

# HOW COUNSELORS IMPROVE STUDENTS' HAPPINESS? Drawing a Part of Mental Health Counseling

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## Abstract

Counselor's roles in helping students countering their problems is being the main concern in Indonesia which is experiencing various social problems as poverty, fraud, distress, violence and moreover crimes. Occupying an exceedingly important role in helping students, counselors exactly need to implant positive emotions toward students to encounter such various social problems impacts to obtain healthy mental condition. Good students' performances could be possessed by happy students in carrying out their tasks. This article would discuss the determinants of happiness. Research result conducted in other countries would be discussed. Of the principal contents, Quality of Life Therapy (QOLT) would be described as a reference model likely to be implemented by counselors in order to increase students' happiness.

**Keywords :** *happiness, counseling, mental health*

## Introduction

The changing of democracy feature and government directly influences many systems of substantial society affairs such as education, economic, social, and physical and mental health. Those then impacted toward social life which vulnerable with various likelihood of recent visible problems such as poverty, fraud, crimes and distress which increasingly wider over ages (Bunte and Ufen, 2008, Coppel, 2006). The events, thus, show the emotional euphoria occurred in this country which affect for many negative impact mentally.

Though those problems are interrelated each other, this article would not discuss all of them in detail, but would concern into the mental health which at least would also encompasses all the factors in certain ways. When the mental status is being the main concern, however, it can continually be track towards the other problems as the roots and detailed inquiry. The arousal of those, actually, is the cause of the mental condition and is being the new concern in improving people well-being.

When considering, scientifically, mental health is being the new concern because of the problems occurred recently, one profession may take a part in encountering this mental effect is school counselor. Conspicuously used in improving happiness, Quality of Life therapy could be reference in order to maximally serving students with mental health focus. This approach is not merely clinically but also commonly used in normal context (Frisch, 2006).

## Students' Happiness as Students' Mental Health

Gentry (2008) suggested that good student's performances in doing their tasks could be possessed by happy students. Happiness is being a highly important due to its impacts on positive emotions in performing their academic or nonacademic activities. Though most children are happy in the early of their life, keeping that happiness over their developments stages is not a given but need to be thought. Aristotle preferably concerned in "the good life" and in happiness. Happiness "the Aristotle way", *eudaimonia*, had nothing to be doing in hunting pleasant feelings, but concerned with functioning (Bull, 2008). Of the Aristotle view, there are two important traditions in positive psychology: the *hedonistic* perspective, which focus on feeling good, and the *eudaimonic* perspective which focus on functioning well.

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The first perspective considered the elements of life satisfaction and emotions and the second one focuses on ways of thought and behavior that evolve engagement and fulfillment. As the focus on mental health of psychology thus be able to imply toward helping professions which have the same concern in improving mental health. Positive psychology has been changed the focus on mental illness toward the promotion of mental well being and mental health (Bull, 2008; Carr, 2004).

There is a reciprocally relationship between health and happiness. Though mostly research in happiness is related to the physical health, but mental health serve as the indication of happiness. Some cognitive-behavioral, psychodynamic and humanistic theorists agree that happiness or satisfaction possessed by clients with life is an essential criterion for mental health (Bull, 2008; Frisch, 2006, Carr, 2004). It asserted by Bull (Bull, 2008; Carr, 2004) that health and happiness are positive cycle elements which when they have established in a certain point of time, thus are difficult to define which one the starting point is. Health promotes happiness; happiness promotes health is the simpler sentence to portraying it.

Some research report that happy people are more sociable, generous, creative, tolerant and altruistic. Dealing with the students' importance for their future needs in workplace, happy people and satisfied persons are relatively more successful in workplace which is indicated by the higher income, favorable evaluations by superior, helping fellow workers, and social support from colleagues and supervisors, thus, the attainment of such success indicators is presumably because of he or she is a happy person. Happy people live longer than unhappy people and are less vulnerable to disease, more endure than that of less happy, broadening focus and expanding thinking, improving ability to problem-solve, building physical, intellectual, and social resources, countering negative emotions, protecting health. Married people are happier than those who are not (Gentry, 2008; Boehm and Lyubomirsky, 2008; Frisch, 2006; Nettle, 2005).

Carver (2003) in Boehm and Lyumbomirsky, 2008, suggested that, when people in a good mood are more likely to meddle into the novel situations, interact with other people, and pursue other new goals. Positive emotions are also signal that life is good and that no threats readily tangible (Cantor in Boehm and Lyumbomirsky, 2008). In addition, result of review shows that happy persons enjoy more successfully working than their less happy friends and the attainment is triggered by the experience of positive emotions.

