When Income isn't a Factor, What Makes Kuala Lumpur's Upper-Class (T20) Households Happy? The Role of Generosity and Social Support

Nik Ahmad Sufian Burhan[1,2,*], Mohamad Fazli Sabri[1], Najwa Baharuddin[3,4], Hanina H. Hamsan[1], Arina Charansarn [5]

[1] *Faculty of Human Ecology, Universiti Putra Malaysia*
[2] *Institute for Social Science Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia*
[3] *Faculty of Business and Communications, INTI International University, Nilai*
[4] *Faculty of Business, Economics and Social Development, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu*
[5] *Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Prince of Songkhla University, Thailand*
*Corresponding author: *nikahmadsufian@upm.edu.my*
DOI: https://doi.org/10.60016/majcafe.v33.06

Abstract

Easterlin Paradox theory suggests that individuals with the highest incomes do not get happier as they get richer. If this is the case for Malaysians, what else can bring them happiness? This study adopted the World Happiness Report (WHR) research paradigm to examine the impact of generosity and social support on the happiness of 334 individuals from high-income households (T20) in Kuala Lumpur. The data were collected using a homogeneous convenience sample method and analyzed with robust regressions. Results revealed that while income increases from T1 to T2 had non-significant impact on happiness among T20s, generosity and social support had significant positive effects. Finally, our findings imply that policymakers should create policies that promote individuals to help one another socially and be more generous to those in need. This approach may increase societal social capital and happiness even further.

Keywords: happiness; high income households; social support; generosity; world happiness report (WHR)

1.0 Introduction

Happiness and well-being are vast concepts. Happiness is a feeling of happiness, joy, and positivity that can be induced by a variety of situations and life experiences. Humans strive for happiness through

a variety of strategies, including completing goals, developing positive connections with those around them, and trying new things. However, happiness can be a subjective and difficult word to define, because what makes one person happy may not make another happy. The concept of happiness can be defined in a variety of ways. According to some experts, happiness stems from internal elements such as positive thinking, feeling pleased, and finding significance in life (Diener, 2000). Each individual's level of happiness may differ and alter over time depending on personal features and life events, as well as beliefs, values, culture, and socioeconomic status.

The relationship between income and happiness has been extensively researched in the past, and the nature of this link has also been a subject of controversy among contemporary scholars (e.g., Brown et al., 2024, in press; Burhan et al., 2014, 2021, 2023b; Powdthavee, 2010). In general, most countries prioritize improving income levels and economic advancement to increase their citizens' well-being and happiness. However, after society or individuals have attained a high level of income, the following gain in money may no longer be sufficient to raise their happiness to a greater level. Leading economist Richard Easterlin has empirically established this tendency for societies in the United States and other developed countries (Easterlin, 1974, 2023; Easterlin et al., 2010). This phenomenon is known as Easterlin's Paradox. This is explained by the concept of 'hedonic adaptation', which states that when people's basic survival needs are met, as they are in many advanced societies, they become accustomed and adapted to increasing income and living standards, which does not result in a continuous increase in happiness.

Since an increase in income may no longer be sufficient to promote happiness for high-income individuals, what other elements can boost their happiness? Since 2002, the World Happiness Report (WHR) (Helliwell et al., 2023) has used cross-country data to identify the level of public happiness in most nations as well as the key elements that influence happiness at the macro level. Overall, many socioeconomic factors at the individual level influence people's happiness around the world, including income levels, health levels, freedom to make choices in life, perceptions of the level of corruption in the country, generosity, and the level of social support they received. The World Happiness Report (WHR / Helliwell et al., 2023) has demonstrated empirically that generosity and the reception of social support are two significant factors influencing human happiness.

Individuals who are generous, such as donating money to charity, generally report an increase in happiness (Aknin & Whillans, 2021; Aknin et al., 2013). Similarly, those who perform random acts of kindness for the benefit of others frequently report higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction as a result of their actions (Dunn et al., 2011). However, Helliwell et al. (2023) discovered that social support from the community had a higher impact on their happiness than generosity. Previous research has repeatedly found a link between the receiving of social support and happiness. Individuals' overall happiness levels were found to be significantly higher when they received social support (Moeini et al., 2018). This assumption is confirmed by Mahanta and Aggarwal's (2013) research, which reveals that social support is not only crucial for the old and vulnerable, but it also has a good effect on the happiness of young people, especially students in higher education institutions. This is demonstrated by the fact that people who receive more social support achieve higher academic grades. Social support from friends, family, and the community is essential for people's general welfare and happiness, according to Öztemel and Yıldız-Akyol (2021), since it helps people successfully adjust in their careers.

Numerous non-material factors have been shown to be reliable predictors of happiness in a society by the World Happiness Report (WHR), which was published from 2002 to 2023. These non-material parameters include social support and generosity levels in addition to health factors and freedom of choice. Many earlier studies discovered that providing financial or material support to those in need can enhance the giver's happiness and spiritual well-being in addition to the beneficial effects of generosity on the recipient (Myslinski, 2014; Geenen et al., 2014; Moche & Västfjäll, 2022). On the other hand, the results of studies conducted by Aknin et al. (2013, 2015) indicate that people who donate money or things to others report experiencing greater levels of happiness. Furthermore, a great deal of prior research has repeatedly demonstrated how well social support works in assisting people in overcoming obstacles in life (Lakey, 2013; Dominguez-Fuentes & Hombrados-Mendieta, 2012). According to Tan et al. (2018), those who receive social support during times of need report higher levels of happiness than those who do not. Social support has a definite positive impact on the happiness of the recipient, particularly in light of the growing doubts regarding the efficacy of social

media's role in fostering the development of supportive social networks (Colak & Dogan, 2016).

In the event that Malaysia's T20 high-income group encounters an Easterlin Paradox, what actions should they take next to improve their degree of happiness? Do high-income people need something immaterial to be happy? Thus, the researcher aimed to emphasize in this study the impact of social support received and generosity on happiness, particularly for Malaysia's high-income group (T20). The goal of the study is to determine if the high-income group's increased happiness can be attributed to these two types of non-material factors or not. People from a higher "status quo" might be happy if they help people in need more while also getting social support from others around them. Therefore, in order to determine how generosity and social support affect people's happiness, the researcher will concentrate on high-income class individuals (T20) in this study.

