



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

***RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LIFE ASPIRATIONS, SATISFACTION OF  
PSYCHOLOGICAL NEEDS, SUBJECTIVE VITALITY AND HAPPINESS  
AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES  
IN MALAYSIA***

**ZAHRA AJRI**

**FEM 2018 1**



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IN MALAYSIA**

**By**

**ZAHRA AJRI**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,  
in Fulfillment of Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**December 2017**

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## **DEDICATION**

While we are far apart, I dedicate this thesis to both of you who supported me with your emotional and financial care and helped me to achieve my goals and dreams, both of you who taught me not to think about what I have, but also what I am; my lovely parents.



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in Fulfilment  
of the Requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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By

**ZAHRA AJRI**

**December 2017**

**Chairman : Mohammad Shatar B. Sabran, PhD**  
**Faculty : Human Ecology**

Traditionally, scholars and societies have focused on the negative side of human behaviour and ignored the positive side. Therefore, few studies have been conducted that look into happiness as the human life purpose. This has resulted in a knowledge gap regarding human well-being, especially in Malaysia. To address this gap, the present study has developed a new hypotheses that focuses on happiness and its' related dynamics, rather than just concentrating on ill-being.

Consequently, this study was designed to examine the relationship between life aspirations and happiness as well as the mediating role of psychological needs. To provide a valid foundation for predicting well-being among undergraduate students, the current study utilized goal contents theory (GCT), basic psychological needs theory (BPNT), and vitality concept to develop the theoretical framework. Specifically, the current research has examined an additional concept i.e. vitality, by employing a serial multiple mediator model. Moreover, it was examined whether extrinsic goals have the same function as intrinsic goals on happiness. In addition, this study was designed to examine the moderating role of autonomy on the relationship between intrinsic goals and happiness among undergraduate students in Malaysia.

A cross-sectional study using multi-stage cluster random sampling method was conducted on 400 undergraduate students from three public universities (UM, UKM and UPM) in Klang Valley, Malaysia. A self-administered questionnaire package containing assessments of goal contents / aspiration index, basic psychological need

satisfaction, subjective vitality and short depression-happiness scale was distributed among respondents. Data from the survey was then subjected to the partial least squares (PLS) path modeling approach to study the relationship between variables by using Smart-PLS.

Results have supported the research hypotheses and indicated that life aspirations (intrinsic goals and extrinsic goals) of undergraduate students are positively and significantly related to their happiness. Moreover, the findings of this study have shown that psychological needs and vitality are partially mediating the relationship between intrinsic goals and happiness. Furthermore, the current study has applied a more comprehensive mediation model. Serial multiple-mediation path was modeled in the present study to advance the understanding of happiness among students. In this path, vitality is in fact the second mediator and comes after psychological needs. This path commences from intrinsic goals, being mediated by the path of psychological needs-vitality, and finally results in happiness. Moreover, findings indicated that extrinsic goals have no relationship with vitality and psychological needs.

Findings have supported a model based on BPNT theory and GCT theory and suggested that psychological need fulfillment and subjective vitality would be key factors in increasing happiness among students. Findings also highlight the importance of autonomy as a moderator on the relationship between intrinsic goals and happiness. The implication of this study would apply to all parties including parents, teachers, university policy makers, media and health specialists. All parties involved attempting to increase well-being and happiness in university and society should encourage students to improve their relationships, personal growth, community affiliation, and spirituality as their intrinsic goals. This strategy will help students to satisfy their basic psychological needs and consequently lead to more energy and happiness in their life.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**HUBUNGAN ANTARA ASPIRASI HIDUP, KEPUASAN KEPERLUAN  
PSIKOLOGI, SUBJEKTIF DAYA TENAGA DAN KEBAHAGIAAN DI  
KALANGAN PELAJAR SISWAZAH DARIPADA UNIVERSITI  
PENYELIDIKAN MALAYSIA**

Oleh

**ZAHRA AJRI**

**Disember 2017**

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Secara tradisinya, para penyelidik dan masyarakat telah memberi tumpuan kepada aspek negatif tingkah laku manusia dan mengabaikan aspek positif. Oleh itu, hanya segelintir kajian yang menyelidik aspek kebahagiaan, iaitu aspek yang tujuan hidup manusia. Ini telah mengakibatkan jurang dalam pengetahuan mengenai kesejahteraan manusia, terutamanya di Malaysia. Untuk menangani jurang ini, kajian ini mengemukakan hipotesis baru yang menumpu pada kebahagiaan dan dinamik yang berkaitan, dan bukan sekadar menumpu perhatian kepada kesengsaraan.