Empirical happiness research has considered carious personality and lifestyle variables. Characteristic found over-represented among the happy are : "identity integrity", ego-strength", mental maturity", inner control". "social ability". "activity" and "perceptual openness". Not surprisingly, these characteristics are typical concominants of mental health, and goals in many psychotherapies. (Veenhoven, 1991).

### **Defining Happiness and Its Determinants**

The happy man, frequently, shows a positive expression honestly with such as smile, laugh, friendly and so forth. This term is familiar in our daily life which often perceived after we obtain something we want and thus evoke satisfaction. The presentation of a goal is beginning in this section, conversely there is no grim visage of children's face to figure out the goal aimed.

That happiness have to be a central of education is believed by many people. Nel Noddings (Warnick, 2009) stated that :

*"happiness and education are 'intimately connected' and happiness should be an aim of education, and a good education should contribute significantly to personal and collective happiness..."*

Many research have been done through economics and psychological standpoints and resulted vary of conclusions. Though income does not have stable correlation strength over the result, the role of income has it function in tracking the path of happiness attainment roots. Gundelach and Kreiner (2004) suggested that economic factors are not goals in themselves but are means for acquiring other types of social goals. This because economy allows society and individual to live a better life due to money could be used to pay over health facilities, schools, infrastructure and so forth. Chronologically, the needs have been fulfilled would result in satisfaction. (Frey and Stutzer, 2002b).

Since 1950, in the United States people are not happier, though living standards have more than doubled. There has been no increase in the number of “very happy” people, nor any substantial fall in those who are “not very happy”. The same story occurred in Britain, where happiness has been static since 1975 and is no higher than in the 1950. This happened despite massive upsurge in real income at every point of the income distribution (Layard, 2005). On another country, Japan, may be a country with the most spectacular growth in income since World War II. Between 1958 an 1991, its per capita income rose six times. Nevertheless, the Japanese people report a satisfaction with life that remains largely unchanged over the period. This is supported by survey result that subjective well-being, or commonly known as happiness, has no consistent relationship with income (Kahneman et al, 2006).

The closeness between counselors with students is a key to give students with something value commonly by the society. Gentry (2008) suggested four prescriptions concern for improving happiness : safety, satiation, perspective, quietude. Furthermore, Demographical determinants also give contribution toward happiness attainment. Survey conducted between 56 and 74 participants indicates that in line with the age increase, person likely of being happier.

When the young people are happy, but research shows that they are more likely to be happy when get older. In addition, marital status also gives contribution toward happiness attainment. The married people are generally happier than those who are not. The same feature with age, education level encourages happiness increment. This may be because of the consequences of high educated person such as earning, health, ability to cope with stress and longevity. Some research reported that the high happiness scores are result by people who tend to experience low negative emotions, high vitality and self-esteem, extroverted characteristics, and absence of problems, satisfying social relationship, an active meaningful life and an optimistic attitude, among other characteristics (Bull, 2008).

### **Quality of Life therapy as one reference approach**

Starting from the initial philosophy, counseling profession was founded based on development and prevention. It asserts the view that counselors need to continue to concern on wellness and helping people to find the meaning and happiness (Rotter, 2000). Regarding with the capacity school counselors in giving service toward students, it is going to be plausible that school counselor necessarily concern the determinants of happiness as reference to care about them. When a school counselor serves as a teacher in school, they could play their roles as the “*second parents*” in building closeness with students. This would be plausible in that students need safety in doing interaction with the counselors especially during counseling session.

One approach could be used by school counselors regarding to the happiness improvement efforts is the Quality of Life Therapy (QOLT). This rooted from positive psychology approach which suggested as the study and increase of human happiness, strength, and better quality of life for all (Frisch, 2006).

In his book entitled *Quality of Life Therapy*, Michael Frisch (2006), in detail explained that compared with other approaches of positive psychology, QOLT advocates a life satisfaction approach where clients are given the knowledge about theory, tenets, and skills for helping them individually identify, pursue, and fulfill their valuable needs, goals, and wishes in their life. Furthermore, this approach could be used for both clinical and non clinical professions. Non clinical clients are defined as groups without psychological or psychiatric disturbances which have defined in DSM IV-TR disorders. According to this, school counselors are including to be apart of the second one cohort.

The famous model of QOL theory suggested the Five Paths model of life satisfaction or commonly known as CASIO model. This constitutes the blueprint for quality of life and positive psychology interventions which then called *Quality of Life Therapy (QOLT)* and *Coaching*. Notoriously known as the model of positive psychology, this also serves as the centerpiece of QOL theory. QOL interventions with CASIO elements could result in greater happiness in a life area (Frisch, 2006).