2.0 Study Aim

The purpose of this study is to investigate how social support and generosity affect the happiness of middle-class (T20) residents in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Over 1.9 million people, including non-citizens, live in Kuala Lumpur, an economic and industrial hub. The best location to represent the study's sample is Kuala Lumpur. There are 1,982,112 people living in Kuala Lumpur (DOSM, 2022). In 2022, there would be 3.5 people living in an average household in Kuala Lumpur, compared to 4 in Malaysia. According to DOSM statistics, Kuala Lumpur and all other states in Malaysia have three distinct income classes: low income (B40), middle income (M40), and high income (T20). Nevertheless, the high-income group (T20), which represents the top 20% of Kuala Lumpur residents' incomes, was the sole group on which the researcher concentrated this study.

Malaysia's urbanization rate tripled in six decades, from 26.6% in 1960 to 78.2% in 2022, according to the World Bank (World Bank, 2023). Currently, Kuala Lumpur's population is entirely urban. Given that Kuala Lumpur is a metropolitan center and home to many high-income persons (T20) in Malaysia, it is the most appropriate place for this kind of study. In light of Easterlin's findings (Easterlin, 1974, 2023; Easterlin et al., 2010), which maintain that wealth does not necessarily translate into happiness, this study also considers non-materialistic elements that contribute to happiness, such as the importance of social support and generosity. A linear regression model from the World

Happiness Report (WHR; Helliwell et al., 2023) was adapted for this study in order to investigate the effects of generosity and social support and happiness. Furthermore, a regression study conducted by WHR using data from the Gallup World Poll (GWP) revealed that perceptions of corruption, health, freedom to make life choices, and income level all influence how happy a society is. Therefore, as recommended by the WHR, this study uses multiple regression analysis to assess the effects of generosity and social support on high-income individuals' happiness when these effects are controlled by some of these aforementioned factors.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Respondents

This study gathered data from 334 Malaysian residents residing in Kuala Lumpur who fall under the T20 category through the use of homogenous convenience sampling. From every household, a single adult respondent between the ages of 18 and 64 was chosen. Respondents can be a husband or wife, or in the absence of a spouse, the head of the family. This survey does not include dependent individuals, such as college or university students. As a thank you for their voluntary participation, respondents who completed the questionnaire were given a RM10 dinner coupon.

3.2 Variables and Data

The dependent variable in this study is a three-item happiness measure (alpha, Cronbach's α = 0.888) that was modified from Lyubomirsky and Lepper (1999). A 6-point Likert scale, with 1 representing strongly disagree and 6 representing strongly agree, was used to quantify happiness. Lyubomirsky and Lepper's initial proposal included four components. The fourth item has been removed from this study, and the third item has undergone significant modification to increase the Cronbach's alpha (α) score. The finalized items are as follows:

1. “In general, I consider myself a very happy person.”
2. “Compared to most of my peers, I consider myself a very happy person.”
3. “I enjoy life and get the best out of my life.”

Monthly household income T20, which is calculated using two levels, T1 and T2, is the first predictor of happiness. Binary items are used to assess income levels. Those who fall into the T1 income category are designated with the number 1, denoting the monthly income bracket spanning from RM 16,449 to RM 21,501. The 80th to 89th percentile of Kuala Lumpur's household income distribution is the basis for this number. Those classified as T2 income, or having a monthly salary range of RM 21,502 and higher, are identified by the number 2. The 90th percentile and higher serve as the basis for these figures. The Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM, 2022) provided the value for the income range for the year 2022.

A single question about the study respondent's degree of health serves as the second predictor. By using a self-rated evaluation method, respondents evaluate their own health on a range from very poor (1) to excellent (6), providing an indication of their perceived state of health. This item was obtained from Eriksson et al. (2001).

The generosity scale, with 10 items (α Cronbach = 0.905), is the third predictor. In this study, there are five factors that contribute to an individual's generosity: 1) money; 2) goods; 3) time and energy; 4) helpful information and guidance; and 5) sharing and lending of goods. After studying the literature review in Allen (2018) and the Science of Generosity Initiative (2012) released by the University of Notre Dame, these five elements were developed. Each component consists of two items: a statement regarding the respondents' propensity to engage in generous activities for that aspect as well as their actions during the previous 12-months in relation to that aspect. For example, the element of money has the following information:

- I like to contribute in the form of money (example: in cash, monthly salary deduction, bank transfer, e-wallet, donation to charity, charity to beggars and others.)
- Over the past 12 months, I have always contributed in the form of money.

The next predictor was a 12-item social support measure (Cronbach's α = 0.780) that was modified from the combined findings of three categories–appraisal, belonging, and tangible–by Cohen et al. (1985). According to Cohen et al., each of these groups is represented by four (4) items. Several questions have been asked, for example:

- Belonging social support: “It is difficult for me to find people to accompany me on a day trip.”
- Appraisal social support: “There was no one I could share my worries and fears with.”
- Tangible social support: “It's easy for me to find people to help with daily work if I'm sick.”

This research evaluates the individual's view on their freedom to choose, based on a single-item variable from the 2020 Gallup World Poll (GWP): "I am satisfied with the freedom to choose what I want to do in life." A 2-item measure measuring public perception of corruption (Cronbach's α = 0.885) that was taken from the GWP is the last predictor. It asks participants how much they believe corruption permeates business and government. Happiness predictors and the dependent variable were measured using a six-point Likert scale. The self-rated health measurement scale ranged from 1 (very poor) to 6 (excellent), while the other factors had a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). A higher score indicates a more positive feature for all variables except the impression of corruption, where a higher score indicates greater belief that corruption is widespread in the country.

Moreover, control variables are included in this study: gender (male = 1, female = 2), age (number of years), life partner (not having a partner = 1, having a partner = 2), employment status (unemployed = 1, not unemployed = 2), and tertiary education (not having tertiary education = 1, having a tertiary education = 2). 'Not having a partner' specifically refers to the respondent's status as single, divorced, or widowed. The 'unemployed' option represents a jobless person who is actively seeking employment. Those who selected option '2' for tertiary education indicate that they have finished a tertiary education.

