



# **Determinants of Adolescents' Happiness in Iceland**

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### Abstract

Happiness has recently received increased attention from both researchers and policy makers. The determinants of happiness in adult life have been well explored in the last decades. The determinants of children's and adolescents' happiness have been less studied. The aim of this study was to explore the relations between socio-demographic factors and happiness among Icelandic adolescents as well as finding which factors are the best predictors for adolescents' happiness. Data from the Icelandic Centre for Social Research & Analysis were used in this analysis. A sample of 2000 Icelandic adolescents aged 14 to 15 years in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade was analysed. The main results show that 86.6% of Icelandic adolescents describe themselves as happy. Loneliness, physical health, how much time they spend with their parents and religiousness are strong predictors of Icelandic adolescents' happiness. The findings will hopefully give a better understanding on which factors are most important for adolescents' happiness which might be of interest to policy makers, parents and others who have happiness and well-being of Icelandic adolescents in mind.

*Key words:* happiness, well-being, adolescents, physical health, religiousness

### Útdráttur

Á síðustu árum hefur hamingja fengið aukna athygli frá bæði rannsakendum og stefnumótendum. Áhrifaþættir hamingju fullorðinna hafa verið mikið rannsakaðir á síðustu áratugum, en hamingju barna og unglinga hefur verið veitt minni athygli. Markmið þessarar rannsóknar er að skoða hvaða þættir hafa áhrif á hamingju íslenskra unglinga. Unnið var úr gögnum Rannsókna og greiningar en þátttakendur í rannsókninni voru 2000 unglingar 14 og 15 ára, úr níunda og tíunda bekk grunnskóla víðsvegar um landið. Helstu niðurstöður sýndu að 86.6% íslenskra unglinga telja sig vera hamingjusama. Einmanaleiki, líkamleg heilsa, það hversu miklum tíma þeir verja með foreldrum og trúhneigð eru sterkustu forspárþættirnir fyrir hamingju unglinga á Íslandi. Niðurstöður rannsóknarinnar munu vonandi varpa frekari ljósi á það hvaða þættir eru mikilvægastir þegar kemur að hamingju unglinga en slíkt gæti verið athyglisvert fyrir stefnumótendum, foreldra og og aðra sem hafa áhuga á hamingju og velferð unglinga á Íslandi.

*Lykilhugtök:* hamingja, vellíðan, unglingar, líkamleg heilsa, trúhneigð

### **Foreword and Acknowledgements**

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the BSc Psychology degree, Reykjavík University, this thesis is presented in the style of an article for submission to a peer-reviewed journal.

First of all I want to thank my supervisor Inga Dóra Sigfúsdóttir. I want to thank my parents for always being there for me and making it possible for me to study these three years to get my bachelor degree by helping me in taking care of my daughter and also for making my childhood and adolescence years happy.

Thanks to my three sisters who each in their way helped me during writing, particularly Dóra Guðrún Guðmundsdóttir for her advice and support.

And last, but not least, my daughter Friðrika Björt who has increased my interest in children and adolescents' happiness and for making me happy every day I spend with her.

### Determinants of Adolescents' Happiness in Iceland

From early in human history, happiness has been one of man's most important subjects, from Ancient Greek philosophy, post-Enlightenment, Western European moral philosophy to research in social, political and economic sciences (Boniwell, 2006). Coan (1977) traces the discourse of happiness to Socrates and Aristotle who wrote of the triumphant human capacity for reason and rationality. Aristotle considered what constitutes the good life and concluded that happiness depends upon ourselves.

"The concept of achieving true happiness has, in the West, always seemed ill defined, elusive, and ungraspable. Even the word "happy" is derived from the Icelandic word *happ*, which means luck or chance" (Lama & Cutler, 1998, p.14).

Happiness and well-being have recently received increased attention from researchers and policy makers alike (Diener, 2006). Through the centuries people have been talking and thinking about happiness; great thinkers and scientist alike. His holiness, Dalai Lama has emphasized the importance of happiness and urged people to seek happiness. In his book (Lama & Cutler, 1998) he states that happiness is not ready-made but that it is a result from our actions.

### Defining Happiness

Individuals might give different answers to the question "what is happiness?" or "what defines a satisfying life?", but most would agree that the word happiness should be high on a list for what constitutes a good life. Subjective well-being is defined as life satisfaction, the presence of positive affect, and a relative absence of negative affect. These three components are often referred to as happiness (Baumgardner & Crothers, 2010). Lyubomirsky (2008) reveals in her book that set point determines just 50% of happiness while 10% can be attributed to differences in life circumstances or situations. This leaves a startling 40% of one's ability for happiness within ones power to change.

Bentham (1789/1996) Defined happiness as “the sum of pleasures and pains”. Argyle (2001) argues that people’s happiness is probably going to increase with age. He also confirms that money cannot buy you happiness and suggests that social relationships may be the greatest single cause of happiness. Fredrickson (1998) has found that happiness is related to creativity and solution focus and Lyubomirsky, King & Diener (2005) concluded that happiness leads to good relationships, better health and longer life. Taking into account the positive benefits of happiness, it is important to study the determinants of happiness and try to find effective ways to enhance happiness in both children and adults.