Oleh itu, kajian ini direka untuk menyelidik hubungan antara aspirasi hidup dan kebahagiaan serta peranan perantaraan keperluan psikologi. Untuk menyediakan asas yang sah untuk meramalkan kesejahteraan di kalangan siswazah, kajian ini menggunakan teori kandungan matlamat (GCT), teori keperluan asas psikologi (BPNT), dan konsep daya tenaga dalam kerangka teori. Khususnya, kajian ini telah menyelidik konsep tambahan iaitu daya tenaga, dengan menggunakan model perantaraan berbilang bersiri. Kajian ini juga memeriksa sama ada matlamat ekstrinsik mempunyai fungsi yang sama seperti matlamat intrinsik terhadap kebahagiaan. Di samping itu, kajian ini direka untuk mengkaji peranan penyederhanaan autonomi dalam hubungan antara matlamat intrinsik dan kebahagiaan di kalangan siswazah di Malaysia.

Kajian keratan rentas telah dijalankan dengan menggunakan kaedah pensampelan kelompok rawak pelbagai peringkat ke atas 400 pelajar mahasiswa dari tiga universiti awam (UM, UKM dan UPM) di Lembah Klang, Malaysia. Pakej soal

selidik yang ditadbir oleh diri sendiri yang mengandungi penilaian kandungan matlamat / indeks aspirasi, kepuasan keperluan asas psikologi, daya tenaga subjektif dan skala pendek kemurungan-kebahagiaan telah diedarkan di kalangan responden. Data dari kaji selidik kemudiannya dimasukkan ke dalam model “partial least squares” (PLS) untuk mengkaji hubungan antara pembolehubah dengan menggunakan perisian Smart-PLS.

Keputusan kajian menyokong hipotesis penyelidikan dan menunjukkan bahawa aspirasi kehidupan (matlamat intrinsik dan matlamat ekstrinsik) para siswazah mempunyai kesan positif dan signifikan terhadap kebahagiaan mereka. Selain itu, penemuan kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa keperluan psikologi dan daya tenaga memainkan peranan penyederhanaan dalam hubungan antara matlamat intrinsik dan kebahagiaan. Tambahan pula, kajian ini telah menggunakan model pengantaraan yang lebih komprehensif. Model perantaraan berbilang bersiri telah dimodelkan dalam kajian ini untuk memajukan pemahaman tentang kebahagiaan di kalangan siswazah. Dalam pendekatan ini, daya tenaga merupakan perantaraan kedua selepas keperluan psikologi. Pendekatan ini bermula dari matlamat intrinsik, dimediasi oleh keperluan psikologi dan daya tenaga, dan akhirnya menghasilkan kebahagiaan. Selain itu, keputusan kajian menunjukkan bahawa matlamat ekstrinsik tidak mempunyai hubungan dengan keperluan psikologi dan daya tenaga.

Kajian menyokong model berdasarkan teori BPNT dan teori GCT dan mencadangkan pemenuhan keperluan psikologi dan daya tenaga subjektif akan menjadi faktor utama dalam meningkatkan kebahagiaan di kalangan siswazah. Kajian juga menekankan kepentingan autonomi sebagai penyederhana dalam hubungan antara matlamat intrinsik dan kebahagiaan. Implikasi kajian ini boleh diterapkan kepada semua pihak termasuk ibu bapa, pendidik, pembuat dasar universiti, media dan pakar kesihatan. Semua pihak terlibat yang cuba untuk meningkatkan kesejahteraan dan kebahagiaan di universiti dan masyarakat harus menggalakkan siswazah untuk memperbaiki hubungan mereka, pertumbuhan peribadi, hubungan masyarakat, dan kerohanian sebagai matlamat intrinsik mereka. Strategi ini akan membantu siswazah untuk memenuhi keperluan psikologi asas mereka dan seterusnya menghasilkan lebih daya tenaga dan kebahagiaan dalam hidup mereka.