3.3 Regression Analysis Technique

The gathered data was subjected to correlation and descriptive analysis using IBM SPSS software. Multiple regression analysis was carried out using EViews statistical software. Ordinary least squares (OLS) was the initial regression technique, and it was followed by OLS with bootstrapped standard error replications. Bootstrap is a resampling strategy that does not require the assumption of normality for estimating a sample statistic's standard error and confidence interval (Efron & Tibshirani, 1993). This strategy of random sampling

with replacement is highly useful, especially when the original sample size is small (e.g., Burhan et al., 2017b). Thus, OLS analysis with 20,000 replications of bootstrapped coefficient estimates and standard errors was performed in this study. Furthermore, robust regressions were carried out using Huber's M-estimator (Huber, 1973) and Tukey's Bisquare M-estimator (Beaton & Tukey, 1974). The purpose is to eliminate any bias in regression results induced by overly large or small observed values. While both M-estimators give less weight to high-leverage observations, Tukey's Bisquare improves prediction accuracy by removing extreme outliers from the data. Robust regressions are less susceptible to outliers and produce more accurate predictions (Burhan et al., 2017a, 2018a, 2018b; 2023a, Suhaimi et al., 2019a, 2019b, 2020).

4.0 Results

Table 1 shows the breakdown of respondents by gender, unemployment, income, education, and life partner status. Out of the 334 participants, 40.42% were males and 59.58% were female. Malays make up the majority (82.04%) of responders. Furthermore, 91.92% of individuals were partnered, whereas the remaining individuals were not partnered, meaning they can be single, divorced, or widowed. Next, 33.23% of the 334 respondents belonged to the T2 income group and 66.77% of the respondents were from the T1 income group. In the study sample, the number of unemployed respondents was only two, or 0.6%. Last but not least, 96.41% of participants have completed a tertiary education.

Table 1 : Demographics of Respondents

Variable	**Criteria**	**Number of Respondents (*n*)**	**Percentage (%)**
Gender	Male	135	40.42%
	Female	199	59.58%
Income level	T1 (RM 16,449 to RM 21,501)	223	66.77%
	T2 (RM 21,502 and higher)	111	33.23%
Race	Malay	274	82.04%
	Chinese	18	5.39%
	Indian	29	8.68%
	Bumiputera	10	2.99%
	Others	3	0.90%
Life partner	Not partnered	27	8.08%
	Partnered	307	91.92%

Variable	Criteria	Number of Respondents (*n*)	Percentage (%)
Unemployment	Unemployed	2	0.60%
	Not unemployed	332	99.40%
Tertiary education	Not completed	12	3.59%
	Completed	322	96.41%

Table 2 displays descriptive statistics for selected variables for this study. A six-point Likert scale is used to measure the following: perception of corruption, generosity, happiness, health, social support, and freedom to make choices in life. The average happiness score, based on 334 responses, is 4.74. In particular, the T1 group's (*n*=223) mean happiness score is 4.69. In the meantime, the T2 group's (*n*=111) happiness score is 4.84. This study performed a t-test, which revealed that there was no significant (*p*=0.133) difference in happiness between T1 and T2 respondents.

Table 2 : Descriptive Statistics for Selected Variables in the Study (N=334)

Criteria	Happiness	Age	Health	Generosity	Social support	Freedom to make life choices	Perception of corruption	Number of dependents
Mean	4.739	44.25	4.740	4.336	4.003	4.802	4.094	3.440
Maximum	6.000	62.00	6.000	6.000	6.000	6.000	6.000	12.00
Minimum	1.670	21.00	1.000	1.600	2.330	1.000	1.000	0.000
Std. Dev.	0.894	7.729	0.914	0.874	0.751	1.003	1.402	2.185
Skewness	-0.897	-0.224	-0.762	-0.169	0.619	-0.867	-0.317	0.269
Kurtosis	3.860	2.964	3.813	2.960	2.822	3.724	2.204	3.220

Note: The mean score is based on a 6-point Likert scale from 1 (lowest) to 6 (highest).

The freedom to make life choices gets the highest average score (4.80) out of the five factors that determine happiness. It is followed by the degree of perceived health (4.74), generosity (4.34), perception of corruption (4.09), and social support (4.00). Furthermore, the researcher discovered that the maximum age of respondents was 62 years old, while the average age of 44.43 years based on the age distribution of respondents.

The interpretation of the mean score according to Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) and the interpretation of the mean score following its conversion to a 6-point Likert scale for this study are displayed in Table 3. Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) proposed that a five-point Likert scale's mean value interpretation approach begin at 1.00–2.00 (low),

2.01-3.00 (moderately low), 3.01–4.00 (moderately high), and 4.01–**5.0** (high). Since this study used a six-point scale, the comparison scale was revised, setting the low mean value at (1.00–2.25) and further adjusting for moderate-low mean values (2.26-3.50), moderate-high mean values (3.51-4.75), and high mean values (4.76–6.00). Thus, it's noteworthy to note that the 334 respondents' mean happiness score was 4.74. In particular, the T1 group's mean score of 4.69 falls into the moderately high category, and the T2 group's mean score of 4.85 falls into the high category.

Table 3 : Nunnally and Bernstein's (1994) Interpretation of Mean Scores, As Well As an Adjusted Interpretation of Mean Scores Using A 6-Point Likert Scale

5-Point Likert Scale (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994)		**6-Point Likert Scale (Current Study)**	
Mean Range	**Score Interpretation**	**Mean Range**	**Score Interpretation**
1.00-2.00	Low	1.00-2.25	Low
2.01-3.00	Moderately low	2.26-3.50	Moderately low
3.01-4.00	Moderately high	3.51-4.75	Moderately high
4.01-5.00	High	4.76-6.00	High

Additionally, the researcher determines if Table 2's seven variables have a normal distribution or not. Kim (2013) proposed that a reference value for demonstrating that a variable is normally distributed can be an absolute skewness value of less than or equal to 2 and an absolute Kurtosis value of less than or equal to 4. However, skewness (Skewness) values between -2 and +2 and kurtosis values between -7 and +7 are what Bryne (2010) and Hair et al. (2010) contend indicate that data is typical. Therefore, the eight variables in Table 2 can be assumed to be normally distributed by the researcher based on this reference.

The bivariate analysis's findings, which consist of Pearson correlations for each variable, are displayed in Table 4. The findings indicate that, at r=0.65 (p<0.01), happiness had the strongest positive correlation with freedom to make life choices. Apart from freedom, there were significant (p<0.01) correlations between happiness and generosity and health, with r=0.48 and r=0.46, respectively. Next, with a value of r=0.24, the association between happiness and social support is significant at the 1% level. Happiness and the perception of corruption, however, have a negative association (r=-0.30; p<0.01).

