, by asking individuals how satisfied they are with their own lives. It is sometimes used as a synonym for subjective happiness, i.e. a state of mind or feeling characterized by contentment, love, satisfaction, pleasure, or joy. A variety of sociological, biological, psychological, religious and philosophical approaches have striven to define happiness and identify its sources.
- 2- *Misery Index*, It is an economic indicator adding unemployment to the inflation rate. It is assumed that a higher rate of unemployment and a worsening of inflation create economic and social costs for a country. The basic misery index causes unhappiness under the conditions of joblessness. It is even followed by an increase in crime rate in the society with special reference to the youth.
- 3- *General Quality of Life*, It requires that people's basic and social needs are met, and that they have the autonomy to choose to enjoy life, to flourish and to participate as citizens in a society with high levels of civic integration, social collectivity, trust and other integrative norms including at least fairness, equity and possibly to some degree of social justice and egalitarianism — all within a physically and socially sustainable global environment.

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