### **Measuring Happiness**

Argyle (2001) approaches happiness in his book *Psychology of happiness* in which he examines what science can tell us about happiness based on a comprehensive review of available research. Among other things, Argyle discusses how scholars study and measure happiness. He explains that subjective well-being is a measure of happiness conducted by asking survey respondents how they felt about their life. Objective well-being is a measure of observable variables, such as life expectancy, which we believe are important for a good life. Single item measures can be quite successful and have a high correlation with longer scales (Argyle, 2001). Happiness can be measured by single questions and thus be assessed in large-scale surveys (Diener, 1995).

### **Correlates of Happiness**

In their study on very happy people, Diener and Seligman (2002) found that very happy people were highly social, had stronger romantic and other social relationships than less happy groups. The happy people were also more extroverted, more agreeable, and less neurotic. Compared with the less happy groups, the happiest respondents did not exercise substantially more, participate in religious activities significantly more, or experience more objectively defined good events.

The relationship between health and happiness has had researchers' interests. Siahpush, Spittal, and Singh (2008) study showed that happier people reported better physical health at the 2-year follow-up when adjusted for baseline health and other relevant covariates. Argyle (2001) proposed that health is closely linked with happiness, and he suggested that healthy people are happy and that happy people are healthy.

Adolescents' and children's happiness has been less studied than that of adults. Variables concerning family conditions such as marital status of parents, age of parents and family size have been weakly associated with adolescents' happiness. The results showed that social relationships were found to correlate significantly with measures of happiness. The findings suggest that predictors of children's and adolescents' happiness were parallel to findings from studies with adults (Holder & Coleman, 2009).

Studies from all over the world show that factors like social support, creativity and learning new things are highly correlated with positive feelings associated with life enjoyment.

Income does influence life satisfaction, but less when other factors are taken into account (Diener, Harter & Arora, 2010). Quantitative income is not nearly as important as the adolescences' family structure, age, health status, or parental well-being (Burton & Phipps, 2011).

### **Happiness in Iceland**

Despite the fact that Iceland has often been rated the happiest country in the world in international surveys (e.g. Argyle, 2001) there are not many analyses available on the determinants of happiness in Iceland. One study on what determines happiness in Iceland conducted by Gudmundsdottir (2007), demonstrated that Icelanders had the highest mean happiness score of 33 European countries where over eighty per cent of the respondents described themselves as very happy. Gender, age and education did not have significant impact on happiness in the adult population and income had a little impact when other factors

were taken into account, while marital status, social relationships and health had a strong impact. In another study on the impact of the economic crisis on happiness in Iceland, Gudmundsdottir (2011) found that income still had little impact on happiness while financial difficulties had stronger negative impact on happiness.

### **Children's and Adolescents' Happiness**

The happiness of children and adolescents has been less studied than adults' happiness and no study on the subject has been found regarding Icelandic children or adolescents. Nevertheless, it is an important topic which deserves more attention. According to Greene (1990) identifying predictors of happiness in children can help parents, researchers, governments and people who work with children to promote children's happiness.

Mahon and Yarskei (2005) found no gender difference between 14-18 years old boys and girls regarding happiness. Also Francis (1998) reported no gender differences in happiness, as measured by the Oxford Happiness Inventory, in 456 men and women in Wales.

Chen (2012) found in his study that education can enhance happiness. Individuals who received more education had more extensive social connections as well as greater involvement with the wider world than less educated individuals; these life circumstances are positively related with happiness. By enhancing one's ability and propensity to connect with the wider social world, education may improve individual's subjective well-being.

Kristjánsson, Sigfúsdóttir, and Sigfússon (2006) demonstrated that children's relationship with their parents and family is of great importance for their development. Time spent with parents also has beneficial effect on children's well-being (Davis-Kean, 2005). Intimacy between adolescents and their parents is important. Spending time with parents and family shows many positive influences on their life (Davis-Kean, 2005). When parents split up or divorce it has a measurable effect on their children's well-being. Amato (1995) studied how parental divorce affects their children and found that the consequences of parental divorce

depend on parental marital conflict prior to divorce. In high-conflict families, children have higher levels of well-being as young adults if their parents divorced than if they stayed together. On the contrary, in low-conflict families, children have higher levels of well-being if their parents stayed together than if they divorced. In marriages that do not end in divorce, parental marital conflict is negatively associated with the well-being of the children. Holder and Coleman (2010) studied the relation between spirituality, religion and happiness in 320 children aged 8–12. Children's spirituality and religion was strongly linked to their happiness. Religiousness and spirituality are internal characteristics that have been associated with happiness and researchers have found that religious people, on average, report higher subjective well-being (Hackney & Sanders, 2003).

