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24-ICIT: Paper # 4-4K

6-8 Feb 2025 hosted by the **Gratia Christian College (GCC)**

At the Regal Riverside Hotel, Shatin, HKSAR, China (www1.gcc.edu.hk/ro/24-ICIT)

Studies about Happiness Index 2018-2024:

The Insights from the literature & Hong Kong Data

Prof. Simon C. LAM



PhD, RN, FAAN -- Associate Dean and Professor, School of Nursing; Centre Director of Integrative Health Centre, Tung Wah College simonlam@twc.edu.hk

- ◆ *He has over 18 years of teaching experience as an academic in both UGC and self-financing tertiary institutions in Hong Kong. He also serves as Associate Editor of BMC Infectious Diseases, Frontiers in Public Health, Frontiers in Medicine, Editorial Broad Member of Korean Journal of Adult Nursing, Reviewer for many international journals (e.g., The BMJ, JAMA Network Open, BMC Medicine, IJNS and Environmental Science and Technology Letters).*
- ◆ *Before joining Tung Wah College in 2021, Professor Lam was the Deputy Director of the Squina Int. Centre for Infection Control, and Assistant Professor at the HKPolyU. He left the HKMU in 2018 as the position Associate Professor. Professor Lam has published over 100 refereed articles and 100 conference proceedings on the field of infection control, psychometric testing and elderly care.*

ICIT + Prof. Simon C. Lam

6-8/2/2025 hosted by the GCC, Paper # 4-4K



東華學院
馬錦燦紀念大樓



東華學院
TUNG WAH COLLEGE

CONTENT

Origins of happiness (The literature)
Contributing factors to happiness/wellbeing (The literature)
General happiness index in Hong Kong (整體開心指數) + Child happiness index
Summary: Comparison

Tips

Acknowledgement: Data from Wofoo Social Enterprise, Prof. Dennis Wong (CityU), & Prof. Lok Sang Ho (LU)
Conflict of interest: Nil

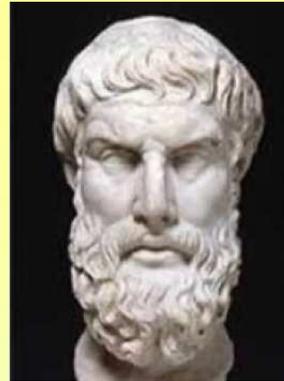


.1 Origins of Happiness

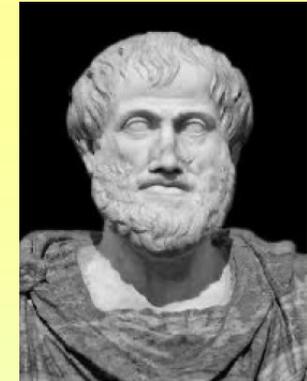
The history of happiness (<https://hbr.org/2012/01/the-history-of-happiness>)

- ▶ 1776: U.S. Declaration of Independence declares that all men have a right to “the pursuit of happiness.”
 - 1926: The song “Happy Birthday” is composed.
 - 1977: McDonald’s introduces the Happy Meal.
- ▶ Some experts argue that happiness is an **inborn trait**, so urging a person to become happier is like insisting she become taller.

.2 Two major philosophical thoughts



Epicurus



Aristotle

Hedonic Wellbeing

Eudaimonic Wellbeing

Subjective Wellbeing (SWB)

Psychological Wellbeing (PWB)

Happiness

Satisfaction with Life

Quality of Life

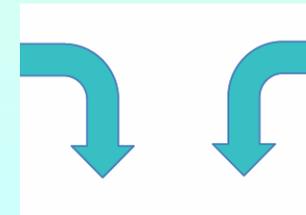
Negative Affect & Positive Affect

Meaning in life

Purpose

Flourishing

Personal growth



WELLBEING

Bartels & Boomsma, 2009; Baselmans & Bartels, 2018;
Bartels, 2015; Lomas, Bartels, et al., 2022

MAPPING GLOBAL

Happiness Levels

IN 2024

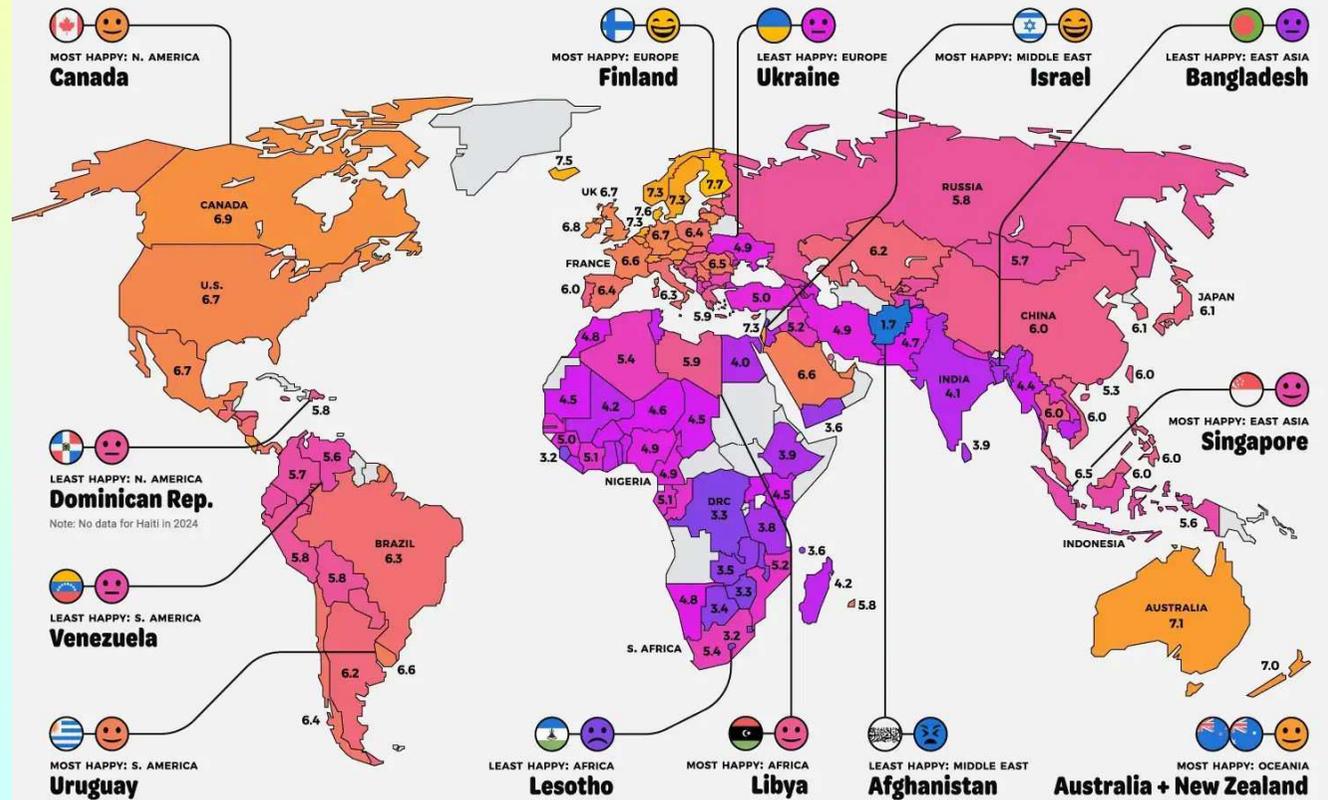
The Gallup World Poll asks respondents in each country to rate their current life on a scale from 0–10, ranking from highest to lowest.

THE MOST & LEAST HAPPY COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD



Each country is scored out of 10 based on self-reported measures of well-being and happiness. See the World Happiness Report 2024 for the full methodology.

← LEAST 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 MOST →



Note: Scores are based on individuals' own assessments of their lives, in particular their answers to the single-item Cantril ladder life-evaluation question.

<https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2024/>

1) Average life evaluation

2) Explained by six factors

3) 95% confidence interval for rank

Finland	7.741	
Denmark	7.583	
Iceland	7.525	
Sweden	7.344	
Israel	7.341	
Netherlands	7.319	
Norway	7.302	
Luxembourg	7.122	
Switzerland	7.060	
Australia	7.057	
New Zealand	7.029	
Costa Rica	6.955	
Kuwait	6.951	
Austria	6.905	
Canada	6.900	
Belgium	6.894	
Ireland	6.838	
Czechia	6.822	
Lithuania	6.818	
United Kingdom	6.749	
Slovenia	6.743	
United Arab Emirates	6.733	
United States	6.725	
Germany	6.719	
Mexico	6.678	
Uruguay	6.611	
France	6.609	
Saudi Arabia	6.594	
Kosovo	6.561	

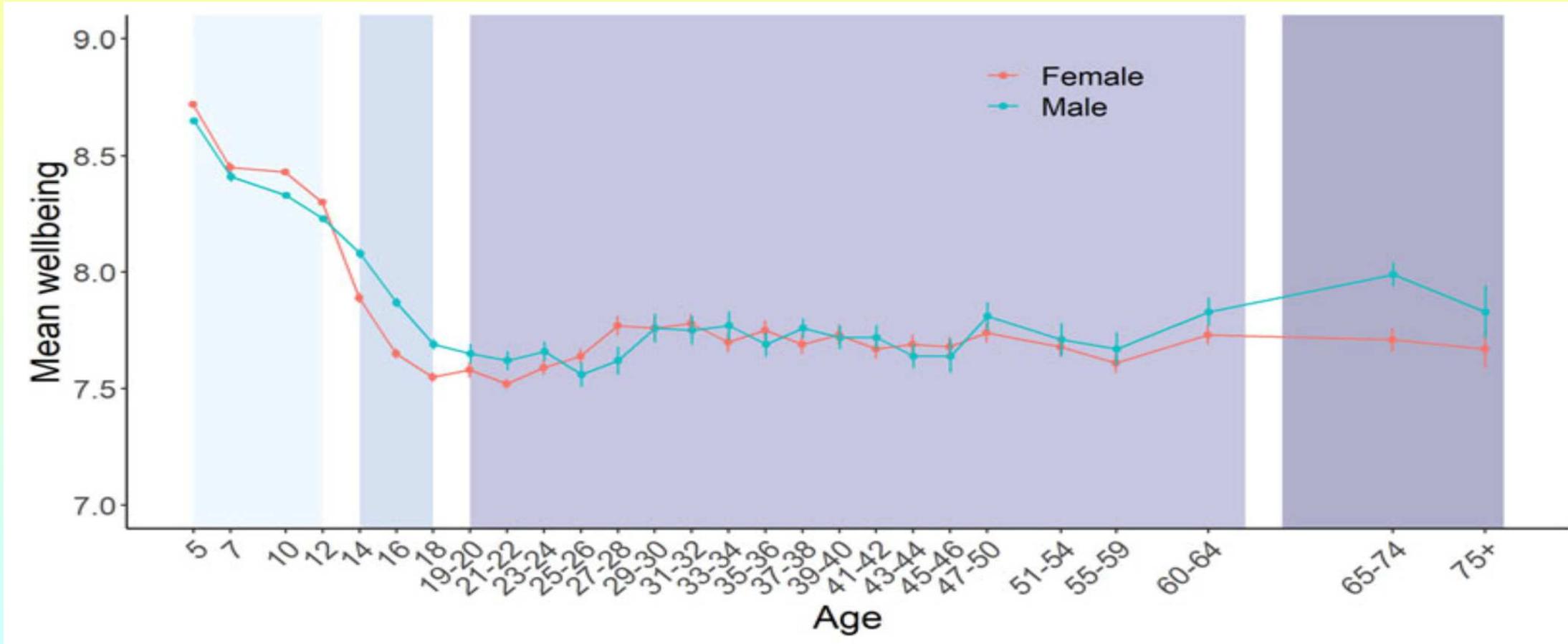
Factors/Variables

- Dystopia + residual
- Perceptions of corruption
- Generosity
- Freedom to make life choices
- Healthy life expectancy
- Social support
- Log GDP per capita