The name of CASIO is obtained by the certain letters from the five strategies elements. Campbell et al (in Frisch, 2006) assumed, empirically validated by numerous studies, that overall satisfaction of an individual's could be perceived as the sum of overall life satisfaction with certain "domains" or areas of life considered important, usually closely related to personal goals, by her or him. (Frisch, 2006, Nettle, 2008)

Happiness or quality of life could be defined as the extent to which what person's most important needs, goals, and wishes have been fulfilled. (Frisch, 2006). Quality of life, in addition, assumed as the level three of happiness because this characterized with the more cognitive judgment after flourishing and fulfilling one's potential (Nettle 2008). The five strategies could be used to increase satisfaction of person in certain area of life which then lead to the increment of happiness, Frisch written as bellow :

**Strategy 1 – Change Circumstance.** This is the first strategy to improve a certain area of one life. Individuals could change their circumstances by changing things such as relationships, the place where alive, work place, and how they play. For instance, a student wrangles against his or her class mate, he or she might see school counselor as an effort to revamp the nature of their relationship. In other words, this is a means to maintain the equilibrium of circumstance to reach harmony over the friends.

**Strategy 2 – Change Attitude.** Changing attitude against situation serve as a strategy to correct any distortions or negativity in one's thinking. This strategy could be done by asking the both two key questions : (1) "What is really happening here?" and (2) "What does it mean to me?". The both questions may emerge during an inconvenient situation around individuals which then lead to the judgment over other's attitude in short period of time. For instance a student may perceive a careless of teacher's response because of the student's unintended indiscipline behavior, whilst as a matter of fact the teacher is in a personal problem with couple. The tendency to conclude without any comprehend facts, this will be important to collect data deal with the situation before judging what is really happening and what is the meaning of the situation toward the student happiness further.

**Strategy 3 – Change Goals and Standards.** The main idea of this third strategy is to set realistic goals and to experiment with raising and lowering standards of fulfillment for a particular areas of life that a person unhappy with. There are some questions have to be answered by individuals to do this strategy such as " What do I really want in this part of life? How much

is enough? What realistic goals and standards can I set for success in this particular part of my life?" Often these questions help to lower individuals' standard which then can gain some fulfillment leading to be happy in part of life.

**Strategy 4 – Change Priorities.** This fourth strategy suggest individual to change his or her priorities in life. This strategy engages reevaluating priorities and emphasizing those areas that are most important and that are most under of his or her control. Many possibilities of people in arranging their priorities lead to worse condition because of any restrictiveness. For example, if a student has an academic achievement problem, he or she could de-emphasize the importance of the academic achievement rather than focus on school organization or outside activities. These may be two areas could be changed in order to make the student happier. In other further story, this may evade student from parents' anger because of the low academic achievement.

**Strategy 5 – Boost Satisfaction in other areas not previously considered.** This final strategy is to increase individual satisfaction in other areas that are not of immediate concern. This strategy is especially worthwhile when student is concerning in area that is considerably hard to attain and low to improve, such as science mastery. When a student concern is in science, may be slowly moving in mastering to reach a top mark, the student could increase his or her quality of life by focusing on other areas of learning as arts or social sciences. Though those both areas are not the priority focus at the point of time, but the attainment to reach certain achievement in the both areas could increase the fulfillment which lead to satisfaction even though previously are not the immediate concern.

The five CASIO strategies have not to be all used together. Though this apparently described in an ordered way, but does not mean that should implemented by the first before the second. The important steps before applying some or all strategies are identifying the areas of life that one is unhappy with and creatively brainstorming about the ways to apply one or more with the goal of increasing his or her quality of life satisfaction.

### **Conclusion**

The determinants of happiness in addition to safety, satiation, perspective, quietude, demographical status also contributes toward happiness attainment such as age, marital status and education level. Income, as many research concerns, does not have the consistent relationship with happiness as empirically researched in United States and Japan. Quality of Life Therapy may be a reference for counselors to be implemented in school setting practice, especially in Indonesia with recent problem impacts on mental health. However, since the source of this paper mostly based on western countries, and also the empiric practices, it is going to be important that research and practices necessarily conducted in Indonesian students, or wider society. The role of counselor on students' wellness would be aptly implemented with basic and advance research on the school or society context. By reflecting problems encountered by Indonesian students recently, as described before, the happiness map must be portrayed clearly by measuring the personal values deal with the attainment of happiness by persons, community or more over country with various ethnic backgrounds. Finally, in step with the growth of research concern, the advantages of students' happiness would be achieved as one solution against the negative impacts of recent social problems.

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