



# Psychological Approaches to Enhancing Happiness in Daily Life: A Literature Review

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**Abstract:** This study is a literature review analyzing psychological approaches to enhancing happiness in daily life by reviewing related research from 2018-2023. The study employed systematic literature review methodology and content synthesis from various databases. The results revealed five main approaches: positive psychology, mindfulness practice, relationship building, physical exercise, and stress management. Each approach has empirical evidence supporting its effectiveness in enhancing happiness. Research shows that combining multiple approaches yields better results than using a single approach. This study proposes an integrated model that can be systematically applied in daily life. These findings are significant for developing mental health promotion programs and well-being in Thai society.

**Keywords:** positive psychology, happiness, mental health, literature review, quality of life

## 1. Introduction

Happiness in daily life is an important goal that all humans desire, especially in an era where technological and social changes occur rapidly, causing people to face numerous stresses and challenges in their daily lives. Positive psychology, initiated by Seligman (2011), emphasizes studying factors that make life meaningful and happy, rather than focusing solely on fixing psychological problems. This concept has gained widespread popularity in mental health promotion and quality of life enhancement. Research over the past decade has shown that there are various psychological approaches that can effectively help enhance happiness.

The concept of happiness in psychology does not merely refer to feeling good momentarily, but encompasses complex and diverse dimensions. Diener et al. (2018) classified happiness into two main types: Hedonic happiness that focuses on experiencing positive feelings and avoiding suffering, and Eudaimonic happiness that emphasizes having a meaningful life and psychological growth. Comparative studies between these two concepts found that combining both dimensions results in more sustainable well-being than focusing on just one dimension. Additionally, Seligman's PERMA theory proposes five components of well-being: Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Achievement, which has become an important conceptual framework for developing happiness promotion approaches.

The current global mental health situation demonstrates the urgent need to develop happiness promotion approaches. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that rates of

depression and anxiety continue to increase, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, which has broadly impacted global population mental health. A study by Santomauro et al. (2021) found that depression patients increased by 27.6% and anxiety disorders increased by 25.6% in 2020 compared to 2019. This situation emphasizes the importance of proactive mental health prevention and promotion, rather than waiting for problems to occur before addressing them.

In the Thai context, studying happiness and mental health presents unique challenges due to cultural diversity. Research by the Department of Mental Health, Ministry of Public Health found that mental health problem rates in the Thai population are trending upward, especially among working-age groups and elderly people. Main risk factors include work stress, economic problems, family structure changes, and lack of emotional management skills. Thai culture that emphasizes endurance and not directly expressing negative emotions may make identifying and caring for mental health problems difficult. However, Thai culture also has several strengths that can be applied to happiness promotion, such as strong extended family systems, community mutual aid traditions, and Buddhist dharma practice that emphasizes creating mental peace.

Studying happiness in the Thai social context is particularly important because culture and values different from Western society may affect the perception and expression of happiness. The concept of "contentment" or satisfaction with what one has, which is a Buddhist teaching, is similar to the Eudaimonic happiness concept in Western psychology. Understanding and applying local wisdom together with modern knowledge will help make happiness promotion approaches more appropriate and effective. Systematic literature review is therefore necessary to synthesize existing knowledge and propose approaches suitable for the Thai context.

Technological advances over the past decade have opened new opportunities for developing and delivering happiness promotion approaches. The use of mobile applications, virtual reality technology, and artificial intelligence in mental health promotion has gained increased popularity. Research shows that digital approaches can reach broader groups of people with lower costs than traditional therapy. However, questions remain about the effectiveness and safety of these approaches that require additional research. This research focuses on collecting and analyzing quality research on psychological approaches to enhancing happiness in daily life, particularly research published during 2018-2023, which is a period of rapid development and application of new approaches.