Search by country

76	Montenegro	5.707	
77	Mongolia	5.696	
78	Colombia	5.695	
79	Venezuela	5.607	
80	Indonesia	5.568	
81	Bulgaria	5.463	
82	Armenia	5.455	
83	South Africa	5.422	
84	North Macedonia	5.369	
85	Algeria	5.364	
86	Hong Kong S.A.R. of China	5.316	
87	Albania	5.304	
88	Tajikistan	5.281	
89	Congo (Brazzaville)	5.221	
90	Mozambique	5.216	
91	Georgia	5.185	
92	Iraq	5.166	
93	Nepal	5.158	
94	Laos	5.139	
95	Gabon	5.106	
96	Ivory Coast	5.080	
97	Guinea	5.023	
98	Turkiye	4.975	
99	Senegal	4.969	
100	Iran	4.923	
101	Azerbaijan	4.893	
102	Nigeria	4.881	
103	State of Palestine	4.879	
104	Cameroon	4.874	
105	Ukraine	4.873	

3 Stability/Change of wellbeing across the lifespan (The literature)



(De Vries et al., 2023 -- Acknowledgment to Prof. Meike Bartels)

.4 Benefits of being happy people ? (The literature)

Happy people:

- ◆ are healthier
- ◆ live longer
- ◆ function better
- ◆ have better social relations



(acknowledgment to Prof. Meike Bartels)

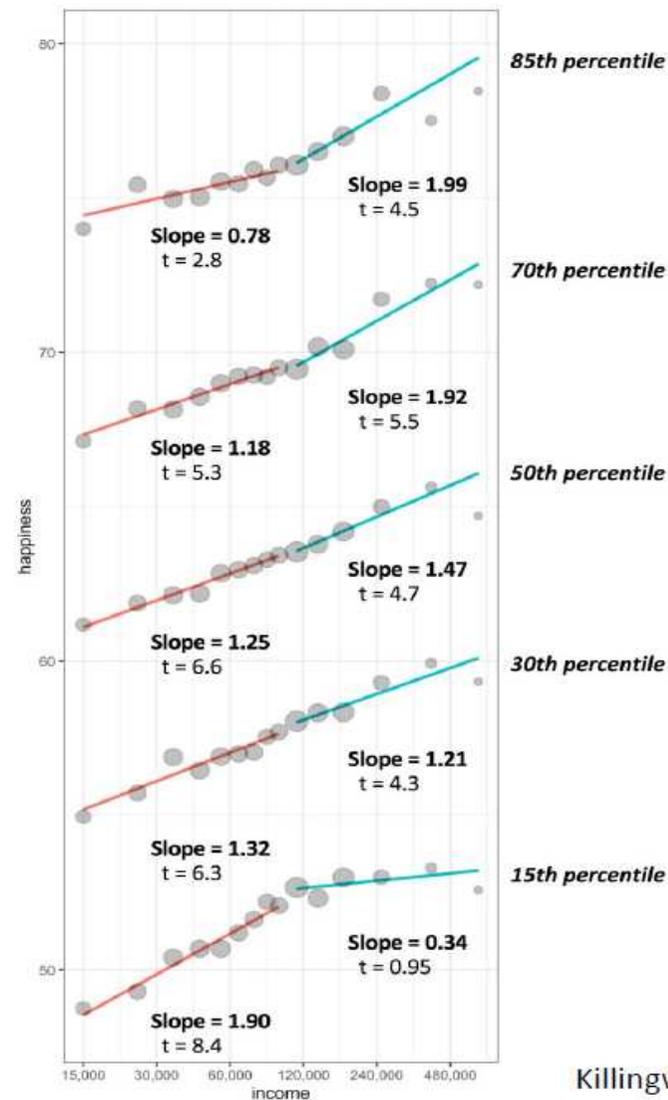
(Lubomirsky et al., 2005; Maccagnan et al., 2019; Oswald et al., 2015; Steptoe, 2019)

1 Contributing factors to happiness/well-being (The literature)



acknowledgment to Prof. Meike Bartels)

Income and Life Satisfaction



Killingworth, Kanheman, Mellers, PNAS,

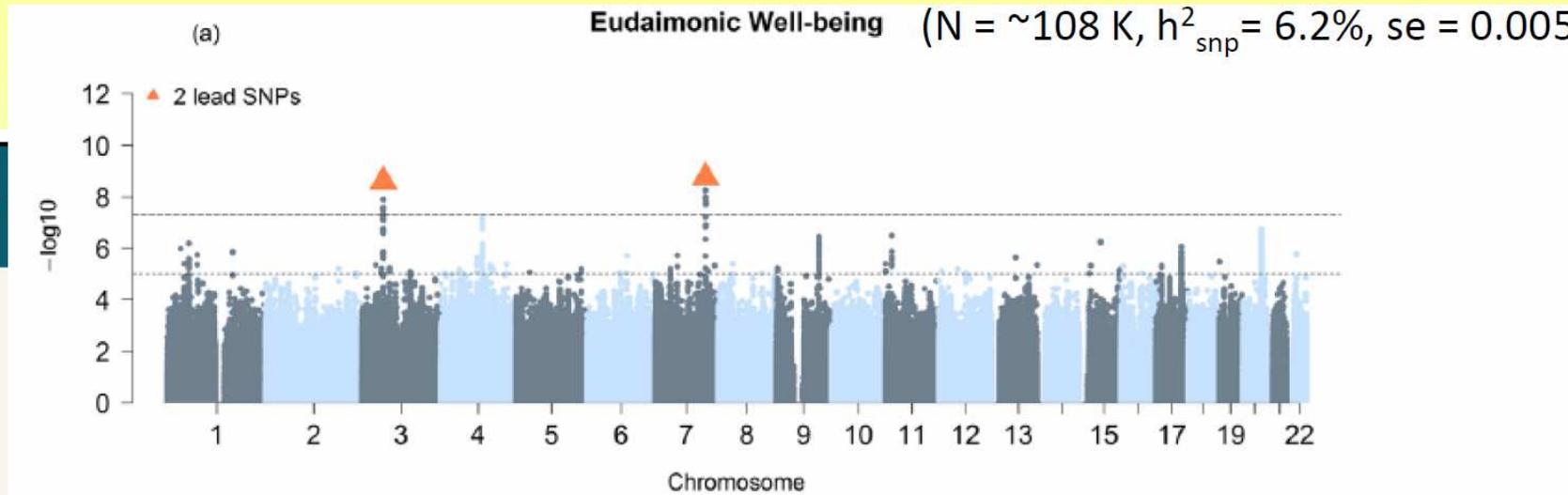
2 Meaning in life and happiness (The literature)

Baselmans & Bartels, Scientific Reports, 2018

ank^{uk} Thoughts and feelings

How happy are you?

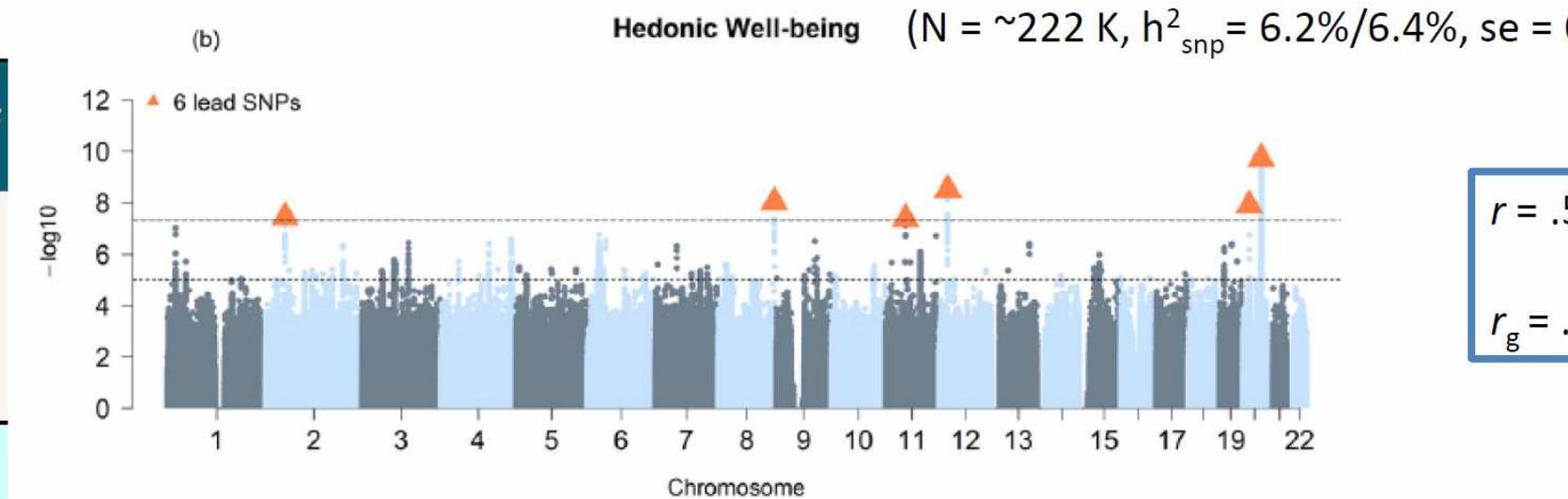
- Extremely happy
- Very happy
- Moderately happy
- Moderately unhappy
- Very unhappy
- Extremely unhappy
- Do not know
- Prefer not to answer



ank^{uk} Thoughts and feelings

Content do you feel your life to be

- Not at all
- A little
- A moderate amount
- Very much
- An extreme amount
- Do not know
- Prefer not to answer