It is well suited to study adolescents' happiness in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade. At that age, they are old enough to have an intensive knowledge of the concepts of emotions, including happiness.

They know how to explain emotions. They know that people can have a wide range of emotions and are also aware that people can experience a number of emotions at a time (Berk, 2010). Nevertheless, it is also good to keep in mind that an adolescent's personality is not fully developed (Costa, Zonderman, McCrae, Barbano, Lebowitz, & Larson, 1986).

The aim of this study is to study the relations between socio demographic factors and happiness as well as explore which factors do predict happiness among Icelandic adolescents. The relationship between these factors will be explored. Based on the literature it is assumed that intimacy with parents is a strong predictor of adolescents' happiness and social relationships are the strongest predictor of adults' happiness. The dependent variable is happiness. The independent variables are gender, mother's education, father's education, parent's financial difficulties, parent's divorce, loneliness, religion and physical health.

The hypotheses are: H1: There is no difference in happiness between boys and girls. H2: Adolescents who have experienced that their parents have divorced are less happy. H3:



Parents' education has a positive correlation with adolescents' happiness. H4: Parents' financial status has a positive correlation with adolescents' happiness. H5: Being religious has a positive correlation with adolescents' happiness. H6: Loneliness has a negative correlation with happiness. H7: Time spent with parents is positively correlated with adolescents' happiness. H8: Physical health has positive correlation with adolescents' happiness. This is the first research done on adolescents on a population level. The research findings will hopefully give a better understanding on which factors are most important for adolescents' happiness which might be of interest to policy makers and others who have the well-being of Icelandic adolescents in mind.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Participants in this study were 2000 14 and 15 year old Icelandic adolescents in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade, ( $n = 2000$ ), 950 boys (49.8%), 1011 girls (50.2%) and 39 subjects did not specify their gender (1.9%). This sample was extracted from randomly a data pool ( $N = 7714$ ) collected through a survey administered by the Icelandic Centre for Social Research and Analysis to all 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders in Iceland in February 2009. Overall response rate was 83.5% of the population on a national basis.

### **Instruments**

The instruments used in this study were advanced questionnaires developed by The Icelandic Centre for Social Research and Analysis. The questions were designed by professionals in social sciences (See appendix B, p: 28-29). All questions were subject to strict requirements in order to secure reliability and validity from the results. The questionnaire contained 96 questions on different themes in 31 pages. For the purpose of the present study, ten questions in this questionnaire were selected with regard to the research questions and analysed further.

**Variables**

Nine variables were used in the study. The dependent variable was happiness and the independent variables were gender, mother's education, and father's education, perception of parent's financial status, parental divorce, loneliness, religiousness and physical health.

*Happiness*

The dependent variable happiness was measured by the question: "How well does the following statement "I'm happy" apply to you?" And the range was: (1 = does not describe me at all; 2 = does not describe me very well 3 = describes me quite well, 4 = describes me very well). The answer possibilities for this statement/variable were reversed to get consistency for statistical processing.

*Gender*

Respondents were asked about gender (1 = boy; 2 = girl).

*Parental education*

Respondents were asked about the educational attainment of both mother and father (1 = finished elementary school or less, 2 = started a school on the secondary level, 3 = finished secondary level, 4 = started university level, 5 = has a university degree), 6 = I don't know which was defined as a missing value).

*Loneliness*

Feeling of loneliness was measured by the "how often during the last week did the following "I am lonely" apply to you?" Answers ranged from (1= never, 2 = seldom, 3 = sometimes, to 4 = often).

*Time spent with parents during the week (after school)*

Respondents were asked how much time they spent with their parents after school during the week. Answers ranged from (1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = sometimes, to 4 = often).

*Time spent with parents during the weekend*

Respondents were asked how much time they spent with their parents during the weekend.

Answers ranged from (1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = sometimes, to 4 = often).

#### *Parent's financial difficulties*

Respondents were asked how the following statement applied to them: "My parents have financial difficulties" Answers ranged from (1 = never, 2 = seldom, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = always). The answer possibilities for this statement/variable were reversed to get consistency for statistical processing.

#### *Parental divorce*

Respondents were asked "have your parents divorced or split up?" Answers were (0 = Yes and 1 = No).

#### *Physical health*

Physical health was measured by the question "How good is your physical health?" Answers ranged from (1 = bad, 2 = fair, 3 = good, 4 = very good ). The answer possibilities for this statement/variable were reversed to get consistency for statistical processing.

#### *Religion*

Respondents were asked how the following statement applied to them: "I believe in God." Answers ranged from (1 = does not describe me at all; 2 = does not describe me well enough 3 = describes me well enough, 4 = describes me very well).

### **Procedure**

The data were collected by the Icelandic Centre for Social Research and Analysis. Teachers and research assistants distributed the questionnaires, and students sealed them in blank envelopes upon completion. Furthermore, the students were asked to answer all questions consciously and ask for help if in trouble. The questionnaire was followed by instructions to avoid misunderstanding (see appendix: A, p: 27). All students who were

present on the day in question answered the questionnaire. Questions on happiness together with background questions were analyzed in this study.