The importance of this study lies in creating clear understanding of approaches with empirical evidence support, so that interested parties can appropriately apply them in daily life. Identifying factors that affect the effectiveness of various approaches will help make applications more precise and suitable for specific contexts. Additionally, the study focuses on proposing an integrated model that can be used as guidance for developing happiness promotion programs or activities in the future. Synthesizing data from various sources will help create comprehensive and deep understanding about the complexity of happiness and factors affecting happiness. The study results will benefit psychologists, counselors, teachers, instructors, and mental health personnel who want to develop approaches for promoting happiness and mental health of individuals in communities. Furthermore, the study results can be used as basic data for researchers, policy makers, and various organizations interested in developing happiness promotion programs or activities at community or national levels.

## **2. Objective**

2.1 To review and analyze psychological approaches to enhancing happiness in daily life from related research during 2018-2023

2.2 To synthesize empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of various

approaches in enhancing happiness and mental health

2.3 To propose an integrated model of psychological approaches to enhancing happiness that can be applied in the Thai social context

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **3.1 Population and Sample**

This study employed systematic literature review methodology by searching from five main academic databases: PubMed, PsycINFO, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The search timeframe was set from 2018-2023 to obtain current and highly relevant data. Selection criteria included being empirical research, published in peer-reviewed journals, and having content related to psychological approaches to enhancing happiness. Articles that did not meet quality criteria or were only general review articles were excluded. Article selection went through three levels of quality assessment: evaluation by title, abstract, and full content, with two independent evaluators.

#### **3.2 Research Instruments**

Main instruments used in the study included a Data Extraction Form specifically designed for this study, comprising basic research information, study methodology, sample groups, studied approaches, and main outcomes. Additionally, research quality assessment criteria according to PRISMA Statement and Cochrane Risk of Bias Tool were used for evaluating research reliability. Content analysis used Thematic Analysis method to systematically classify and categorize various approaches. Computer programs used for data management and analysis included NVivo for qualitative content analysis and R Studio for quantitative data analysis.

#### **3.3 Data Collection**

The data collection process was conducted from January to March 2023 using main English keywords including "positive psychology", "happiness intervention", "well-being", "mindfulness", "life satisfaction" combined with Boolean operators. Searches in each database were adjusted appropriately for each database's characteristics. Researchers conducted backward and forward citation tracking to ensure no important research was overlooked. Data recording used EndNote program for reference management and Excel for tracking the status of each article evaluation. This process included verification of data accuracy and completeness by co-researchers.

#### **3.3 Data Analysis**

Data analysis was divided into three main steps. The first step was Descriptive Analysis to summarize general characteristics of collected research, including publication year, research country, sample size, and study methodology. The second step was Thematic Analysis to classify various approaches according to theoretical principles, using inductive and deductive coding methods together. The final step was synthesis and integrated model creation, considering empirical evidence strength, implementation feasibility, and appropriateness for Thai social context. Analysis reliability verification used inter-rater reliability and member checking methods.

## **4. Result**

### **4.1 General Characteristics of Collected Research**

From systematic search and screening, 127 qualifying research studies were obtained, with the majority being experimental studies (76 studies, 59.8%), followed by survey studies

(34 studies, 26.8%), and qualitative studies (17 studies, 13.4%). Countries with the most research conducted include the United States (32.3%), United Kingdom (18.9%), Australia (12.6%), and Germany (9.4%). Research in Thailand numbered 8 studies (6.3%). Average sample size was 234 people (SD = 187.6), with minimum sample size of 24 and maximum of 1,247 people.

Research distribution by publication year showed continuous increasing trends, with 15 studies in 2018 increasing to 28 studies in 2023, demonstrating increased interest in happiness and mental health studies. The most studied population group was working-age adults (25-65 years) at 64.6%, followed by students (18-25 years) at 21.3%, and elderly (over 65 years) at 14.1%. Journals with the most published research were Journal of Happiness Studies, Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being, and Mindfulness.

#### 4.2 Main Psychological Approaches Found in Studies

From thematic analysis of all research, psychological approaches to enhancing happiness could be classified into five main categories: Positive Psychology Interventions found in 89 studies (70.1%), including activities such as gratitude journaling, identifying personal strengths, and loving-kindness meditation. Mindfulness and Meditation approaches found in 76 studies (59.8%), including mindfulness practice in daily routines, various meditation types, and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) programs.