$r = .5$
 $r_g = .$

3 Depression and happiness (The literature)

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



Distinguishing happiness and meaning in life from depressive symptoms: A GWAS-by-subtraction study in the UK Biobank

Lianne P. de Vries^{1,2}  | Perline A. Demange^{1,2} | Bart M. L. Baselmans³ |
Christiaan H. Vinkers^{4,5,6} | Dirk H. M. Pelt^{1,2} | Meike Bartels^{1,2}

¹Department of Biological Psychology, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

²Amsterdam Public Health Research Institute, Amsterdam University Medical Centres, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

³Biomedical Technology, Faculty of Technology, Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

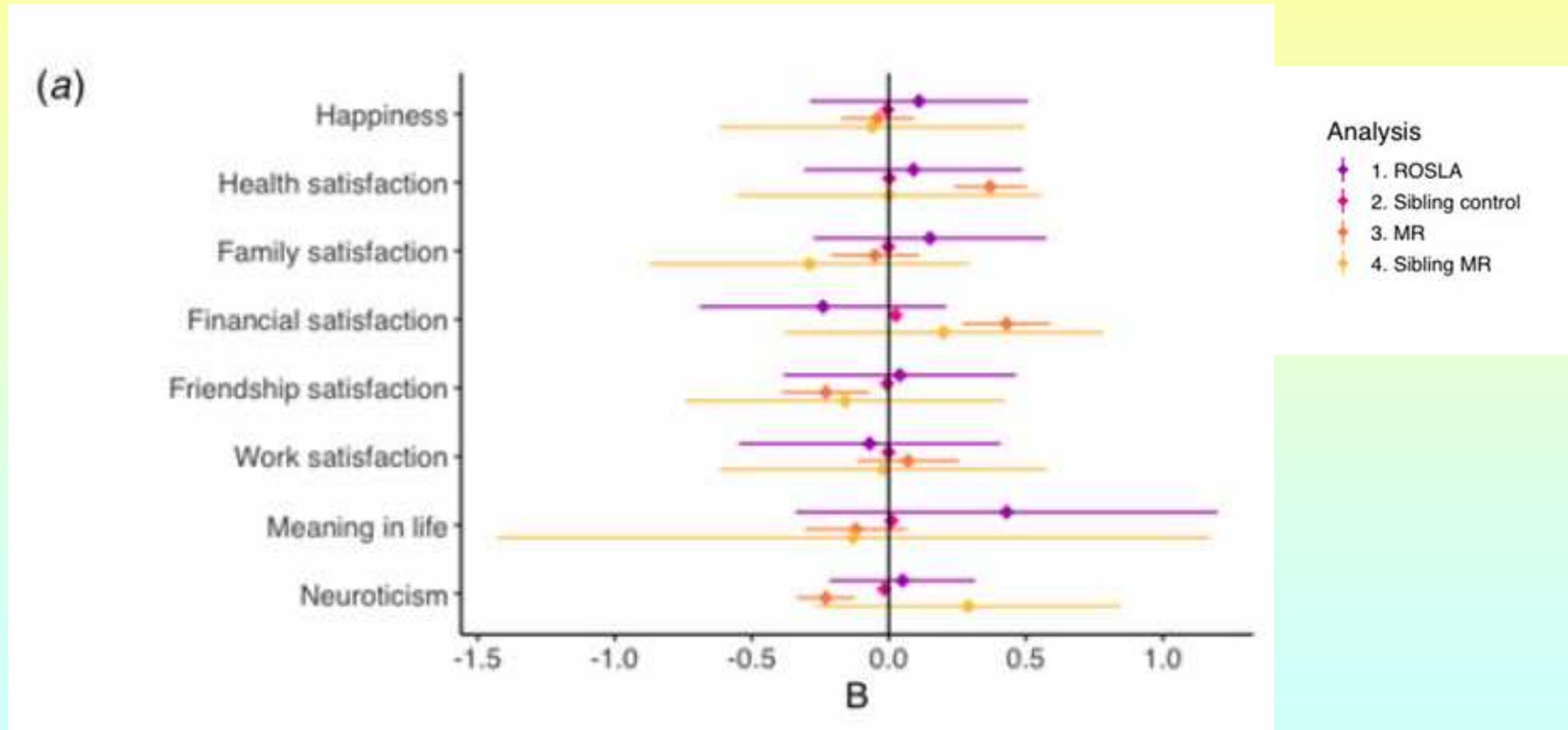
⁴Department of Psychiatry and Anatomy and Neurosciences, Amsterdam University Medical Center location Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam,

Abstract

Hedonic (happiness) and eudaimonic (meaning in life) well-being are negatively related to depressive symptoms. Genetic variants play a role in this association, reflected in substantial genetic correlations. We investigated the overlap and differences between well-being and depressive symptoms, using results of Genome-Wide Association studies (GWAS) in UK Biobank. Subtracting GWAS summary statistics of depressive symptoms from those of happiness and meaning in life, we obtained GWASs of respectively “pure” happiness ($n_{\text{effective}} = 216,497$) and “pure” meaning ($n_{\text{effective}} = 102,300$). For

4 Education & Well-being (The literature)

Higher education is not associated with higher well-being



(Van de Weijer et al., 2024 -- Acknowledgment to Prof. Meike Bartels)

4 Heredity & Happiness (The literature)

Erfelijkheid? Nature-Nurture

Heredity %

1. Height	-> 80%
2. Weight	-> 70%
3. Exercise Behaviour	-> males: 70-80%
	-> females: age 13: 38%; age > 13 70-80%
4. School exam	-> 60%
5. Smoking	-> initiation: males: 37%; females: 55%
	-> current: males: 59%; females: 46%
6. Agression	-> 50%
7. Wellbeing	->
8. Depression	-> 30-40%

nowledgment to Prof. Meike Bartels)

5 Happiness Formula (from Social Science perspectives)

Martin Seligman, widely considered the father of positive psychology, asked us to consider the equation:

$$H_e = S + C + V$$

- H_e is 'the enduring level of happiness' (unobservable).
- S is 'your set range'.
- C is 'the circumstances of your life' and
- V represents 'factors under your voluntary control.'

Prof. Ho proposed " $H_r = S(G, V1) + C(t, V2)$ " (Ho & Lam, 2025)

- G = Genes, $V1$ = Accumulated mental capital voluntarily
- S is 'your set range'
- t = a short-term deviation beyond one's making
- $V2$ = circumstances that are a result of voluntary actions
- H_r = reported happiness (observable) not the

2.6 SUMMARY

1. Happiness is heritable.
2. Happiness is stable after 18-year-olds.
3. Circumstances of your life (environmental factors, also named as external factors) are also important.
4. Mental capital can be trained and interacted with gene and environmental factors
5. Related factors:
 - a) Education level: No
 - b) Income: Yes but...
 - c) Meaning in life: Yes
 - d) Depression: Yes

3.1 General Happiness Index (2018-2024)

Aim:

- Track the trend of personal happiness level in Hong Kong.

2018-2024 is the second phase, more sophisticated online questionnaires were collected between July and August.

Design: Online survey

Sample size : n=1,013

Sample size : n=1,077

Sample size : n=1,827

Sample size : n=1,557

Sample size : n=1,147

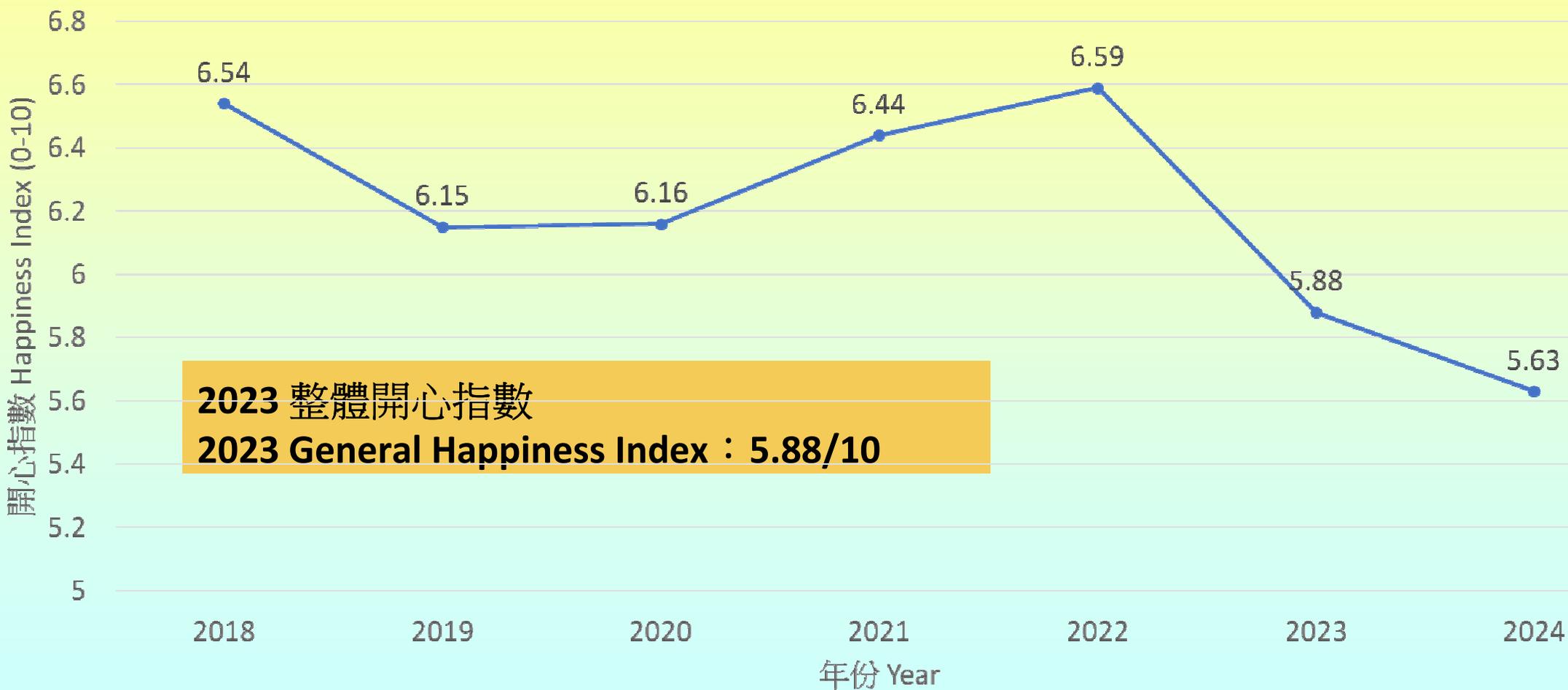
Sample size : n=1,283

Sample size : n=1,093

Questionnaires:

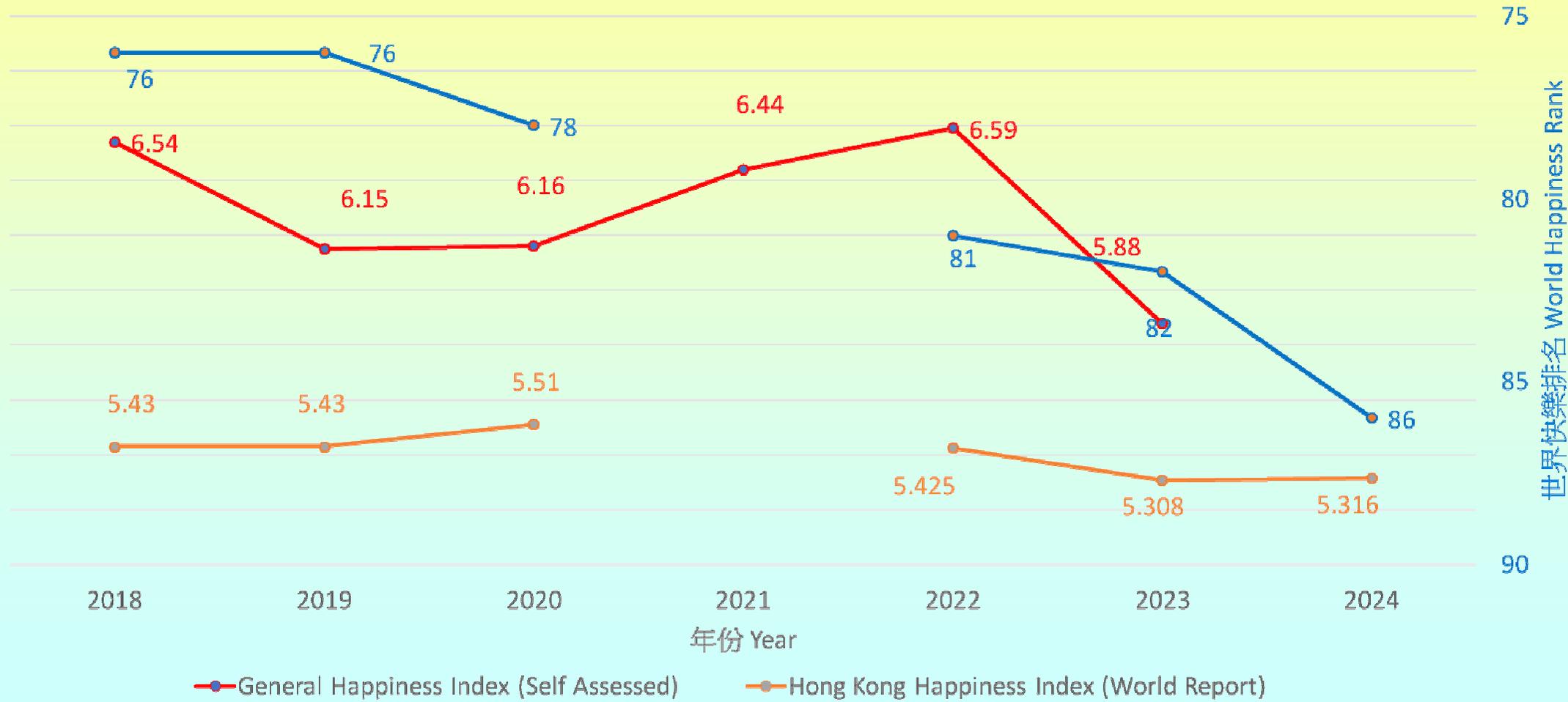
- Personal happiness index
- LIFE mental capital, values,
- Social wellbeing, satisfaction of external factors
- Self-rated health, depressive symptoms assessment (Patient Health Questionnaire, PHQ-9)

3.2 General Happiness Index (2018-2024)



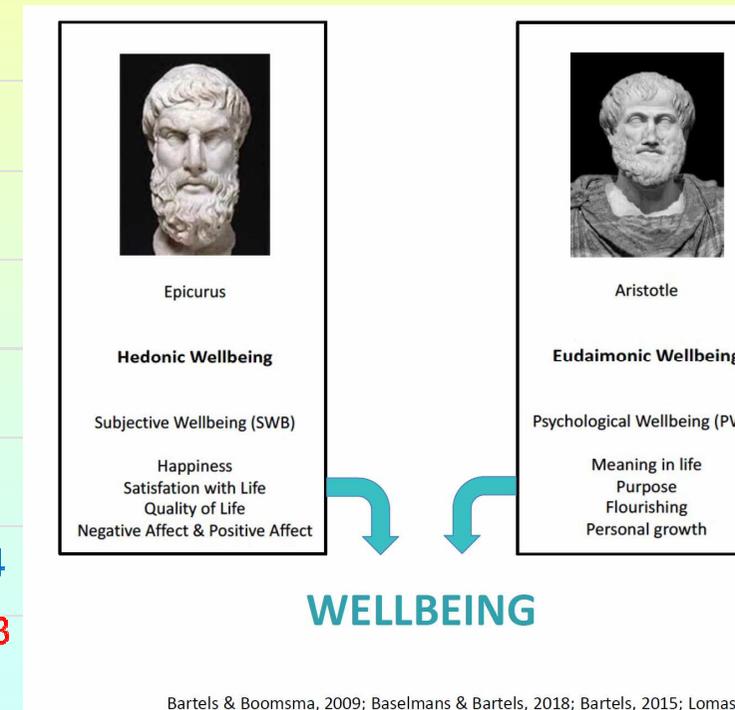
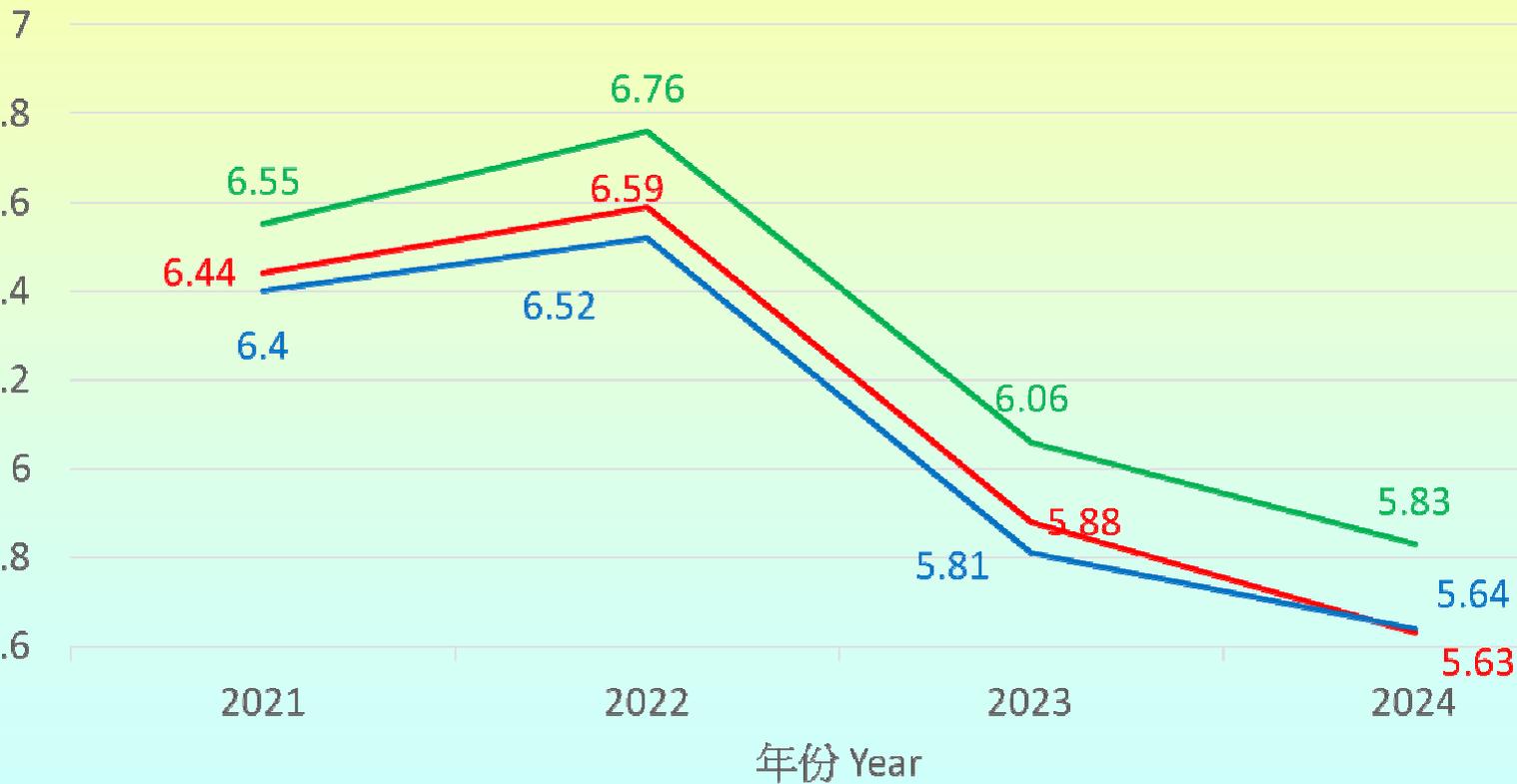
Comparison of General Happiness Index with World Report Happiness Index & Ranking

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
General Happiness Index (Self Assessed)	6.54	6.15	6.16	6.44	6.59	5.88
World Happiness Rank (Ranks 2 years before)	76	76	78		81	82
Hong Kong Happiness Index (World Report)	5.43	5.43	5.51		5.425	5.308