Lastly, there is no significant correlation (p>0.05) between happiness and any of the other variables, such as age, gender, life partner, income level, unemployment, number of dependents, or tertiary education.

Four regression analysis techniques were utilized to examine the effects of socioeconomic characteristics, such as generosity and social support, on T20 respondents' happiness, as correlation analysis cannot demonstrate causality. The results of regression analyses are displayed in Table 5. Through OLS, 'freedom to make life choices' was the strongest factor in influencing happiness, according to the standardized coefficient (β) value, which has a value of β=0.47 and is significant at the p<0.01 level. Furthermore, happiness was equally impacted by perceptions of corruption (β=-0.20, p<0.01) and health status (β=0.21, p<0.01). The happiness of T20 individuals did not significantly rise (p>0.10) with an increase in income from T1 to T2. Generosity and social support—two key variables for this study—also had positive and significant effects on happiness. While social support (β=0.10) was only significant at the p<0.05 level, the effect of generosity (β=0.13) was highly significant at the p<0.01 level through OLS.

Table 4 : Pearson Correlation Analysis for All Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Happiness	1.00												
2. Female	0.04	1.00											
3. Age	0.06	-0.08	1.00										
4. Life partner	0.04	-0.03	0.09	1.00									
5. Number of dependents	0.02	-0.04	0.18**	0.17**	1.00								
6. Not unemployed	-0.07	0.09	-0.05	-0.03	0.00	1.00							
7. Income level	0.08	-0.13*	0.12*	0.17**	-0.01	-0.03	1.00						
8. Tertiary education	0.05	0.10	0.04	0.10	-0.06	-0.01	-0.07	1.00					
9. Health status	0.46**	-0.05	-0.08	0.07	-0.15**	-0.06	-0.02	0.09	1.00				
10. Generosity	0.48**	-0.07	0.11*	0.04	-0.04	-0.05	0.21**	0.00	0.33**	1.00			
11. Social support	0.24**	-0.01	0.01	-0.05	-0.25**	-0.01	0.10	0.05	0.20**	0.26**	1.00		
12. Freedom to make life choices	0.65**	0.04	0.21**	0.00	-0.03	-0.05	0.07	-0.01	0.36**	0.47**	0.24**	1.00	
13. Perception of corruption	-0.30**	0.09	-0.05	0.07	-0.03	0.09	0.13*	0.06	-0.15**	-0.25**	0.13*	-0.16**	1.00

Note: Significance level: ** p<0.01, * p<0.05. Based on 2-tailed test

Table 5 : Regression Analyses Predicting Happiness of T20 Individuals

	Dependent Variable: Happiness of T20 Individuals			
	Ordinary least squares (OLS)	**Huber's M-estimator**	**Tukey's Bisquare M-estimator**	**OLS with bootstrapped coefficient estimates and standard errors (20,000 replications)**
Female	0.057	0.048	0.047	0.056
	(1.491)	(1.298)	(1.259)	(1.460)
Age	0.622*	0.304	0.077	0.624
	(1.948)	(1.000)	(0.250)	(1.251)
Age-squared	-0.692**	-0.397	-0.185	-0.694
	(-2.181)	(-1.310)	(-0.599)	(-1.471)
Life partnered	0.003	-0.002	0.000	0.003
	(0.082)	(-0.045)	(0.012)	(0.042)
Number of dependents	0.094**	0.101**	0.105***	0.094**
	(2.367)	(2.655)	(2.719)	(1.983)
Not unemployed	-0.007	-0.008	-0.010	NA
	(-0.182)	(-0.228)	(-0.275)	
Income level	0.063	0.054	0.043	0.063
	(1.566)	(1.394)	(1.081)	(1.558)
Tertiary education	0.040	0.026	0.011	0.041
	(1.058)	(0.717)	(0.305)	(0.888)
Health status	0.207****	0.210****	0.211****	0.207***
	(4.863)	(5.189)	(5.120)	(3.993)
Generosity	0.125***	0.119***	0.108**	0.125***
	(2.712)	(2.702)	(2.396)	(2.507)
Social support	0.104**	0.085**	0.078*	0.104**
	(2.531)	(2.149)	(1.901)	(2.488)
Freedom to make life choices	0.469****	0.522****	0.574****	0.469****
	(10.306)	(12.244)	(13.376)	(7.096)
Perceptions of corruption	-0.204****	-0.185****	-0.167****	-0.205****
	(-5.019)	(-4.728)	(-4.140)	(-4.382)
Included observation, *N*	334	334	331	334
R^2	0.562	0.633	0.682	0.562
Adj. R^2	0.545	0.618	0.668	0.546
F-statistic	31.64****	42.51****	52.19****	34.37****

Note: Main entries are standardized regression coefficients. T-statistics are in parentheses. Constant terms are zero. Significance level: *****p < .001; ***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .10*

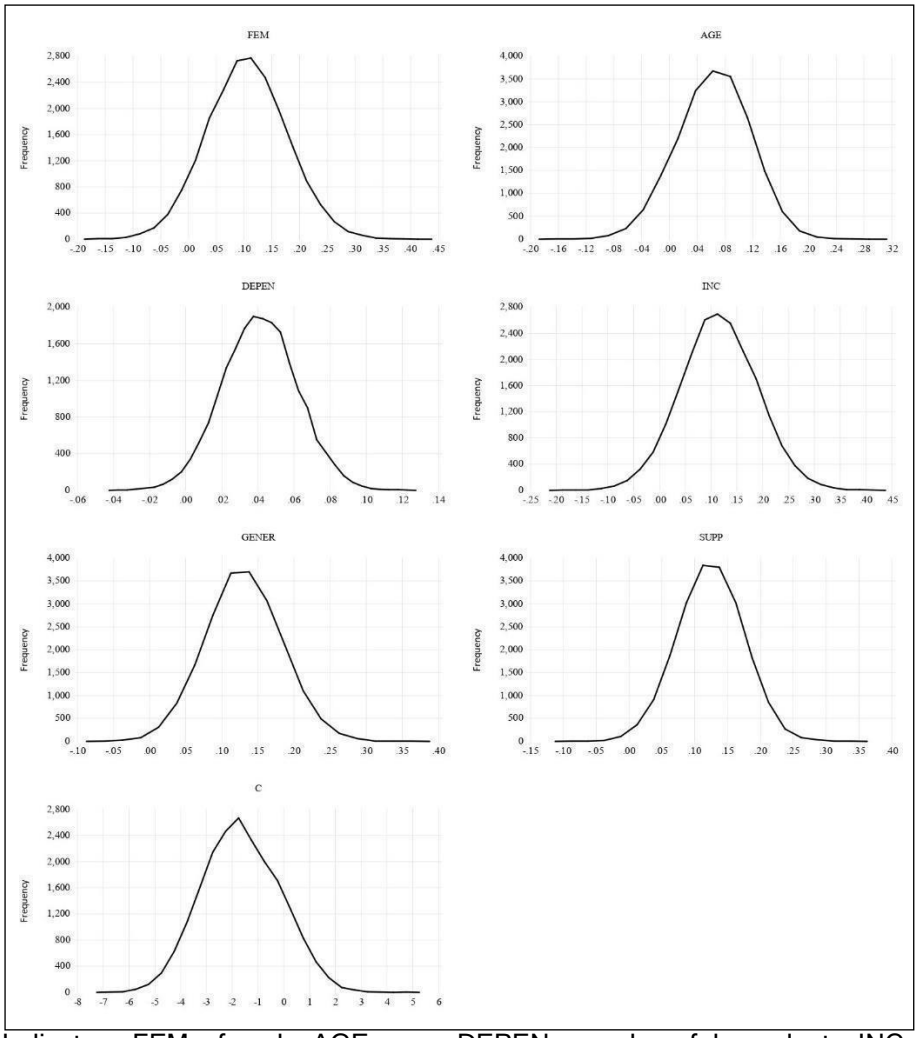
Furthermore, even at the p<0.10 level, other predictor variables that serve as control variables, such as gender, having a life partner or not, unemployment, income level, and tertiary education accomplishment, did not significantly affect happiness. Age had a