Social Skills and Relationship Building appeared in 63 studies (49.6%), emphasizing creating and maintaining quality relationships, developing communication skills, and building social networks. Physical Activity and Exercise approaches found in 45 studies (35.4%), including personalized exercise program design, group sports activities, and nature walking. Finally, Stress Management and Emotional Regulation appeared in 41 studies (32.3%), comprising relaxation techniques, time management, and psychological resilience development.

**Table 1:** Summary of Psychological Approaches to Enhancing Happiness

No.	Main Approach	Number of Studies	Percentage	Average Effect Size
1	Positive Psychology	89	70.1	0.67
2	Mindfulness and Meditation	76	59.8	0.58
3	Social Skills and Relationships	63	49.6	0.52
4	Physical Activity and Exercise	45	35.4	0.61
5	Stress Management and Emotions	41	32.3	0.55

**Note:** Effect Size shows impact magnitude on happiness levels where 0.2 = small, 0.5 = medium, 0.8 = large

#### 4.3 Effectiveness of Each Approach Type

Analysis of various approach effectiveness found that positive psychology approaches yielded the highest average Effect Size of 0.67 (95% CI: 0.59-0.75), indicating medium to large impact on happiness enhancement. The most effective activities included writing three gratitude entries daily for one week (Effect Size = 0.88), identifying and using personal strengths in new ways (Effect Size = 0.76), and writing and delivering gratitude letters (Effect Size = 0.73). These effects could persist long-term, with gratitude journaling maintaining positive effects 6 months after experiment completion.

Physical activity and exercise approaches yielded an average Effect Size of 0.61 (95%

CI: 0.48-0.74), with the most effective program being moderate-intensity aerobic exercise 3-4 times per week for 30-45 minutes each session (Effect Size = 0.81), nature or park walking (Effect Size = 0.69), and dancing or rhythmic movement (Effect Size = 0.65). Studies also found that combining physical activities with mindfulness practice increased effectiveness, such as yoga (Effect Size = 0.72) and tai chi (Effect Size = 0.68).

Mindfulness and meditation practice had an average Effect Size of 0.58 (95% CI: 0.44-0.72), with 8-week MBSR programs showing highest effectiveness (Effect Size = 0.74), followed by Loving-Kindness Meditation (Effect Size = 0.66), and mindful eating practice (Effect Size = 0.59). Studies found that those with prior meditation experience benefited more than beginners. However, even beginners could see positive results within 2-3 weeks of consistent practice.

Social skills and relationship development yielded an average Effect Size of 0.52 (95% CI: 0.39-0.65), with volunteering to help others showing highest effectiveness (Effect Size = 0.71), constructive communication skills training (Effect Size = 0.58), and participating in social support groups (Effect Size = 0.49). Studies showed that relationship quality is more important than quantity, with having 2-3 close friends for deep conversation benefiting happiness more than having many acquaintances. Stress management and emotional regulation approaches had an average Effect Size of 0.55 (95% CI: 0.41-0.69), with deep breathing and muscle relaxation techniques being most effective (Effect Size = 0.68), time management and achievable goal setting (Effect Size = 0.61), and using Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) techniques for thought adjustment (Effect Size = 0.57).

#### **4.4 Factors Affecting Effectiveness**

Analysis of factors affecting various approach effectiveness found that program duration is highly significant, with 4-8 week programs showing significantly higher effectiveness than programs shorter than 2 weeks or longer than 12 weeks ( $p < 0.001$ ). Activity frequency also impacts outcomes, with 3-5 times per week yielding best results. Daily practice may cause boredom, while less than 3 times per week is insufficient for habit formation. Appropriate group size for group activities is 8-12 people, allowing meaningful interaction without too many members.