3.2 Happiness Index Trend by Life Satisfaction & Meaning

Correlation	Happiness	Satisfaction	Meaning life
Happiness	1		
Satisfaction	0.826***	1	
Meaning in life	0.719***	0.774***	1



— General Happiness Index (Self Assessed) — Life Satisfaction — Meaning in Life

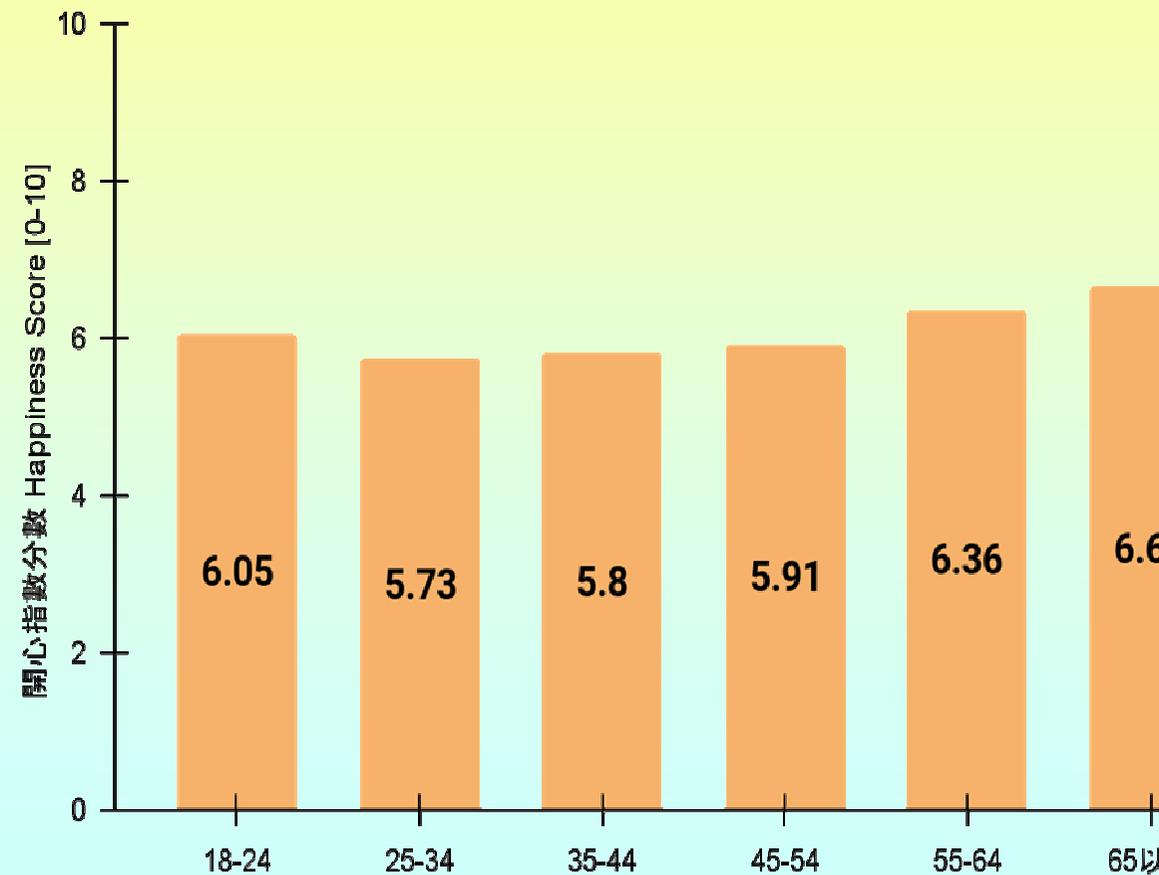
3.3 General & Child Happiness Index in 2023

Happiness by Grade (P4 to S5)
年級快樂指數 (小四至中五)

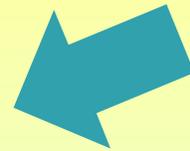


Child happiness scores by age groups
(data from Lingnan University)

Personal happiness scores by age groups



東華學院護理學院副院長(研究)林清表示，以前開心指數的圖表呈「微笑狀」，即年幼時處於高位，因童年無憂無慮的時期壯年時期開始下降至低位，但至年老時會再次上升，因大部分人已享受退休生活；但近年圖表走勢有明顯變化，逐漸呈現「手推車狀」，即年幼時處於最高位，至壯年期開始走下坡，至年老期便一直處於低位平穩持續，反映近年長者的開心指數已不及以前。估計因長者的教育水平逐漸提升，懂得計算退休生活保障是否足夠；會擔心積蓄難以應付晚年的生活費或醫療費。

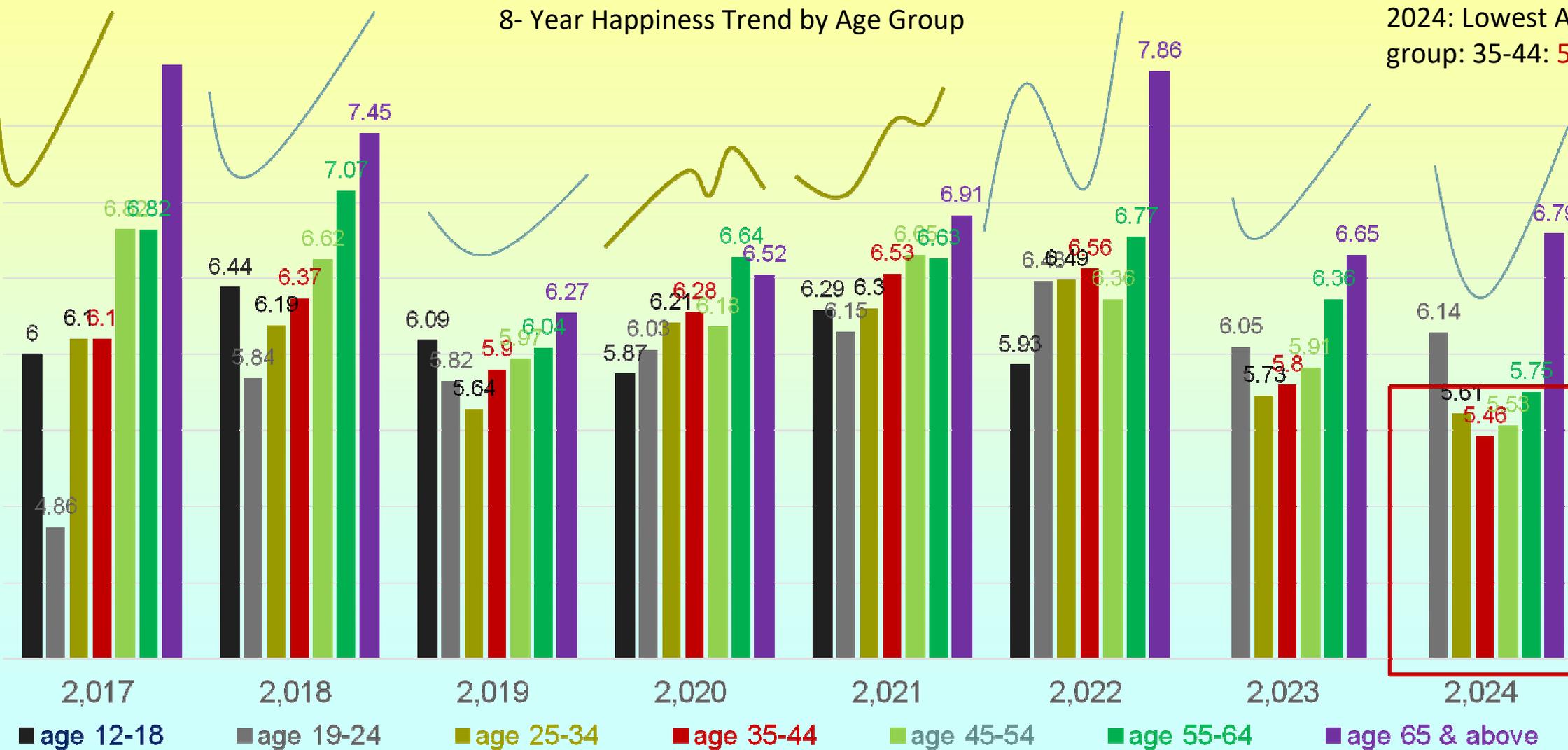


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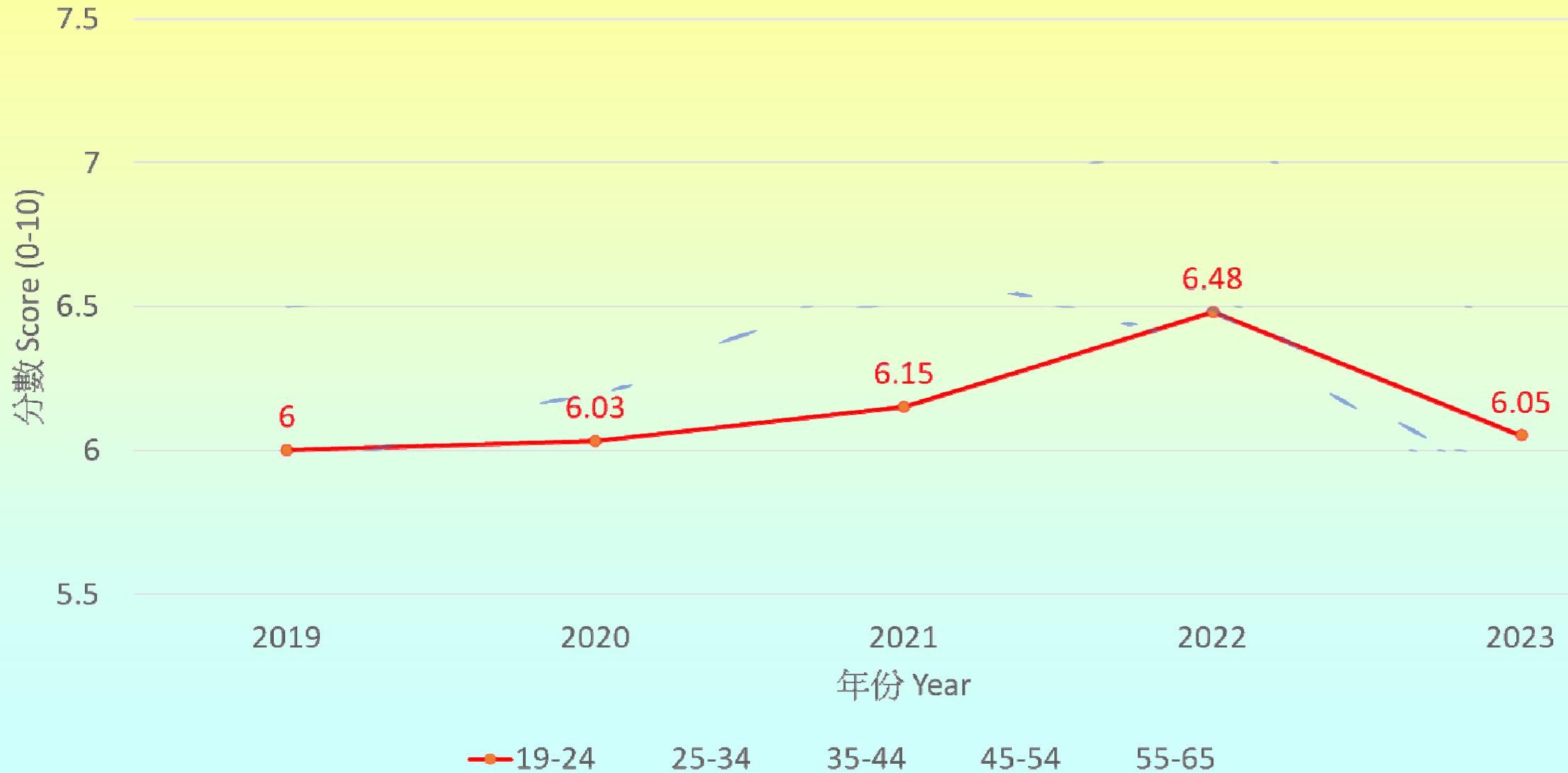
The younger the age the lower the scores in the Happiness Trend 2018-2024