### **Statistical Analysis**

Prior to analysis, all variables were explored.

*Screening the data:* The data was screened by looking at the distribution, range, mean and standard deviation as well as a plot of every variable was made before any analyses were conducted. The mean happiness score of each group of the independent variables were calculated and a comparison was made between the groups by one way ANOVA.

Correlations between all variables were calculated and then a stepwise, multiple linear regression analysis was performed in order to account for the happiness variance.

Assumptions for a regression analysis were met (Field, 2009). All the variables used in the regression were either quantitative or categorical (DUMMY) and had some variance.

Assumption for independent errors was met, the errors were normally distributed and the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable was linear.

Variables with qualitatively different categories were changed into a number of two-level variables (DUMMY variables) to meet the assumptions for linear regression (Field, 2009).

Like in earlier studies on the subject, (Myers and Diener, 1996) the dependent variable, happiness, is skewed and was kept like that. Since the number of participants is high enough this is considered acceptable (Field, 2009). Required sample size depends on a number of issues, including the desired power, alpha level, number of predictors, and expected effect size (Field, 2009).

### **Results**

Prior to analysis, all variables were explored. Descriptive statistic for all the study variables can be found in table 1. The number of participants answering each question can be found together with information on the range, mean and standard deviation.

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables*

	N	Range	Mean	SD
Gender	1961	1-2	1.51	0.49
Mother's education	1951	1-6	4.13	1.59
Father's education	1947	1-6	4.09	1.59
Spending time with parents on weekdays outside school	1987	1-5	3.11	1.11
Spending time with parents on weekends	1968	1-5	3.31	1.14
Parental financial difficulties	1975	1-5	1.78	0.95
Parental divorce	2000	0-1	.80	0.39
Physical health	1950	1-4	3.24	0.80
Happiness	1960	1-4	3.35	0.78
Religion	1953	1-4	2.91	1.04

As can be seen in table 1, the dependent variable, happiness was answered on the range from 1 to 4 and the mean happiness score for the whole sample was 3.35 ( $SD = .78$ ).

As can be seen in Figure 1, the majority of the adolescents found that the statement "I'm happy" did described them very well, and all together 86.6% of the participants do agree that the statement, "I'm happy" did describe them quite well or very well.

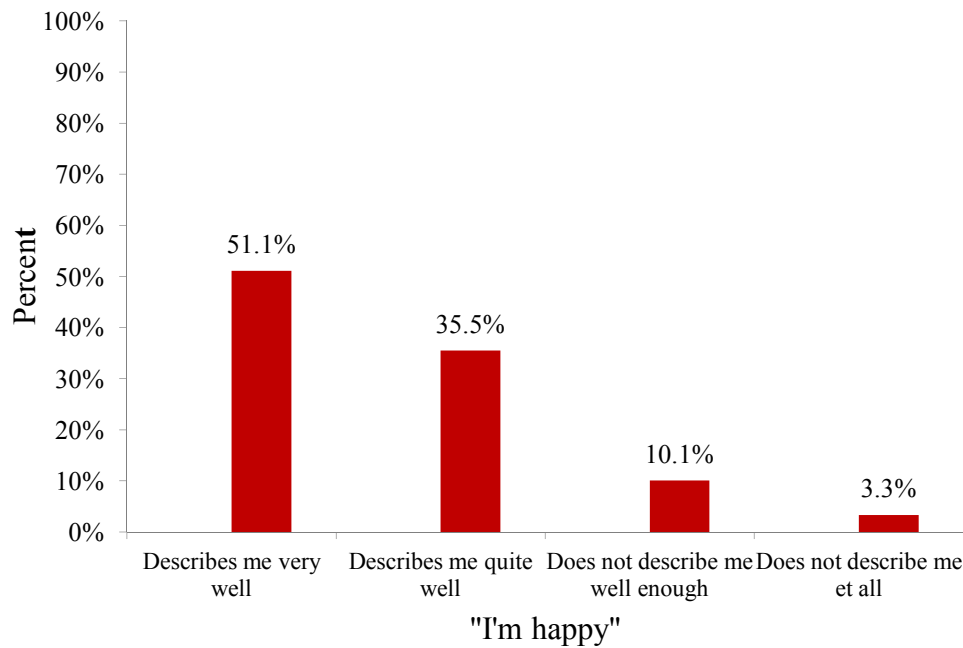


Figure 1. Distribution of happiness responses among adolescents in Iceland.