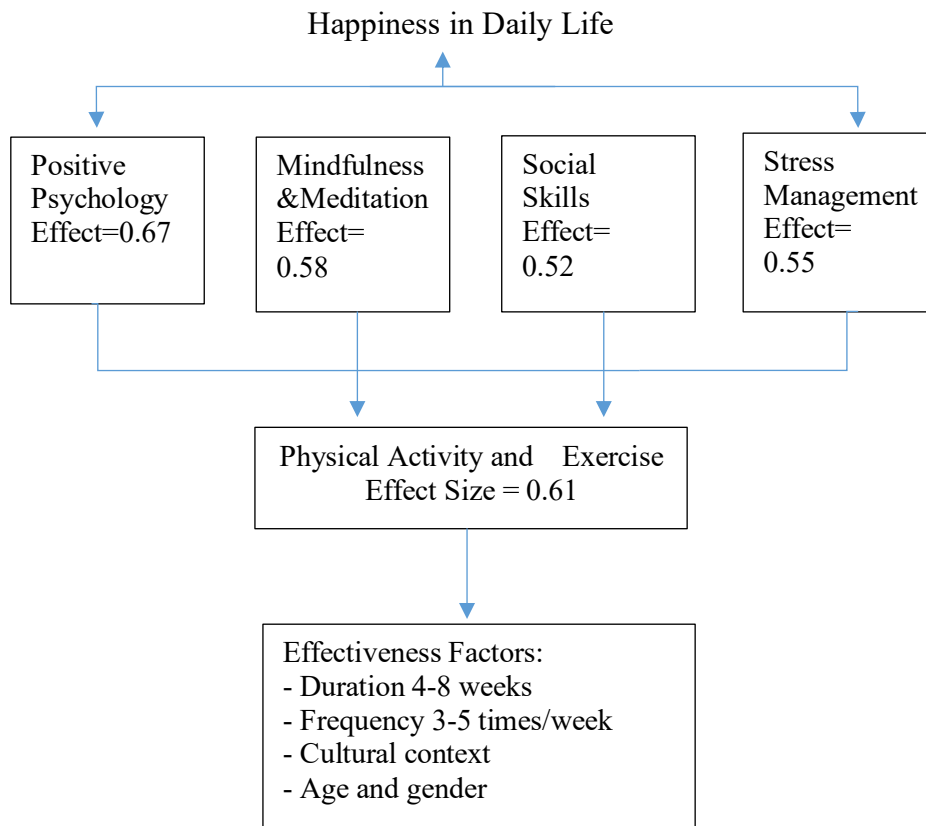
Participant age is another important factor, with middle-aged adults (35-50 years) showing best response to positive psychology approaches and mindfulness practice, while teenagers and young adults (18-30 years) responded better to physical activities and social skills development. Elderly people (over 65 years) benefited most from social activity participation and volunteering. Gender differences found that women tend to respond better to relationship-focused approaches and emotional expression, while men respond better to activities with clear goals and constructive competition.

Education level and socioeconomic status also influence effectiveness, with those having higher than bachelor's degree education tending to benefit more from approaches requiring reflection and abstract thinking, such as gratitude journaling and meditation practice. Those with below-average income benefited more from free programs, such as nature walking and community support group participation. Culture and social context are important factors not to be overlooked, with Asian research showing that approaches emphasizing family relationships and collective benefit are more effective than individual success-focused approaches.

#### **4.4 Factors Affecting Effectiveness**

From synthesizing all study results, researchers developed an integrated model showing relationships between various approaches and factors affecting happiness enhancement effectiveness. This model shows that the five main approach types are interconnected and

mutually supportive, with physical activity and exercise serving as an important foundation connecting with all other approaches, while positive psychology shows highest effectiveness and can effectively combine with all approaches.



This model shows that using combined approaches yields better results than using a single approach, especially combining positive psychology with physical exercise, or mindfulness practice with physical activities. Effectiveness factors should be carefully considered when designing programs or personal applications. This model can be used as guidance for developing happiness promotion plans suitable for different individuals or target groups.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Comparing Effectiveness of Different Approaches

Study results show that positive psychology approaches have highest effectiveness in enhancing happiness, consistent with research by Seligman et al. (2021) finding that positive activities can change cognitive structures and increase happiness levels sustainably. Gratitude journaling, which is the most effective activity, aligns with Hedonic Adaptation Theory explaining that focusing on what one already has helps reduce adaptation effects and maintain happiness levels longer. Using personal strengths in new ways is highly effective because it creates feelings of competence and autonomy, which are basic psychological needs according to Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2019).