positive but marginally significant impact (p<0.10). Age-squared demonstrated evidence of greater happiness among middle-aged respondents compared to younger and older respondents, with a negative coefficient and significance at the p<0.05 level. The number of dependents also showed a positive link with happiness, which was significant at the 5% level. This suggests that in order for T20 households to become happier, they need to have more dependents, which is another way of saying that they need more children. Based on Table 5, the OLS model has an overall adjusted R^2 value of 0.55. This indicates that the predictor variables included in this study account for 55% of the variation in T20 individual happiness. At the p<0.01 level, the F statistic value of 31.64 is significant. The study's factors are jointly significant in predicting the happiness of T20 individuals, as demonstrated by the large F statistic value.

To determine the robustness of the results of the OLS in Table 5, this study performed robust regression analyses using Huber's M-estimator and Tukey's Bisquare estimator. The results reveal that using Huber's approach, the R^2 value climbed to 62% after giving less weight to outliers, and to 67% using Bisquare's approach, which occurred after three extreme data were excluded from the analysis (i.e., N=331). This time, age and age-squared were no longer significant in the regressions, but the significance of the number of dependents on happiness improved, as seen by increases in t-statistics values. The study indicated that 'freedom to make life choices', 'perceptions of corruptions', and 'health status' remained significant at p<0.001 level. Generosity (p<0.01) and social support (p<0.05) remained significant with Huber's but decreased to 5% and 10% using Tukey's M-estimator.

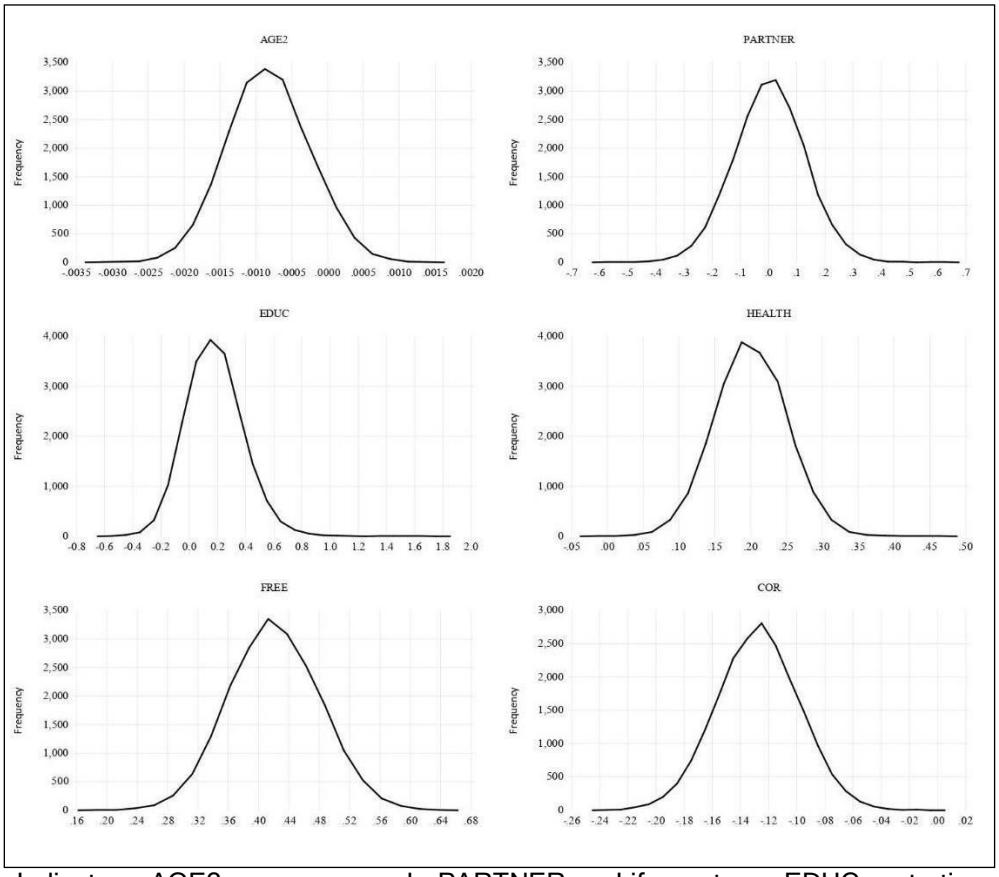
Lastly, a bootstrapping of coefficient estimates and standard error process with 20,000 replications was performed. This is to ensure that the effect of variables on happiness remains significant even if the distribution of the study data violated from the assumption of normality. The predictor factor 'not unemployed' was removed from this analysis because only two respondents had this status. This is meant to address the near-singular matrix error problem in the bootstrapping procedure. Table 5's final column demonstrates that health, perceptions of corruptions, and freedom to make life choices are all significant at the p<0.01 level. Furthermore, the impact of generosity (p<0.01) on happiness has a greater coefficient and is more significant than the impact of social support (p<0.05), which is consistent with their findings from OLS and M-estimators. This implies that when it comes to

fostering happiness of T20 individuals, the impact of generosity is somewhat greater than that of social support. Figure 1(a) shows the bootstrap distribution of unstandardized regression coefficients (20,000 replications) for all independent variables, which continues into Figure 1(b). Based on the findings in Table 5 (i.e., bootstrapped OLS) and Figures 1(a) and 1(b), this study indicated that, under ideal "normal distribution" conditions, the predictor factors of generosity and social support have a substantial impact on happiness.