8- Year Happiness Trend by Age Group

2024: Lowest A group: 35-44: 5.46



3.4 Happiness Index Trend by Age Group (2018-23)

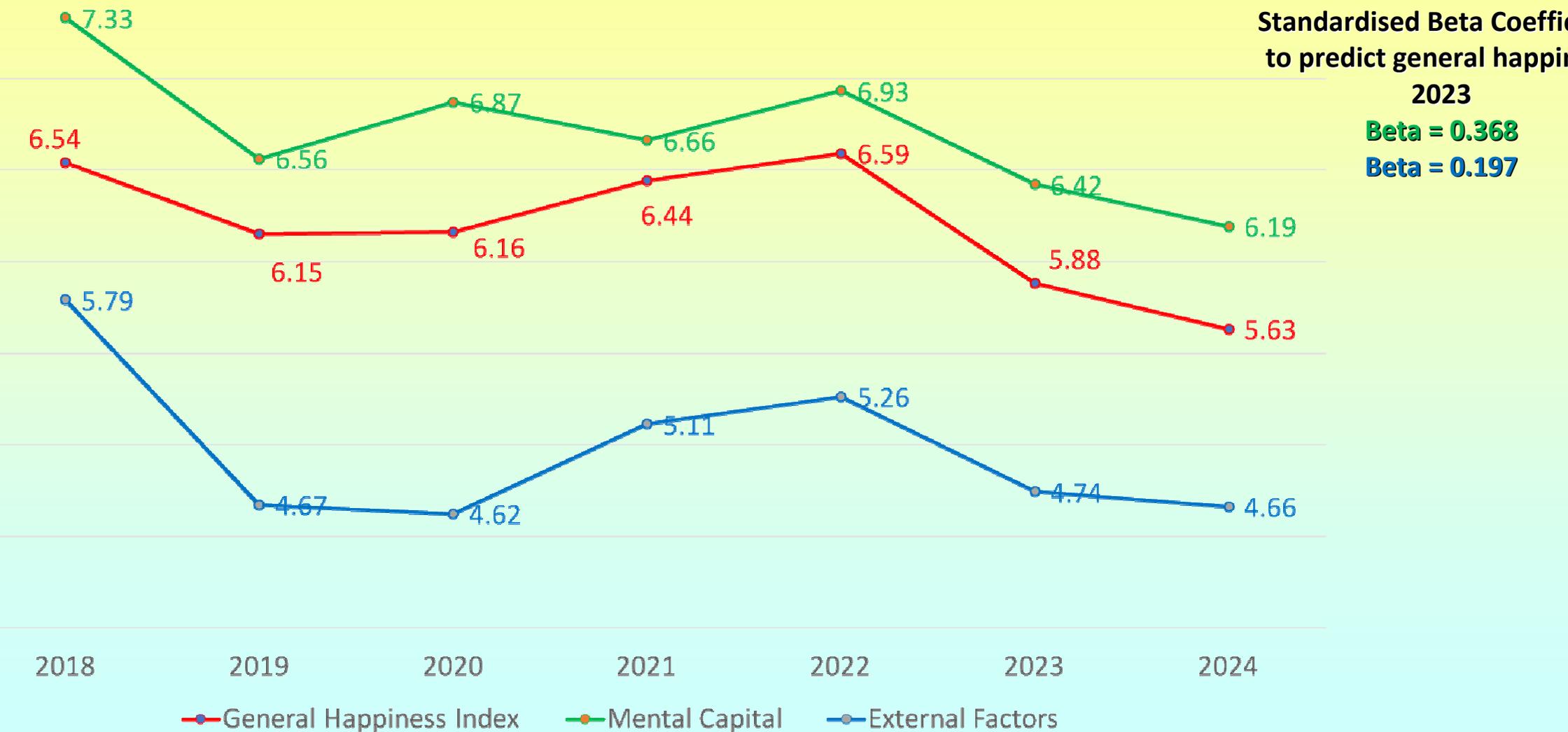


The most influential factors on the General Happiness Index are:

- a) Mental capital,
- b) Mental health, and
- c) Satisfaction with external factors (2018-2024)

Factors	2024	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019
Mental capital	B eta = 0.408	B eta = 0.368	B eta = 0.426	B eta = 0.513	B eta = 0.285	B eta = 0.39
Mental health	B eta = 0.210	B eta = 0.192	B eta = 0.213	NA	NA	NA
External quality of living	B eta = 0.160	B eta = 0.197	B eta = 0.164	B eta = 0.311	B eta = 0.330	B eta = 0.26

C3&4. Mental Capital & External Factors predicted Happiness index

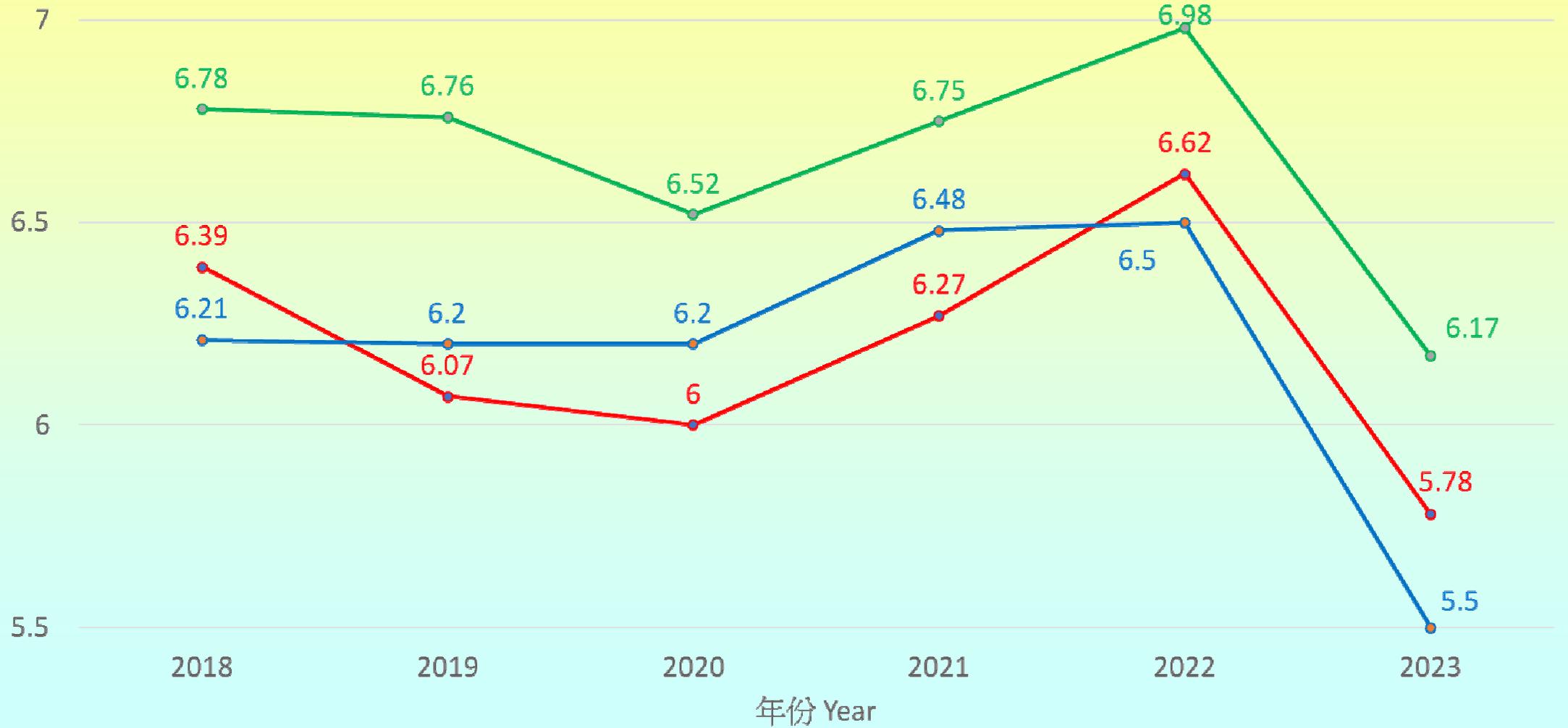


3.5 Trend of External Factors

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
整體開心指數 General Happiness Index	6.54	6.15	6.16	6.44	6.59	5.88
對外因素 External Factors	5.79	4.67	4.62	5.11	5.26	4.74
E1 政治及社會狀況 Politics & Society	4.53	3.06	3.31	4.31	4.69	4.19
E2 政府的施政 Government Policy	4.31	2.73	3.03	4.21	4.55	4.20
E3 香港整體經濟狀況 HK General Economy	5.25	4.63	4.68	5.06	4.69	4.32
E4 自己的住房狀況 Personal Housing Condition	5.88	5.64	5.85	5.80	5.76	5.00
E5 居住環境 Living Environment	6.03	5.81	6.04	5.91	5.95	5.18
E6 公共醫療 Public Medical Services	5.34	5.14	5.19	5.19	5.22	4.52
E7 娛樂康體設施 Entertainment & Leisure Facilities	5.72	5.57	5.57	5.78	5.62	5.07
E8 媒體 Media	5.59	5.39	5.13	5.25	4.99	4.65
E9 治安 Law & Order		4.06	4.4	5.36	5.66	4.89
E10 信任政府處事的程度 Trust in Government			3.04	4.10	4.48	4.23
E11 教育 Education					5.02	4.50
E12 宗教共融 Harmony between Religion					5.81	5.41
E13 自然環境 Natural Environment					5.88	5.46