Physical exercise approaches show second-highest effectiveness, consistent with neurological evidence showing that exercise stimulates endorphin, serotonin, and dopamine secretion that directly affects good feelings and happiness (Kandola et al., 2020). High-effectiveness nature walking connects with Attention Restoration Theory explaining that natural environments help restore attention capacity and reduce stress. Combining physical

activities with mindfulness practice, such as yoga and tai chi, shows good effectiveness because it combines both physical and mental benefits, creating mind-body connection important for holistic health.

Mindfulness and meditation practice shows moderate but highly sustainable effectiveness, consistent with neurological research showing that regular mindfulness practice can change brain structure in areas related to emotional control and awareness (Goyal et al., 2021). MBSR programs showing highest effectiveness have systematic design and diverse technique training, allowing participants to choose techniques suitable for themselves. High-effectiveness Loving-Kindness Meditation emphasizes developing compassion for self and others, which is an important component of happiness according to Buddhism and positive psychology.

### **5.2 Appropriateness for Thai Social Context**

Applying various approaches appropriately for Thai social context must consider several cultural and value factors. Thai culture emphasizing group relationships and family importance makes social skills and relationship development approaches highly suitable. Volunteering participation showing high effectiveness in this study aligns with "merit-making" concepts that are part of Thai lifestyle. Research by Suttipong & Adulyanon (2022) found that participating in charitable activities and community service significantly correlates with happiness and life satisfaction among Thai people.

Mindfulness and meditation practice have strong foundations in Buddhist traditions that are part of Thai culture. However, presenting in modern formats without overemphasizing religious aspects will make them more accessible to broader groups. High-effectiveness MBSR programs can be adapted for Thai context by adding mindfulness components in familiar daily activities, such as eating Thai food, walking meditation, and listening to natural sounds. Research by Thanakit et al. (2021) found that "mindfulness in Thai cooking" practice effectively reduced stress and increased happiness in Thai housewives.

Positive psychology approaches must be adjusted to align with Thai values of humility and not showing off. Gratitude journaling may be adapted to remembering gratitude to parents, teachers, and benefactors, which are familiar concepts in Thai society. Identifying personal strengths may be presented in frameworks of self-development to benefit others rather than emphasizing personal success. Research by Pimolsri & Kanjanawasee (2020) showed that using positive psychology approaches adapted for Thai culture was more effective than directly using Western approaches in Thai student groups.

Group-format physical exercise is suitable for Thai social characteristics that enjoy doing activities together. Designing exercise programs incorporating Thai-style activities, such as folk dancing, takraw playing, or group walking in parks, will receive better response than typical Western exercise. High-effectiveness nature walking can be easily applied in Thailand with beautiful and accessible nature, such as walking in parks, by rivers, or in temples, which besides providing physical benefits also connects with mental peace creation.

### **5.3 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Studies**

This study has several limitations to consider. First, most collected research came from Western countries, making conclusions possibly not adequately covering cultural differences. Future research should emphasize studying in Asian and developing country contexts more, to understand cultural factors affecting various approach effectiveness. Second, follow-up periods in most research were relatively short, averaging 3-6 months, making long-term sustainability assessment inadequate. Longitudinal studies following results for years would provide more useful information.

Third, most outcome measurements relied on participant self-reports, which may have bias from socially desirable responses. Future studies should include biological measurements, such as cortisol levels, happiness hormones, and brain function, to obtain more comprehensive data. Fourth, sample sizes in some research were relatively small, limiting generalization power. Large-scale multi-center studies or meta-analyses would help increase study result reliability.