Indicators: FEM = female, AGE = age, DEPEN = number of dependents, INC = income level, GENER = generosity, SUPP = social support, C = constant

Figure 1 (a) : The Study Bootstrapped Distribution of Unstandardized Regression Coefficients For Each Independent Variable (20,000 Replications)



Indicators: AGE2 = age-squared, PARTNER = Life partner, EDUC = tertiary education, HEALTH = health, FREE = freedom to make life choices, COR = perception of corruption

Figure 1(b) : Bootstrapped Distribution of Unstandardized Regression Coefficients For Each Independent Variable (20,000 Replications)

5.0 Discussion

This study investigates the impact of generosity and social support on the happiness of high-income individuals, namely the T20 group in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The study model employed in this study was modified from Helliwell et al.'s World Happiness Report (2023). This study's findings indicate a considerable positive association between generosity and social support and happiness. This is consistent with the conclusions reported in numerous earlier research, as indicated in the literature review.

Furthermore, after controlling for other variables, the study's multiple regression analysis revealed that the influence of generosity and social support on T20 happiness was also significant. But

compared to the effect of social support (β=0.09; p<0.05), the effect of generosity (β=0.12; p<0.01) was marginally stronger and more significant. This result runs counter to the WHR analysis that found that social support had a larger impact on enhancing community happiness than generosity (Helliwell et al., 2023). However, the WHR used an international study sample, with study findings that summarized the effect or average statistical value at the macro level. The current study, on the other hand, employed the individual level as the unit of analysis and only includes respondents from the high-income group (T20), leaving out those from the low- and medium-income bracket.

According to the study's findings, those who are kind, giving, or who take pleasure in doing good things for other people would be happier with themselves. This idea also holds true for people who regularly get social assistance from their family and the community. Compared to people who connect with others less or who don't get as much support from their social surroundings, they are happier.

Surprisingly, in this study, an increase in income among T20 from T1 to T2 level had no significant relationship with happiness. This contradicts previous findings, which demonstrated a favorable association between income levels, individual financial well-being, or socioeconomic position, and overall happiness and life satisfaction among Malaysians (Boo et al., 2016; Chong et al., 2021; Lim et al., 2017; Sabri et al., 2021; Sabri & Zakaria, 2015). Given that rising income among T20s did not boost happiness, this study concludes that any effort to design policies that foster intact social interactions among community members is critical. This attempts to build community members that help one another and are more generous to those in need. This mechanism has the potential to boost social capital and contribute to overall happiness.

It is appropriate for the researcher to claim that helping others, or being giving and receiving social support, is a reciprocal process in human connections that leads to high-income individuals' happiness (T20). This is supported by the findings of correlation and regression analyses, which consistently reveal a substantial positive association between happiness and two essential factors: generosity and social support received. As a result, it can be argued that both the act of giving something good, assessed as generosity, and the act of getting assistance or something good, measured as social support, are required to promote individual happiness. This demonstrates that people who have higher incomes should always have a desire to give,

and they require social support from others around them, even if they have a greater status in society. The fact that charity has a bigger impact on happiness than social support suggests that T20 players should actively seek opportunities to help or benefit more people in need, rather than receiving or benefiting from their surroundings.

Meanwhile, the direction of the link between happiness and other predictor variables is consistent with that revealed in the WHR. The outcomes of this study show that health status was positively associated with happiness, which is consistent with previous research (e.g., Boo et al., 2020; Lim et al., 2017). As a result, appropriate policies can be implemented to promote access to health care, hence enhancing Malaysians' happiness. Other indicators of happiness, such as freedom to make life choices and perceptions of corruption, all show significant positive and negative effects on the happiness of the T20 high-income group. This suggests that the more free a person is, the happier they are, and the less they perceive corruption, the higher their degree of happiness. Freedom to make life choices is the most powerful indicator of happiness when compared to other variables. This is consistent with Verme's (2009) findings, which indicated that the freedom to make life choices predicts happiness more accurately than health status, employment status, income, or marital status. Individual freedom is vital because it allows people to express their thoughts as well as their feelings, allowing them to make their own decisions and choices without being constrained by the government or society.

6.0 Conclusion

This study provides a significant contribution to understanding the impact of generosity and social support on the happiness of high-income individuals (T20) in Kuala Lumpur. The findings reveal that both generosity and social support are positively associated with happiness, with generosity having a stronger effect. This highlights the crucial role of giving in fostering well-being, even among those with greater financial resources. Importantly, the results suggest that policy efforts should focus not solely on economic growth or income increases, but on fostering social cohesion and encouraging acts of generosity to enhance the T20 community well-being. This has broader implications for public policy, which suggests that creating environments that facilitate social support networks and altruistic behaviour may be more effective in improving happiness than income redistribution alone.

Furthermore, the study offers insights into the significance of cultural values, particularly among the Malay respondents, whose strong cultural emphasis on communal responsibility may further shape these dynamics. Future research should explore these cultural factors in greater depth and extend the focus to include other income groups and ethnicities. As a result, this will potentially enable a more comprehensive understanding of the determinants of happiness in Malaysia.

7.0 Limitations of the Study

The primary goal of this research is to investigate the impact of generosity and social support on the level of happiness of the high-income group (T20) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. This study does not focus on other elements that influence individual happiness, which have been examined by earlier studies. Although not given much attention, these other aspects serve as control variables in this study. Furthermore, this study is limited to the high-income group (T20) who live in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Kuala Lumpur was chosen because to its larger population density and higher cost of living than other Malaysian states. High-income workers living outside of the Kuala Lumpur area or in other states are excluded from this study since their costs of living and income range differ from Kuala Lumpur's, although each state has its own T20 household income class. Moreover, this study only included participants between the ages of 18 and 64. According to International Labor Organization (ILO) standards, adults are those aged 18 and older, whereas those aged 18 to 64 are regarded to be actively engaged in economic activity.