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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AI	Aspirations Index
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
AU	Autonomy
BNSG-S	Basic Need Satisfaction in General Scale
BPNT	Basic Psychological Needs Theory
CP	Competence
DV	Dependent Variable
EWB	Eudaimonia Well-Being
GCT	Goal Content Theory
HCM	Hierarchical Component Model
HOC	Higher Order Component
HPY	Happiness
INT	Intrinsic Goals
IV	Independent Variable
LOC	Lower Order Component
LVS	Latent Variable Scores
MED	Mediator
PLS	Partial Least Square
PSY	Psychological Needs
RL	Relatedness
SDHS	Short Depression Happiness Scale
SDT	Self-Determination Theory
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
SVS	Subjective Vitality Scale
SWB	Subjective Well-Being
Vit	Vitality

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Overview

This chapter consists of several major sections. The first section introduces the topic under discussion and provides a background to the study. The second part states the problem that is researched. Next, the research questions of study are stated as well as the research objectives and hypotheses. The next part of the chapter is allocated to the significance of the study. Then, scope and limitation of the study are stated. The final part of the chapter provides the constitutive and operational definition of the key terms used in the study.

### 1.2 Background of Study

Happiness is an ultimate goal in everyone life. Often, undergraduate students are subjected to experience new situation with new stress-inducing factors. These factors may make them to feel unhappy or find less well-being in their life. Based on a study carried out by Sherina & Kaneson in (2003), 35.9% undergraduate students among medical students of Universiti Putra Malaysia did not feel happiness in their life. While, the main reason of being unhappy was indicated academic performance by them.

In recent years, the subject of happiness has increasingly garnered more attention in the field of psychology, and numerous researchers are investigating this subject (Argyle, 2013; Lyubomirsky, 2008; Seligman, 2002). Of the various constructs associated with positive well-being, happiness has received considerable attention in the past forty years (Bernard, 2010). Happiness, has typically been related to concepts such as, pleasure, well-being, satisfaction and jubilation, (Seligman, 2002) and subjective well-being (Seligman et al., 2005) These concepts and words are usually used interchangeably (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005).

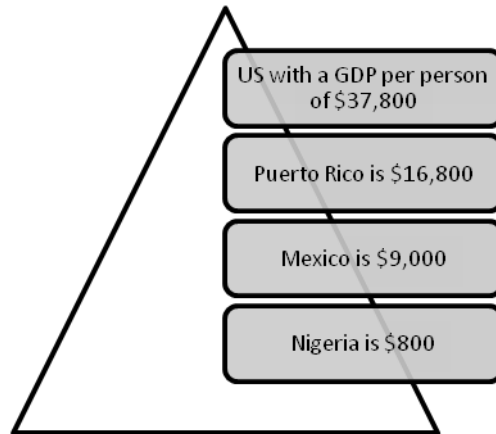
In another study, Al-Naggar et al. (2010) asked undergraduate students in Malaysia about their thoughts on happiness by asking open-ended question such as, “What is your understanding of happiness? What do you think are the causes of the happiness? What prevents you from attaining happiness?” and the conversations were recorded. The findings showed that, students regarded money as the main source of happiness. And surprisingly when they were asked How do you handle when you are not happy? The Majority of the study participants stated that praying and reading Al-Quran is one of the ways to overcome this situation.

Therefore, Happiness is determined by various factors namely, family, health, income, social relationships, labor market status, job features, security, leisure, liberty, moral values and a lot more (Ahn et al., 2004). Furthermore, happiness is also influenced by numerous external factors such as social life, marriage, leisure activities, work satisfaction, as well as internal factors such as personality, personal goals and coping styles. Consequently, different individuals search for and find happiness in different things and places, according to their society and upbringing (Al-Naggar et al., 2010).