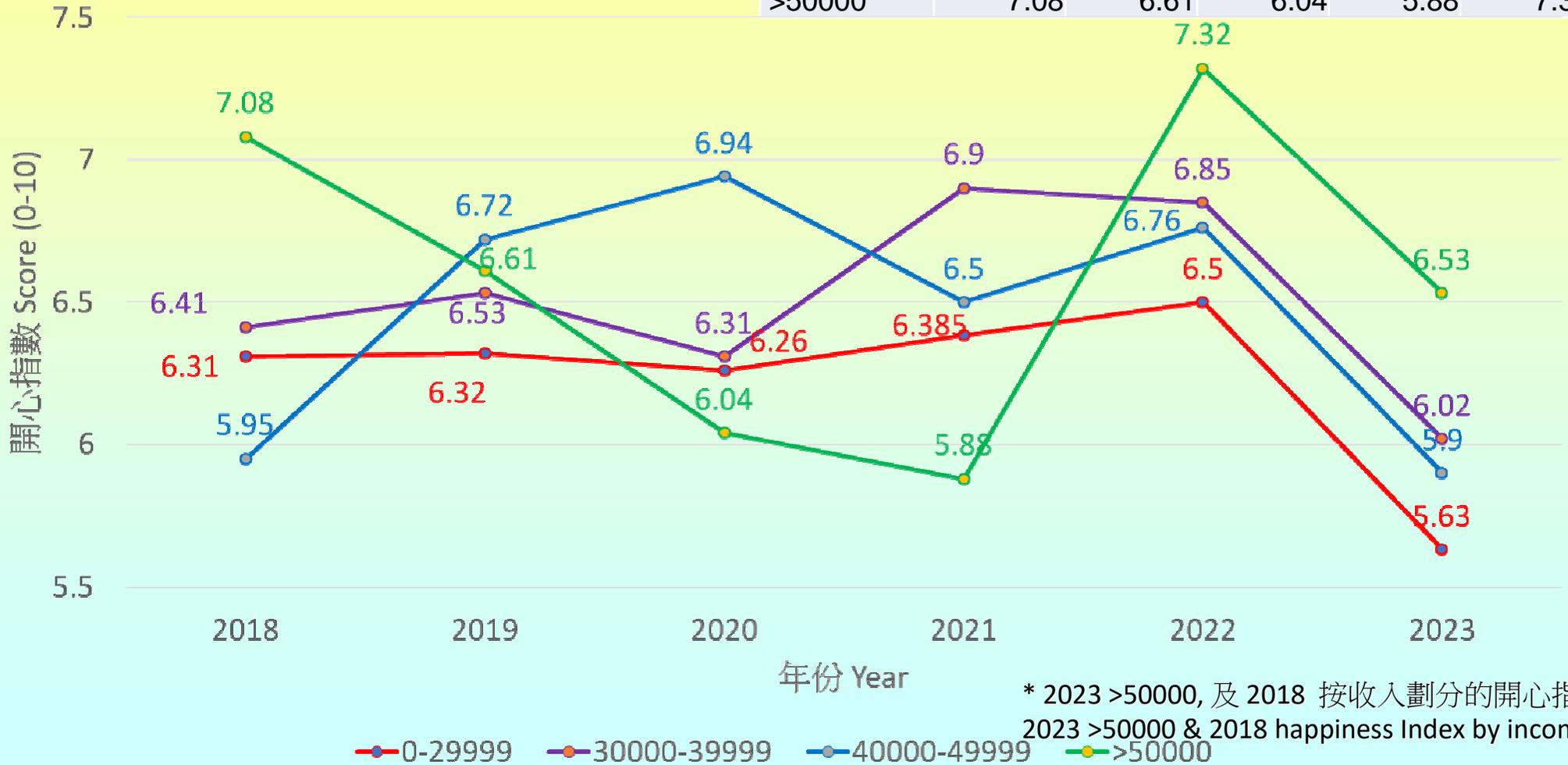
Happiness Index Trend by Education

Education	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Secondary or below	6.39	6.07	6	6.27	6.62
Undergrad	6.21	6.2	6.2	6.48	6.5
Postgrad and beyond	6.78	6.76	6.52	6.75	6.98



Happiness Index Trend by Income

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
0-29999	6.31	6.32	6.26	6.39	6.50	5.63
30000-39999	6.41	6.53	6.31	6.90	6.85	6.02
40000-49999	5.95	6.72	6.94	6.50	6.76	6.02
>50000	7.08	6.61	6.04	5.88	7.32	6.53

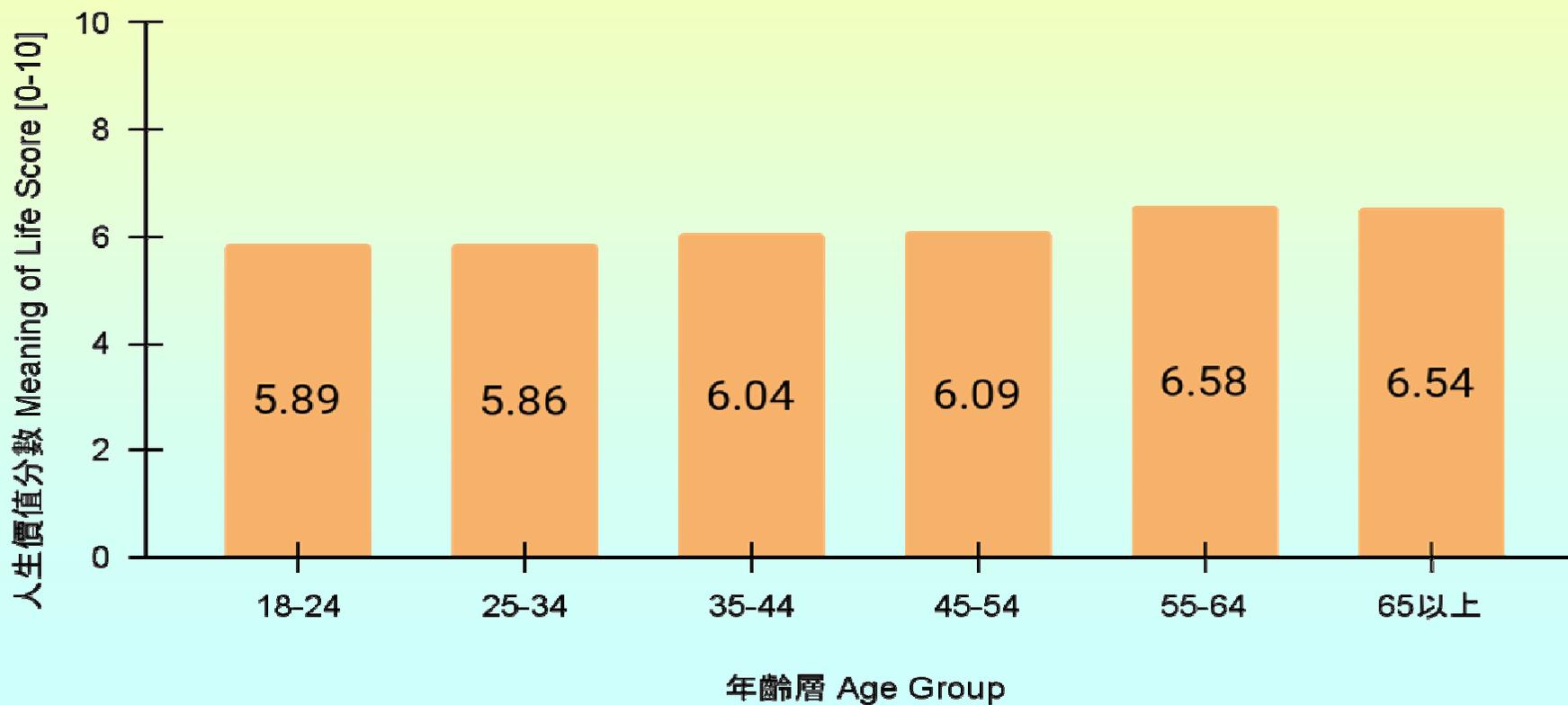


* 2023 >50000, 及 2018 按收入劃分的開心指數以平均
 2023 >50000 & 2018 happiness Index by income is rounded