Moreover, an additional constraint of this research is that a significant proportion of the participants (82.04%) are Malays. This is in opposition to the actual population distribution, which stands at 41.6% for Chinese, 47.7% for Malay, and 10% for Indians. Indeed, among the total population of Malaysia, 70.1% identified as Bumiputera, 22.6 percent as ethnic Chinese, and 6.6 percent as ethnic Indian (DOSM, 2022). One potential limitation of the present study is that Malays may be more receptive to responding to the questionnaire survey. Indeed, the researchers are able to affirm that the survey sites are relatively diverse in terms of the main races represented.

The higher proportion of Malay respondents (82.04%) compared to other ethnic groups in Malaysia may affect the generalizability of the findings across the nation's diverse population. Malays, as a racial

group, are known to place significant emphasis on communal values such as mutual cooperation and zakat (charitable giving), which might influence their perceptions of generosity and social support in ways that differ from other ethnic groups like the Chinese or Indians, whose cultural norms may prioritize different values. The relatively low representation of Chinese respondents (who make up 22.6% of the population) may mean that the study does not fully capture how cultural differences in social support and generosity impact happiness. Future research could explore how these cultural variations across racial groups contribute to happiness. This could potentially yield a more nuanced understanding of how generosity and social support are perceived in multi-ethnic societies like Malaysia.

Additionally, this study relied on self-reported measures, which are susceptible to social desirability bias. Future research could benefit from employing mixed methods or longitudinal designs to explore these relationships over time and across a more diverse sample. Moreover, expanding this research to include qualitative interviews, for instance, could deepen understanding of how income levels shape the perception and experience of generosity and social support in contributing to happiness.

Funding Declaration

This work was supported by Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) Malaysia through the Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS) (Project Code: FRGS/1/2021/SS0/UPM/02/2).

References

Aknin, L. B., Barrington-Leigh, C. P., Dunn, E. W., Helliwell, J. F., Burns, J., Biswas-Diener, R., Kemeza, I., Nyende, P., Ashton-James, C. E., & Norton, M. I. (2013). Prosocial spending and well-being: Cross-cultural evidence for a psychological universal. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 104(*4), 635–652.

Aknin, L. B., Broesch, T., Hamlin, J. K., & Van de Vondervoort, J. W. (2015). Prosocial behavior leads to happiness in a small-scale rural society. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General, 144*(4), 788.

Aknin, L. B., & Whillans, A. V. (2021). Helping and happiness: A review and guide for public policy. *Social Issues and Policy Review, 15*(1), 3-34.

Allen, S. (2018). *The Science of Generosity*. The Greater Good Science Center at the University of California, Berkeley. Retrieved from https://www.templeton.org/discoveries/science-of-generosity

Beaton, A. E., & Tukey, J. W. (1974). The fitting of power series, meaning polynomials, illustrated on band-spectroscopic data. *Technometrics, 16*(2), 147–185.

Boo, M. C., Yen, S. H., & Lim, H. E. (2016). A note on happiness and life satisfaction in Malaysia. *Malaysian Journal of Economic Studies, 53*(2), 261-277.

Boo, M. C., Yen, S. H., & Lim, H. E. (2020). Income and subjective well-being: a case study. *Kajian Malaysia: Journal of Malaysian Studies, 38*(2), 91–114.

Brown, G. D. A., Quispe-Torreblanca, E., & Gathergood, J. (2024, in press). Money, methodology, and happiness: Using big data to study causal relationships between income and well-being. Forthcoming in Pogrebna, G., & Hills, T. (Eds.), *Cambridge Handbook of Behavioural Data Science*. Cambridge University Press.

Burhan, N. A. S., Azizul, M. D. A, Sabri, M. F., Wan Jaafar, W. M., Hamsan, H. H., & Baharuddin, N. (2023a). Is police force size related to crime rates? *Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies, 47*, 195-210.

Burhan, N. A. S., Mohamad, M. R., Kurniawan, Y., & Sidek, A. H. (2014). National intelligence, basic human needs, and their effect on economic growth. *Intelligence, 44*, 103-111.

Burhan, N. A. S., Razak, R. C., Ibrahim, S., Selamat, M. R., & Rosli, M. R. (2018a). Social classes of intelligence, economic growth and technological achievement: robust regression and outlier detection. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Economics, 30*(2), 148-163.

Burhan, N. A. S., Razak, R. C., Rahman, A. R. A., Selamat, M. R., Zalli, M. M. M., & Rosli, M. R. (2018b). Intellectual giftedness for leadership: how robust is the crime reducing effect of intellectual class? *Mankind Quarterly, 59*(1), 57-86.

Burhan, N. A. S., Razak, R. C., Salleh, F., & Tovar, M. E. L. (2017a). The higher intelligence of the 'creative minority' provides the infrastructure for entrepreneurial innovation. *Intelligence, 65*, 93-106.

Burhan, N. A. S., Sabri, M. F., & Rindermann, H. (2023b). Cognitive ability and economic growth: how much happiness is optimal? *International Review of Economics, 70*(1), 63-100.

Burhan, N. A. S., Sabri, M. F., Samah, A. A., Jaafar, W. M. W., & Noor, A. M. (2021). Does happiness boost the impact of intelligence on economic growth? *Mankind Quarterly, 62*(1), 129-150.

Burhan, N. A. S., Yunus, M. M., Tovar, M. E. L., & Burhan, N. M. G. (2017b). Why are cognitive abilities of children so different across countries? The link between major socioeconomic factors and PISA test scores. *Personality and Individual Differences, 105*, 95-106.

Byrne, B. M. (2010). *Structural equation modeling with AMOS: Basic concepts, applications, and programming.* Routledge.

Chong, K. F., Sabri, M. F., Magli, A. S., Abd Rahim, H., Mokhtar, N., & Othman, M. A. (2021). The effects of financial literacy, self-efficacy and self-coping on financial behavior of emerging adults. *Journal of Asian Finance, Economics and Business, 8*(3), 905-915.

Cohen S., Mermelstein R., Kamarck T., & Hoberman, H. M. (1985). Measuring the functional components of social support. In Sarason, I., G., & Sarason, B., R., (Eds). *Social support: Theory, research, and applications.* Martinus Niijhoff.

