

# HAPPINESS ACROSS THE LIFESPAN: A CRITIQUE OF MEASUREMENT AND COMPARISON NEGLECTING AGE-SPECIFIC DEFINITIONS

Nasipat CHANCHAIPITIPHAT<sup>1</sup>, Parinya SIRIATTAKUL<sup>1</sup> and Roy MARZO<sup>2</sup>

1 Faculty of Political Science, North Bangkok University, Thailand;  
681500089@northbkk.ac.th (N. C.); siriattakul@hotmail.com (P. S.)

2 Faculty of Humanities and Health Sciences, Curtin University Malaysia, Malaysia;  
roy.marzo@curtin.edu.my

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## ABSTRACT

This paper synthesizes 21st-century empirical literature to examine the definitions, components, and characteristics of happiness as it evolves across the lifespan, critically analyzing measurement practices that neglect these fundamental age-specific nuances. Findings reveal that happiness is not a monolithic concept, but a dynamic construct that evolves with age: in childhood, happiness is predominantly linked to immediate positive affect, such as play and excitement. In adulthood, happiness becomes more complex, integrating affect, behavior, and cognition, often tied to the attainment of goals, the pursuit of meaning in life, and the formation of valuable relationships. For the elderly, happiness usually centers on acceptance, maintaining meaningful connections, and inner peace. A key critique highlights that universal happiness measurement tools, unadapted to these age-specific definitions, yield misleading conclusions and ineffective policies. Researchers have widely acknowledged the limitations of happiness metrics, including complexities such as the income-happiness paradox and the profound influence of cultural context on perceptions of well-being. This paper thus advocates for nuanced, age-specific research methodologies to foster a deeper, more accurate understanding of happiness, thereby enabling the development of truly effective and sustainable well-being policies.

**Keywords:** Happiness, Age Stages, Happiness Measurement, Social Context, Public Policy

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