3 Younger respondents scored lowest in meaning in life

不同年齡層對人生價值的評分
Meaning in life scores by age groups

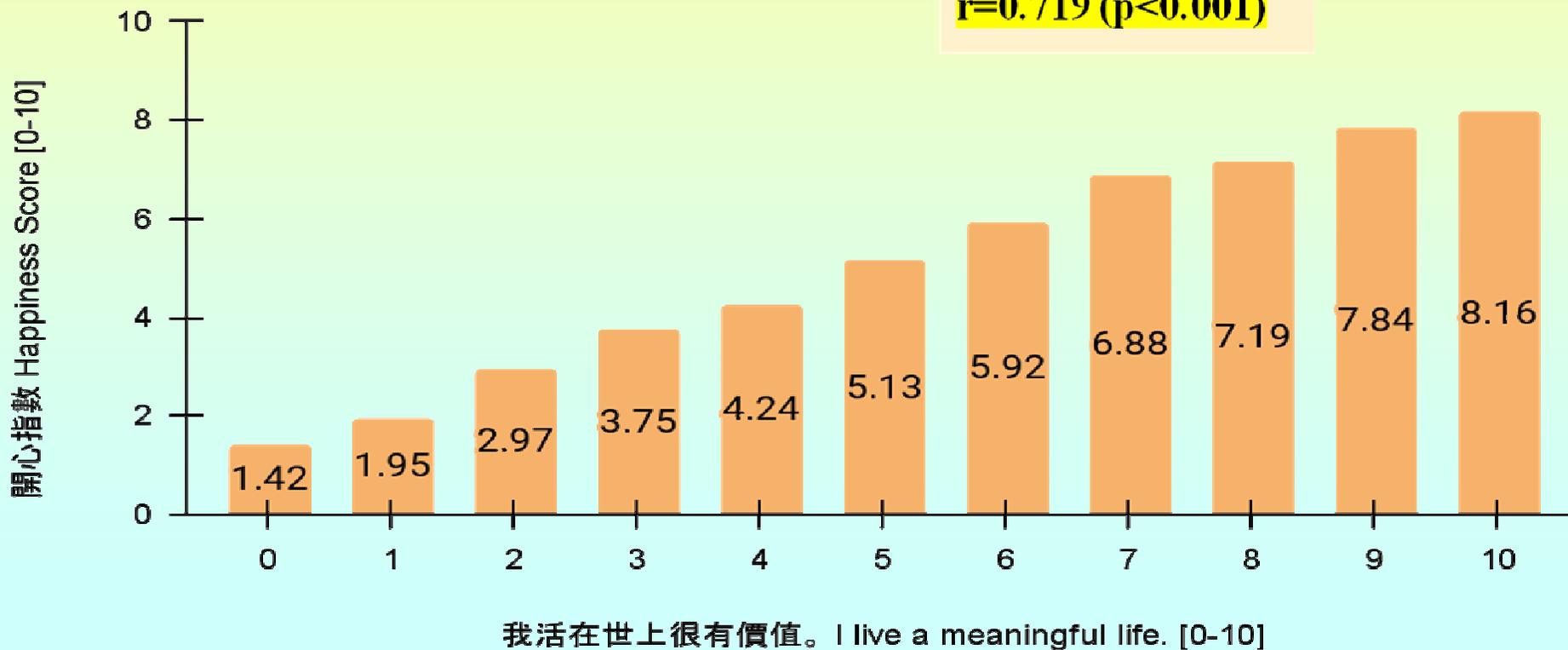
g3. 我活在世上很有價值。 [0-10]
I live a meaningful life.



The more meaningful one's life is, the happier they are

人生價值和個人開心指數
Meaning in life and personal happiness

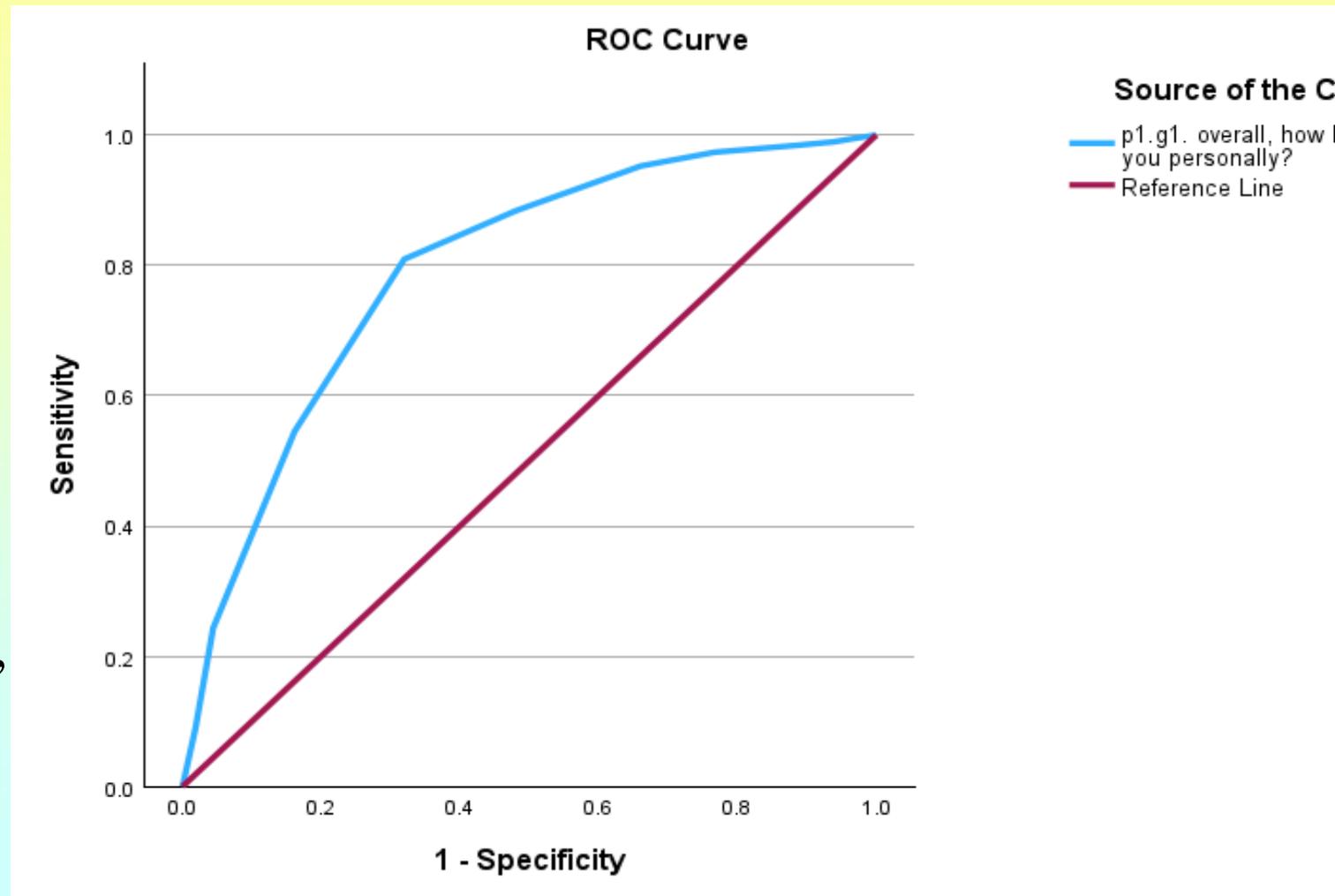
Pearson
Correlation
Coefficient :
 $r=0.719$ ($p<0.001$)



3.10 Depression and Happiness

happiness correlated with depressive symptoms ($r = -0.468^{***}$)

happiness index < 7 for identifying mild or more severe depressive symptoms (sensitivity 68%, specificity 81%).



4. Summary: Comparison

the literature

Happiness is heritable.

Happiness is stable after 18-year-olds.

Circumstances of your life (environmental factors, also named as external factors) are also important.

Mental capital can be trained and interacted with gene and environmental factors

Related factors:

- a) Education: No
- b) Income: Yes but...
- c) Meaning in life: Yes
- d) Depression: Yes

Happiness index in HK

1. Unable to check.
2. No great variation between 18-55 except little bit high in 65 or above.
3. External factors predicted the general happiness index consistently.
4. Mental capital predicted the general happiness index consistently.
5. Related factors:
 - a) Education: Postgraduation > other
 - b) Income: fluctuated, non-linear
 - c) Meaning in life: Yes.
 - d) Depression: Yes, predictive.

Being a happy and joyful person (做開心快樂人?)

Insights from Prof. Meike Bartels, Prof. Seligman and Prof. Ho

Positive activity interventions (PAIs):

• Writing letters of Gratitude

• Counting one's blessings

• Practicing optimism

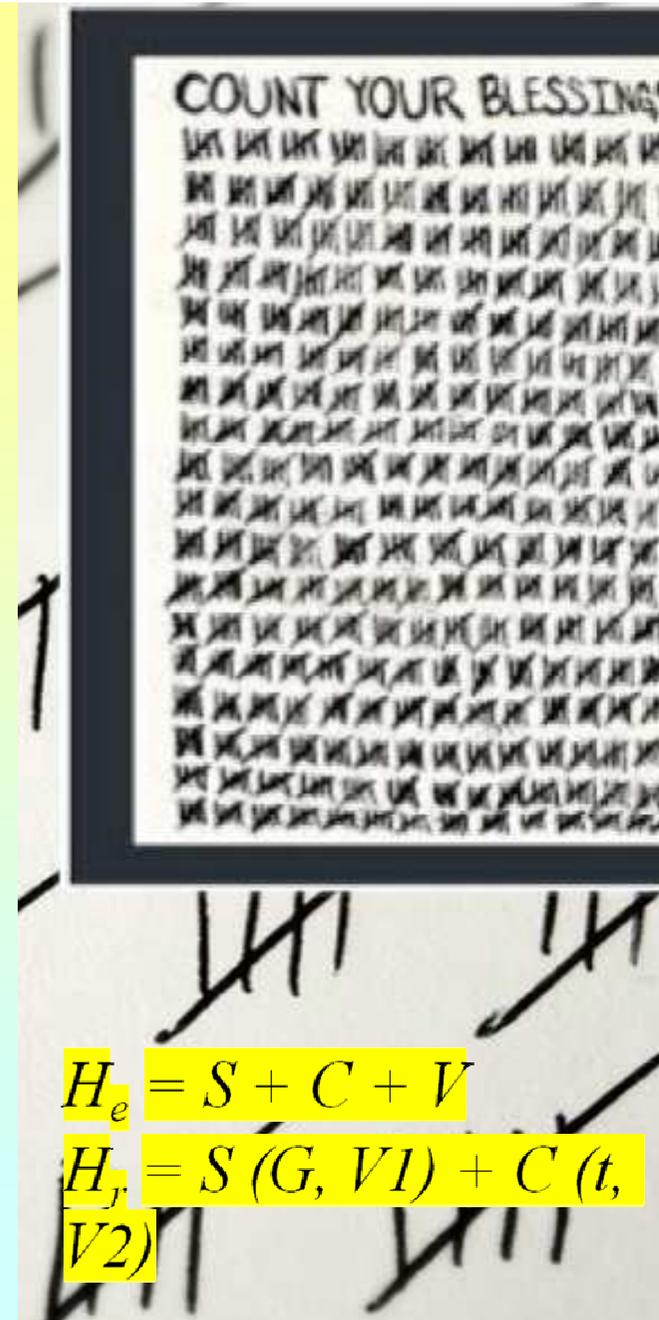
• Performing acts of kindness

• Using one's strengths in a new way

• Affirming one's most important values

• Focus on what you can control the controllable factors e.g., your time, emotions, focus...

• Stop comparing with others but more with yourself



5. My BELIEF →



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