Colak, T. S., & Doğan, U. (2016). Does the use of social media ensure social support and happiness*? International Online Journal of Educational Sciences, 8*(4).

Diener, E. (2000). Subjective well-being: The science of happiness and a proposal for a national index. *American Psychologist, 55*(1), 34.

Diener, E., Tay, L., & Oishi, S. (2013). Rising income and the subjective well-being of nations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 104*(2), 267.

Dominguez-Fuentes, J. M., & Hombrados-Mendieta, M. I. (2012). Social support and happiness in immigrant women in Spain. *Psychological Reports, 110*(3), 977-990.

DOSM (2022). Population And Housing Census. Retrieved from https://dev.dosm.gov.my/portal-main/release-content/key-findings-population-and-housing-census-of-malaysia-2020-administrative-district

Dunn, E. W., Gilbert, D. T., & Wilson, T. D. (2011). If money doesn't make you happy, then you probably aren't spending it right. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 21*(2), 115-125.

Easterlin, R. A. (1974). Does economic growth improve the human lot? Some empirical evidence. In David, P. A., & Reder, M., W., (Eds). *Nations and households in economic growth* (pp. 89-125). Academic Press.

Easterlin, R. A. (2023). Why does happiness respond differently to an increase vs. decrease in income? *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization, 209*, 200-204.

Easterlin, R. A., McVey, L. A., Switek, M., Sawangfa, O., & Zweig, J. S. (2010). The happiness–income paradox revisited. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 107*(52), 22463-22468.

Efron, B., & Tibshirani, R. (1993). *An introduction to the bootstrap.* Chapman & Hall.

Eriksson, I., Undén, A. L., & Elofsson, S. (2001). Self-rated health. Comparisons between three different measures. Results from a population study. *International Journal of Epidemiology, 30*(2), 326-333.

Gallup World Poll (GWP) (2020). *World Poll methodology.* Gallup Inc.

Geenen, N. Y., Hohelüchter, M., Langholf, V., & Walther, E. (2014). The beneficial effects of prosocial spending on happiness: Work hard, make money, and spend it on others? *Journal of Positive Psychology, 9*(3), 204-208.

Hair, J., Black, W. C., Babin, B. J. & Anderson, R. E. (2010) *Multivariate data analysis* (7th ed.). Pearson Educational International.

Helliwell, J. F., Layard, R., Sachs, J. D., Aknin, L. B., De Neve, J.-E., & Wang, S. (Eds.). (2023). *World Happiness Report 2023* (11th ed.). Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

Huber, P. (1973). Robust regression: Asymptotics, conjectures and Monte Carlo. *Annals of Statistics, 1*(5), 799−821.

Kim, H. Y. (2013). Statistical notes for clinical researchers: Assessing normal distribution (2) using skewness and kurtosis*. Restorative Dentistry & Endodontics, 38*(1), 52-54.

Lakey, B. (2013). Perceived social support and happiness: The role of personality and relational processes. In S. A. David, I. Boniwell, & A. C. Ayers (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of happiness* (pp. 847–859). Oxford University Press.

Lim, H. E., Shaw, D., & Liao, P. S. (2017). Revisiting the income-happiness paradox: The case of Taiwan and Malaysia. *Institutions and Economies, 9*(4), 53-69.

Lyubomirsky, S., & Lepper, H. S. (1999). A measure of subjective happiness: Preliminary reliability and construct validation. *Social Indicators Research, 46*(2), 137-155.

Mahanta, D., & Aggarwal, M. (2013). Effect of perceived social support on life satisfaction of university students. *European Academic Research, 1*(6), 1083-1094.

Moche, H., & Västfjäll, D. (2022). To give or to take money? The effects of choice on prosocial spending and happiness. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 17*(5), 742-753.

Moeini, B., Barati, M., Farhadian, M., & Ara, M. H. (2018). The association between social support and happiness among elderly in Iran. *Korean Journal of Family Medicine, 39*(4), 260

Myslinski, S. (2014). *Giving, takers, and happiness: How prosocial motivation relates to the happiness effects of giving.* Wharton University of Pnensylvania.

Nunnally, J., & Bernstein, I. (1994). *Psychometric theory* (3rd ed.). McGraw-Hill.

Öztemel, K., & Yıldız-Akyol, E. (2021). The predictive role of happiness, social support, and future time orientation in career adaptability. *Journal of Career Development, 48*(3), 199-212.

Powdthavee, N. (2010). How much does money really matter? Estimating the causal effects of income on happiness. *Empirical economics, 39*, 77-92.

Sabri, M. F., Dass, T. M., Burhan, N. A. S., Wahab, H. A. R. A., Wijekoon, R., & Simanjuntak, M. (2021). Determinants of life satisfaction among female-headed households in Malaysia. *International Journal of Business and Society, 22*(1), 276-295.

Sabri, M. F. & Zakaria, N. F. (2015). Financial well-being among young employees in Malaysia. In Z. Copur (Ed.), *Handbook of research on behavioral finance and investment strategies: Decision making in the financial industry* (pp. 221-235). IGI Global.

Science of Generosity Initiative. (2012). What is Generosity? University of Notre Dame. Retrieved from https://generosityresearch.nd.edu/more-about-the- initiative/what-is-generosity/

Suhaimi, S. S. A., Burhan, N. A. S., Daud, M. N., & Rahman, A. R. A. (2019a). Does good governance strengthen the intelligence-happiness nexus? *Mankind Quarterly, 60*(1), 25-46.

Suhaimi, S. S. A., Burhan, N. A. S., Rahman, A. R. A., & Daud, M. N. (2019b). Populations with higher average intelligence are healthier, but do they smoke fewer cigarettes? *Mankind Quarterly, 59*(4), 487-508.

Suhaimi, S. S. A., Burhan, N. A. S., Sabri, M. F., Rahman, A. R. A., & Ibrahim, S. (2020). IQ and governance contribute to entrepreneurship, but in different ways. *Journal of Social, Political, and Economic Studies, 45*(3/4), 230-259.

Tan, C. S., Low, S. K., & Viapude, G. N. (2018). Extraversion and happiness: The mediating role of social support and hope. *PsyCh Journal, 7*(3), 133-143.

Verme, P. (2009). Happiness, freedom and control. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization, 71*(2), 146-161.

World Bank (2023). *Urban population (% of total population) – Malaysia.* The World Bank Group. Retrieved from https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.IN.ZS?locations=MY