For undergrad students some factors influence them to be unhappy such as, the pressure to perform well academically, difficulties in integrating and adjusting in the system, and factors of uncertainty related to their future. In other words, factors such as, emotional, social, physical and family difficulties, may negatively affect or interfere with a students' academic performance and learning ability (Chew-Graham et al., 2003; Fish, 1996). This consequently, puts them at risk for depression, stress, and anxiety, which has an opposite effect of happiness (Schiffrin and Nelson, 2010). It was reported in a study that, 85/400 or 21.3% of tertiary students in Malaysia were diagnosed unhappy and around 46.5% of them claimed, studies and academic performance as the main factors for the cause of this issue (Teo and Say, 2012).

A World Value Survey which was conducted in 2003, was published in the New Scientist, a British magazine. The survey included individuals from across 65 different nations, and the survey revealed, that Puerto Rico and Mexico were the world's happiest countries, which reported the highest number of satisfied people, whereas Nigeria and Mexico reported the most globally optimistic people (Inglehart, 2004). Moreover, based on Yamamoto (2016), Latin America is one of the happiest regions in the world. However, this high subjective well-being does not correspond to the modern prototype of happiness which is based on the belief that richness and autonomy are the basic building blocks of a good life.

However, the measure of material prosperity as determined by the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita of a country, revealed that in 2003, USA had one of the highest GDP of \$37,800 per person (**Figure 1.1**), as compared to \$16,800 per person in Puerto Rico, \$9,000 in Mexico and a measly \$800 in Nigeria, the worlds happiest nations (Figure 1.1) (McDoniel, 2009).



**Figure 1.1 : “World’s happiest countries’ GDP compare with US GDP”**

Moreover, according to the United Nations Human Development Indicators ranking of 2003, Nigeria ranked 152 out of a total of 175 countries, 24th from the bottom, for education, life expectancy, literacy and, standard of living (McDoniel, 2009). These statistics, present an entirely new perspective to the concept of happiness, that happiness it is not necessarily associated with wealth, health, education or even life expectancy. Previous studies have demonstrated that, external factors including, marital status, health, educational background and income, have only very small effects on the variance in the level of happiness (Diener et al., 2003). In addition, surveys that have been carried out in the United States have indicated that, though the mean income in the country has increased over the past 60 years, there has been no increase in the levels of happiness during this period (Layard, 2010).

Regardless of general population, it is needed to study about positive side of human being among the specific group such as undergraduate students in universities. In other words, the emergence of the idea of positive psychology, suggests that societies have continuously focused on the negative side of human qualities and ignored the positive side. Thus, studies that focus on enhancing the good qualities of human beings in reducing symptoms of psychological illness, is required (C. Ng, 2014).

The construct of well-being is rather complex, and involves optimal experience and functioning. The current research on well-being has been derived from two different, perspectives namely, the hedonic approach, and the eudaimonic approach. The hedonic approach, emphasizes happiness, as defined in terms of pleasure attainment and avoidance of pain, while the eudaimonic approach, focuses on meaning and self-realization. These two approaches, have contributed in creating different research foci, and a concept that is divergent in certain areas, yet complementary in others (Ryan and Deci, 2001).



### 1.3 Problem Statement

Increasing happiness is one important aspect for students in social systems such as universities. Several recent studies conducted in Malaysia, have revealed that the prevalence of psychological distress which cause to unhappy state, is relatively high among university students and is increasing (Khor, 2011; Yusoff, 2011; Yusoff et al., 2013). Sherina et al. (2004) investigated among 396 undergraduate medical students of Universiti Putra Malaysia. The authors reported that, among the participants, 41.9% of them were suffering from psychological stress, which has a significant association with the opposite side of happiness which is depression. In another study, a prevalence rate of 13.9% to 29.3%, was reported as the rate of unhappy students among undergraduate students in Malaysia (Teh et al., 2015).

Due to the high prevalence and morbidity of depression, this subject has gained a lot of attention and research in Malaysia. Numerous studies have investigated the prevalence, risk factors involved, treatment options and outcomes of depression in different populations in Malaysia (C. Ng, 2014). After examining the different aspects regarding depression, a question arises that, is it not time that we change our way of thinking about human wellbeing? In other words, after continuously focusing on and emphasizing the negative aspects of human qualities and trying to find solutions to them, is it not time we turn our attention and thoughts towards the positive aspects, and start thinking, studying, discussing, and moving towards positivity? Consequently, more emphasis and attention should be placed on the happiness and wellbeing of undergraduate students as a means of improving their quality of life.