The mean happiness score of each group of the independent variables can be found in table 2 together with the  $F$  value from the ANOVA where the means between the groups were compared. As can be seen in table 2, the mean for boys and girls was almost the same, thus the difference is not significant. The difference in adolescents' happiness by their mother's education can also be found in table 2. The mean happiness score did increase by mother's education except that those who have mothers who have started university are least happy. The same pattern does also apply for father's education (see table 2). The mean happiness score for those who have experienced parent's divorce was significantly lower than for those who haven't (see table 2). In table 2 it is also demonstrated that the more the adolescents experience financial difficulties with their parents, the less happy they were.

Table 2

*Comparison of Adolescents' happiness between socio demographic groups*

Variables	N	M	SD	Statistical test
<b>Gender</b>				
Boys	924	3.35	.79	$F(1.1925) = .04$
Girls	1003	3.36	.78	
<b>Mother's education</b>				
Finished elementary school or less	147	3.26	.83	$F(4.1494) = 9.924^{***}$
Started on secondary level	212	3.31	.76	
Finished secondary level	385	3.44	.71	
Started university	94	3.22	.85	
Has a university degree	661	3.47	.73	
<b>Father's education</b>				
Finished elementary school or less	161	3.33	.78	$F(4.1486) = 8.07^{**}$
Started on secondary level	139	3.3	.73	
Finished secondary level	513	3.39	.75	
Started university	65	3.25	.88	
Has a university degree	613	3.48	.71	
<b>Divorce</b>				
yes	361	3.16	.84	$F(1.1958) = 25.83^{***}$
no	1599	3.39	.77	
<b>Parent's financial difficulties</b>				
never	979	3.51	.72	$F(4.1940) = 31.42^{***}$
seldom	560	3.32	.77	
sometimes	296	3.08	.81	
often	83	2.91	.89	
always	27	2.71	1.17	

Note. Sign\*  $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$  \*\*\* $p > .001$ 

In table 3 there are significant differences between all the mean happiness score by social relationships, health and religion. The more often adolescents spend with their parents after school, the happier they are. The same does also apply for the time spent with parents on weekends except that those who *always* spend their times with their parents on weekends are less happy than those who often spend time with their parents on weekends. The more often adolescents experience loneliness the less happy they are (see table 3).

Table 3

*Comparison of Adolescents' happiness by social relationships, health and religion.*

Variables	N	M	SD	Compare means
<b>Spending time with parents after school</b>				
never	196	2.98	.97	$F(4.1949) = 22.48^{***}$
seldom	309	3.18	.84	
sometimes	703	3.37	.76	
often	549	3.52	.68	
always	197	3.46	.72	
<b>Spending time with parents on weekends</b>				
never	142	2.96	.97	$F(4.1930) = 17.02^{***}$
seldom	302	3.21	.86	
sometimes	617	3.35	.75	
often	544	3.50	.72	
always	330	3.41	.72	
<b>Loneliness</b>				
never	1066	3.62	.62	$F(3.1947) = 155.61^{***}$
seldom	487	3.25	.72	
sometimes	272	2.96	.85	
often	126	2.40	.98	
always	1951	3.35	.79	
<b>Health</b>				
	45	2.44	1.03	$(3.1925) = 98.70^{***}$
very good	304	2.88	.87	
good	703	3.30	.75	
fair	877	3.60	.65	
bad	1929	3.35	.79	
<b>Religion</b>				
does not describe me at all	287	3.09	.96	$F(1.1927) = 20.77^{***}$
does not describe me well enough	277	3.30	.74	
describes me well enough	678	3.33	.75	
describes me very well	689	3.51	.71	

\*sign.  $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$  \*\*\* $p > .001$

Significant differences between mean scores in happiness were also found by the health status of the adolescents, the better the health, the higher the happiness mean (see table 3).

Significant differences were also found between those who find it describes them well that



they believe in God and those who don't find it describes them well. The better it describes the adolescents the higher their mean happiness score is.

The correlation between selected background variables and happiness can be found in table 4.

All the selected variables had a significant correlation with happiness except mother's education.

Table 4

*Correlation between predictive variables and happiness.*

	Moth. educat.	Time w. parents	Parents fin.diff.	Religion	Loneliness	Health	Happiness
Mother's education	1	.05*	-.11**	.02	-.06**	.01	.02
Time spent with parents	.05*	1	-.13**	.18**	-.07**	.12**	.19**
Parent's financial diff.	-.02**	-.13**	1	-.11**	.24**	-.27**	-.25**
Religion	.01	.18**	-.11**	1	-.08**	.17**	.17**
Loneliness	.06**	.07**	.24**	.08**	1	.31**	-.44**
Health	.01	.12**	-.27**	.17**	-.31**	1	.36**
Happiness	.02	.19**	-.24**	.17**	-.43**	.36**	1

\*sign.  $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$  \*\*\* $p > .001$

According to the results in table 4, the more time subjects spent with parents the higher their happiness score is,  $r = .19$ . The less the adolescents perceived their parents as having financial difficulties the higher their rating on the measure of happiness  $r = .25$ . The lonelier the more unhappiness  $r = .43$ . Parental divorce the less happier  $r = .11$ . The better physical health the happier  $r = .363$  and the more religious the happier  $r = .17$

As can be seen in table 5, loneliness alone explains 18% of the happiness variance. When physical health is added another 4% can be explained. Time spent with parents adds 1%, financial difficulties add less than 1% and religion/ believing in God adds another 1% so the final model with all the factors describes 25% of the happiness distribution.