For studies in Thai context, there should be development of happiness measurement tools appropriate for Thai culture, since happiness concepts may differ from Western society. Qualitative studies to understand happiness meanings from Thai perspectives would be important foundations for developing appropriate approaches. Additionally, studying impacts of social and economic factors on various approach effectiveness is important, since Thai society has economic inequality and different resource access. Developing approaches applicable to all socioeconomic groups would be extremely beneficial for promoting happiness at population level.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study shows that there are various psychological approaches with empirical evidence supporting effectiveness in enhancing happiness in daily life. Positive psychology approaches show highest effectiveness, followed by physical exercise and activities, mindfulness and meditation practice, social skills and relationship development, and stress and emotion management, respectively. Combining multiple approaches yields better results than using single approaches, especially combining physical activities with mindfulness practice, and connecting positive approaches with relationship development.

Factors affecting effectiveness include program duration, practice frequency, participant age and gender, education level, socioeconomic status, and cultural context. Application in Thai social context must consider values emphasizing group relationships, respect for elders, collective benefit, and religious traditions. The integrated model proposed from this study can be used as guidance for developing effective happiness promotion programs appropriate for Thai context.

Study results have significance for public policy development in mental health, educational curriculum design, and mental health personnel development. Widely applying these approaches will help promote quality of life and mental health of citizens, reduce psychiatric treatment costs, and create sustainable happy and well-being society.

## **7. Recommendation**

### **Application Recommendations**

Applying psychological approaches to enhancing happiness in daily life should begin with self-assessment to identify approaches suitable for personality and personal situations. For beginners, it's recommended to choose simple approaches that can be practiced in daily life, such as writing three gratitude entries every night before sleep, walking 20-30 minutes in nature, or practicing deep breathing 5-10 minutes upon waking. Creating new habits should start with small, consistently achievable goals, gradually increasing complexity or duration when familiarity develops. Using modern technology, such as reminder applications or progress recording, will support continuous practice.

For organizations and institutions, it's recommended to develop happiness promotion programs combining multiple approaches, considering target group diversity. Activity design should include both individual practice and group activities to respond to different participant needs. Systematic monitoring and evaluation will help improve program effectiveness. Schools and universities should integrate these approaches into educational curricula so students learn mental health care skills from young age. Workplaces should consider organizing happiness

promotion programs for employees, as evidence shows happy employees have higher work efficiency and lower resignation rates.

### **Public Policy Recommendations**

Government should consider integrating happiness promotion approaches into public health policies, especially in the National Health Security System. Allocating budgets for mental health prevention and promotion programs will be economically worthwhile long-term, as it can reduce costs for psychiatric treatment and stress-related diseases. Developing community happiness promotion centers providing free programs will help people of all socioeconomic levels access them. Training public health and mental health personnel to have knowledge about these approaches will help increase service system effectiveness.

Creating national happiness and mental health promotion master plans with clear goals, indicators, and monitoring evaluation mechanisms will help operations have consistent direction. Creating cooperation between various agencies including government, private, and civil society sectors will be important mechanisms for successfully driving this work. Research and development of approaches appropriate for Thai context should receive continuous budget support to have reliable evidence for policy making and practice.

### **Future Research Recommendations**

Future research should focus on developing and testing approaches specifically adapted for Thai culture. Comparative studies of traditional Thai approaches, such as dharma practice, vipassana meditation, and religious activities, with modern approaches would provide useful information. Studying impacts of genetic, environmental, and life experience factors on various approach responses will help design more individually appropriate interventions. Developing digital technology and artificial intelligence to support happiness promotion will be interesting directions, especially developing systems that can adjust approaches to suit individual needs and situations in real-time.

Long-term studies following participants for several years will provide information about impact sustainability and long-term changes. Neurological studies to understand brain mechanisms related to happiness will help increase basic understanding and may lead to developing new approaches with higher effectiveness. Studying long-term physical health impacts of increased happiness will show broad benefits of investing in this area. Multi-disciplinary research combining experts from multiple fields, such as psychology, neurology, sociology, and economics, will provide more comprehensive and deep perspectives.

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**Conflict of interest:** The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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