

Predicting Happiness in College Students through Occupational Performance

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Introduction: Happiness is a state of well-being characterized by "the frequent experience of positive emotions over time" (Lyubomirsky, 2005, p. 806). People all over the world pursue happiness in their everyday activities. Lyubomirsky's model of happiness hypothesizes 40% of one's happiness is due to intentional activities, which include behavioral, cognitive, and volitional activities. Kielhofner (2008) wrote "While humans are all energized by a universal drive toward action, they want to do the things that they value, feel competent to do, and find satisfying". Do the things that people choose to do influence their happiness?

Objective: The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between occupational performance and happiness, and to predict happiness among college students through their occupational performance.

Method: 722 second through fourth year students at a central New York college completed an online survey to rate their happiness, occupational performance, and coping on a 7-point scale. Happiness was evaluated with Lyubomirsky's Subjective Happiness Scale (2005). Occupational performance was represented by the mean of students' ratings of competence, importance, satisfaction, and effort in the occupational performance areas typically engaged in by college students (including academic, social, extracurricular and leisure, employment, and volunteer activities). Coping represented the mean of each student's rating of their ability to cope with stress in occupational performance areas.

The survey results were analyzed using Pearson correlations and hierarchical multiple regression analyses.

Results: Social occupational performance, the ability to cope with occupational stress, and academic occupational performance were the most important predictors of happiness. Together, these variables predicted 39.8% of the variance in students' ratings of happiness.

Conclusions: The findings of this study are consistent with Lyubomirsky's view of the contribution of intentional activities (i.e. occupation) to an individual's happiness. The findings also lend validity to Kielhofner's Model of Human Occupation, particularly with respect to his discussion of volition and occupational adaptation.

Contribution to occupational therapy: This study contributes to theory development related to the importance of human occupation for personal well-being. If therapists can identify and influence occupational performance in their clients' valued life roles, they may also influence clients' happiness.