Table 5

*Regression analysis of independent factors and adolescent's happiness in Iceland.*

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>beta</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>F change</i>
Constant 1	4.01	.04		Model 1:	
Loneliness	-.35	.02	-.43	.18	288.02***
Constant 2	4.26	.05		Model 2:	
Loneliness	-.302	.02	-.37		
Physical health	-.20	.02	-.21	.22	69.14***
Constant 3	4.02	.07		Model 3:	
Loneliness	-.30	.02	-.37		
Physical health	-.19	.02	-.20		
Time spent with parents on weekends	.06	.02	.1	.23	16.62***
Constant 4	3.9	.08		Model 4:	
Loneliness	-.31	.02	-.38		
Physical health	-.20	.03	-.21		
Time spent with parents on weekends	.06	.01	.10		
Gender	.13	.03	.09	.24	12.44***
Constant 5	4.07	.08		Model 5:	
Loneliness	-.29	.02	-.36		
Physical health	-.18	.02	-.19		
Time spent with parents on weekends	.06	.01	.09		
Gender	.13	.03	.09		
Parental financial status	-.72	.02	-.09	.24	11.93**
Constant 6	3.95	.09		Model 6:	
Loneliness	-.29	.02	-.36		
Physical health	-.17	.02	-.18		
Time spent with parents on weekends	.05	.01	.08		
Gender	.12	.03	.08		
Parental financial status	-.07	.02	-.09		
Religion	.04	.01	.07	.25	6.91**

\*sign.  $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$  \*\*\* $p > .001$

Model 1: Loneliness as a predictor of adolescence happiness. Model 2: Loneliness and physical health as a predictor of happiness. Model 3: Loneliness, physical health, spending time with parents on weekends as a predictor of happiness. Model 4: Loneliness, physical

health, spending time with parents on weekends and gender as a predictor of happiness.

Model 5: Loneliness, physical health, spending time with parents on weekends, gender and parental financial status as a predictor of happiness. Model 6: Loneliness, physical health, spending time with parents on weekends, gender, parental financial status and religion as a predictor of happiness.

### **Discussion**

The results demonstrate that 51.1% of Icelandic adolescents in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade said that it describes them very well that they are happy and another 35.5% said that it describes them quite well so altogether did 86.6% of the adolescents state that the statement, I'm happy, did describe them very or quite well. These findings are in line with findings from the adult population in Iceland where over 80% did described themselves as very happy (Gudmundsdottir, 2007). This study investigated the relationship between several social demographic variables and happiness among Icelandic adolescents. The hypotheses tested were formed on the basis of existing literature on adults', adolescents' and children's happiness. All of the eight hypotheses were confirmed. However, interesting results regarding religion, family circumstances and time spent with parents.

The first hypothesis, that there is no difference in happiness between boys and girls was confirmed. The results demonstrate no difference in happiness between gender which is also in line with earlier findings on the adult population in Iceland (Gudmundsdottir, 2007) as well as in other studies on adults and adolescents in other countries (Frances, 1998; Mahon & Yarskei, 2005).

The second hypothesis that adolescents who have experienced that their parents have divorced are less happy was also confirmed as those who had experienced that their parents had divorced had significantly lower happiness score, than those who had not experienced that. These results are not quite in line with Holder and Coleman's (2009) findings that

marital status has been weakly associated with adolescents' happiness. It is difficult to argue that parents' divorce has a negative impact on happiness in all cases. Like noted earlier there is a difference between how much conflict children experience in their families and that makes a difference. According to Amato (1995), in high-conflict families, children have higher levels of well-being as young adults if their parents divorced than if they stayed together. This is something that could be identified better to get clearer results by analyzing low-conflict and high-conflict families and through clearer definitions of these parameters. The third hypothesis that parents' education has a positive correlation with adolescents' happiness was also confirmed since the mean happiness score of the adolescents was higher as both their mothers' and fathers' education level was higher. The only exception was that those who had parents who were still in university were less happy than those who had parents with a university degree or a lower degree. A possible explanation for this would be that parents who have started university but not finished their degree are in a more stressful situation and may not be able to spend as much time with their adolescents as those who have already finished their degree. It is also possible that parents who have not finished their degree have more financial difficulties as the student loans are not that great. Nevertheless, there was a significant positive correlation between both mothers' and fathers' education with happiness which supports the third hypothesis. Chen (2012) noted about how education can enhance happiness, however in his research the participants were adults and the subject were their own educational level but not that of their parents.

The fourth hypothesis, that financial difficulties have a negative correlation with adolescents' happiness was supported. The findings show that adolescents' perception of their parents' financial difficulties correlates with their own perceived happiness, the more financial difficulties the less happiness. Despite the fact that the relation between income and happiness on a individuals level, is not a strong one (Argyle, 2001), financial difficulties have

been found to have a negative correlation with happiness (Gudmundsdottir, 2011) which is also the case in these findings.

The fifth hypothesis that being religious has a positive correlation with adolescents' happiness was also confirmed as the more religious the adolescents perceived themselves, the higher was their happiness score. This is in harmony with Holder and Coleman (2010) study which states that religion has been associated with happiness and studies show that spiritual and religion is strongly linked to happiness (Holder & Coleman, 2010). The sixth hypothesis was also confirmed as the more loneliness the adolescents experienced the less their reported happiness. The relation between loneliness and happiness was strongest of all the relations measured in this study,  $r = .44$ . When all the factors were tested together in a stepwise linear regression, the loneliness alone accounted for 18% of the happiness variance. Since loneliness reflects a lack of social relationships, these findings are in line with how important social relationships are for happiness (Argyle, 2001; Diener and Seligman, 2002; Gudmundsdottir, 2007; Holder & Coleman, 2009). The seventh hypothesis that time spent with parents is positively correlated with adolescents' happiness was also confirmed. However, there is a limit to this. Although spending time with parents is generally positive, the results also indicate that adolescents who *always* spend time with their parents on weekdays and weekends had lower happiness score than those who spent time often but not all the time with their parents. This probably reflects the importance of having friends at your own age and being a part of a peer group. The social status of adolescents who spent all their free time with parents might not be good if the reason is that they have few or no friends. According to the literature, social relationships are one of the most important predictors of happiness (Argyle, 2001; Holder & Coleman, 2009; Diener and Seligman, 2002; Gudmundsdottir, 2007). Adolescents who spend all their time with their family may not have good relationships with individuals in their own peer group and therefore more likely to be

unhappier. This does not mean that spending time with parents is negative; in fact those adolescents who spent very little time with their parents were unhappier than those who spent the most time with their parents. This is also according to earlier research which showed beneficial effect of time spent with parents on children's well-being (Kristjánsson et al., 2006) and that spending time with parents has a positive effect on adolescence's life (Davis-Kean, 2005).

The eighth and the last hypothesis that physical health has a positive correlation with adolescents' happiness were also supported as a strong positive correlation was found between physical health and happiness. This is in line with earlier findings on the adult population both in Iceland (Gudmundsdottir, 2007) and in other countries (Siahpush, et al., 2008). Further literature demonstrates that happier people report better physical health, Argyle (1987, 1997) and Siahpush, et al. (2008) proposed that health is closely linked with happiness. The results of the present study demonstrate that this also applies to adolescents.

When the independent variables were put into a stepwise regression to find out how much of the happiness variance could be explained by these selected predictors, the first model with only one predictor was with loneliness which explained 15% of the happiness variance. As mentioned before, loneliness can reflect a lack of social relationships, therefore, these findings support earlier findings on the importance of social relationships for happiness.

When physical health was added to the model, another four percent was explained and time spent with parents did add 1% after that. Financial difficulties did add less than 1% and in the end, being religious added the last percent which gave a model which explained 25% of the happiness variance. Other variables did not explain more of the happiness variance when these other variables mentioned above, were taken into account.

To be able to enhance adolescents' well-being it is very important to continue the research of happiness and well-being in all age groups and acknowledge these topics as important for

psychology and the society as a whole. Determinants of happiness is an interesting research topic which deserve more attention in the future which will hopefully provide interesting findings for people to enhance their happiness and well-being. These results demonstrate that the determinants of adolescents' happiness are not that different from adults' determinants of happiness even though their situation is different, for example, there is no study which measures how much time adults spend with their parents but this is an issue of family circumstances and social relationships. Spending time with people close to you may contribute to happiness or be a reflection of a happy life.

In future studies it would be interesting to explore in more detail the effects of high-conflict versus low-conflict relationships in divorced and non-divorced families. Furthermore, it would provide interesting insights to study the correlations between adolescents' and their parents' ratings on variables associated with happiness.

The present study is limited in terms of capacity for drawing causal inferences. Thus, it cannot provide any simple answers as to what causes adolescents' happiness. However, the results do provide very important information on which factors are associated with young individuals' perceived happiness and well-being. With further research on adolescents' happiness more information can be gathered on the actual effects on their happiness which in turn can provide tools for intervention and preventative measures on a policy basis. As earlier research has indicated (Costa et al., 1985) a young adolescent's personality is not fully developed and, therefore, may be more prone to responding to intervention than older individuals in terms of procedures for increasing happiness in a particular population.

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## Appendix A

**Ungt Fólk 2009.****9. og 10. bekkur****Könnun á högum og líðan****grunnskólanema í****9. og 10. bekk****- Trúnaðarmál****Til nemenda**

Í þessu hefti eru nokkrar spurningar sem þú ert beðin(n) að svara. Við vonum að þú svarir þeim af samviskusemi því **svör þín skipta miklu máli**. Þetta er ekki próf. Það eina sem skiptir máli er að þú segir **satt og rétt frá**. Við flestum spurningunum eru nokkrir svarmöguleikar. Stundum þarf að velja einn og stundum má velja fleiri eins og fram kemur í leiðbeiningum við hverja

spurningu. Settu kross í reitinn við það svar sem þú hefur valið ☐. Ef þér finnst enginn svarmöguleiki í einhverri spurningu eiga nákvæmlega við um þig merktu þá við þann svarmöguleika sem þér finnst komast næst. Vinsamlega notaðu penna. Ef þú skiptir um skoðun og vilt breyta svari við einhverri spurningu er best að fylla reitinn alveg út þannig að ekkert hvítt sjáist ☐. Þannig útfylltur reitur táknar „ógilt“. Á fáeinum stöðum eru ekki gefin svör og þar ertu beðin(n) að skrifa þitt eigið svar. Þar þarftu að skrifa mjög greinilega og helst nota prentstafi. Þú ræður því hvort þú svarar einstökum spurningum en við biðjum þig að svara þeim öllum eftir bestu getu. Svör þín eru **trúnaðarmál**, það er að segja, enginn sem þekkir þig, hvorki kennarar þínir né foreldrar, kunningjar eða vinir, munu nokkurn tíma fá að sjá svör þín eða fá að vita hvernig þú svaraðir. Gættu þess því að skrifa **hvorki nafn þitt né kennitölu** á spurningalistann eða umslagið sem honum fylgir. Þegar þú hefur lokið við að svara öllum spurningunum, settu þá listann í umslagið, límdu vel fyrir og skilaðu til kennara.

Ef þú hefur einhverjar spurningar um spurningalistann, lokaðu þá listanum þínum og réttu upp hönd. Starfsmaður eða kennari kemur þá með útfyllt eintak af spurningalistanum til að aðstoða þig án þess að sjá

þín svör.

Með kærri þökk fyrir þátttökuna, **Starfsfólk Rannsóknna & greiningar**

## Appendix B

### 1. Ert þú strákur eða stelpa?

☐ Strákur ☐ Stelpa

### 5. Hver er menntun móður þinnar? (Ef þú ert að mestu alin/n upp hjá fósturmóður, svarar þú fyrir hana) (Merktu aðeins í EINN reit)

- ☐ Lauk grunnskólaprófi eða minna
- ☐ Hóf framhaldsskólanám í menntaskóla eða iðnskóla
- ☐ Lauk framhaldsskóla í menntaskóla eða iðnskóla
- ☐ Hóf háskólanám
- ☐ Lauk háskólanámi
- ☐ Veit ekki, eða á ekki við

### 6. Hver er menntun föður þíns? (Ef þú ert að mestu alin/n upp hjá fósturföður, svarar þú fyrir hann) (Merktu aðeins í EINN reit)

- ☐ Lauk grunnskólaprófi eða minna
- ☐ Hóf framhaldsskólanám í menntaskóla eða iðnskóla
- ☐ Lauk framhaldsskóla í menntaskóla eða iðnskóla
- ☐ Hóf háskólanám
- ☐ Lauk háskólanámi
- ☐ Veit ekki, eða á ekki við

### 27. Hversu vel eiga eftirfarandi fullyrðingar við um þig? (Merktu í EINN reit í hverjum lið)

a) Ég er með foreldri/foreldrum utan skólatíma á virkum dögum

Nær aldei ☐ Sjaldan ☐ Stundum ☐ Oft ☐ Nær alltaf ☐

b) Ég er með foreldri/foreldrum um helgar

Nær aldei ☐ Sjaldan ☐ Stundum ☐ Oft ☐ Nær alltaf ☐

### 41. Hversu vel eiga eftirfarandi fullyrðingar við um þig?

Ég er hamingjusöm/hamingjusamur

Lýsir mér mjög vel ☐ Lýsir mér nokkuð vel ☐ Lýsir ekki nógu vel ☐ Lýsir mér alls ekki ☐

**42. Hversu oft varðst þú var/vör við eftirfarandi vanlíðan eða óþægindi síðastliðna viku?**

Þér fannst þú einmana

Nær aldrei ☐ Sjaldan ☐ Stundum ☐ Oft ☐**45. Hefur eitthvað af eftirfarandi komið fyrir þig?**

Foreldrar þínir skilið eða slitið sambúð

Nei ☐ Já ☐**58. Hversu góð er líkamleg heilsa þín?**Mjög góð ☐ góð ☐ sæmileg ☐ slæm ☐**60. Hversu vel eiga eftirfarandi fullyrðingar við um þig?**

Ég trúi á Guð

Á mjög illa við mig ☐ Á frekar illa við mig ☐ Á frekar vel við mig ☐ Á mjög vel við mig ☐