Throughout the history of mankind, in every culture (San Martín et al., 2010), the concept of happiness has always been of relevance, in one way or other (Layous and Lyubomirsky, 2014; Lyubomirsky, 2008). In present day life, most individuals are in search of happiness (Argyle, 2013), which has been rated and recognized as, the most important component of life (Al-Naggar et al., 2010).

In Malaysia, the mean level of subjective well-being of youths was compared with those of their American counterparts as reported by Diener and Suh (1999), and it was demonstrated that the level of SWB of Malaysian youths was much lower than American youths (Muhamad and Jaafar, 2009). In addition, Albaity (2012), also reported that non-Malaysians were generally happier than Malaysians. He observed that, there is a significant different in happiness between Malaysian and non-Malaysian students, and non-Malaysian students score a higher mean in happiness.

Traditionally, for the past couple of decades, researchers have focused mainly on how to change and improve psychological weaknesses. However, according to Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2014), the emergence of the subject of happiness has shifted the focus from improving the worst qualities in human beings to building

up their positive qualities. This new perspective, has changed the focus of individuals, researchers, communities and societies to concentrate on enhancing the positive aspects, instead of solely paying attention to illnesses and disorders. Therefore, in order to fill this gap, it would be necessary to conduct extensive research in order to identify potential factors such as life aspirations, satisfaction of basic psychological needs and subjective vitality that lead to happiness and enhance well-being among students accordingly.

Until now, there were only a limited number of studies that examined happiness, to better understand and facilitate it (Seligman, 2004). Most of the literature on happiness, were studies carried out in the West, and the populations examined belonged to either Western societies or other economically developed countries. There is a lack of research however, conducted in smaller nations and non-Western cultures on the subject of happiness (R. T. Howell et al., 2012). Since there is limited work on this subject in certain areas, it is therefore, important for this topic to be explored in non-Western cultures, which will significantly contribute to the body of knowledge (Muhamad and Jaafar, 2009). Hence, the one important objective of this study is to identify robust predictors of happiness (life aspirations, satisfaction of basic psychological needs, and subjective vitality) within undergraduate students in Malaysia.

One of the most interesting areas of research within the study of happiness is, the one that attempts to determine ways of attaining and increasing it (Bryce and Haworth, 2002; Lyubomirsky, 2008; Seligman, 2002; Sheldon and Lyubomirsky, 2006; Tkach and Lyubomirsky, 2006; Zaid et al., 2007). In Malaysia, in study of Al-Naggar et al. (2010), undergraduate students indicated money as the main way of attaining happiness. Moreover, the majority of undergraduates stated that when they are not happy in life, praying and reading Al-Quran is one important way to overcome this situation. Thus, some students look for happiness in external factors, such as money, while others search for happiness in internal factors, such as spirituality (Al-Naggar et al., 2010). In current study, these factors were indicated as life aspirations. This variable including intrinsic goals such as spirituality, personal growth, relationship, community affiliation and extrinsic goals such as money, fame and image which established to evaluate the important ways of attaining happiness among undergraduates.

According to the above points, this step leads to the most fundamental question of, under what conditions do intrinsic and extrinsic goals lead to happiness? This is where the research gap exists in the literature, what has yet to be determined are the elements, such as potential mediators including satisfaction of basic psychological needs and subjective vitality, and moderating role of autonomy for intrinsic life goals which may lead to an increase in happiness.

Furthermore, previous literature has revealed that the extent to which intrinsic and extrinsic goals are linked to basic psychological needs satisfaction for relatedness, competence, and autonomy is the key to differentiate between intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations. Moreover, subjective vitality has a positive correlation with emotional, psychological and social well-being. However, very few studies have attempted to determine the association between an individual's goals, psychological needs, subjective vitality, and wellbeing, and no studies to date have explored these factors among undergraduates in Malaysia.

The eudaimonic concept, which is concerned with generating happiness and wellbeing, emphasizes important aspects and facets of wellbeing. However, these facets have rarely (if ever) been investigated and assessed within East Asia populations. Accordingly, Howell (2012) in his study entitled "Happiness and Life Satisfaction in Malaysia", recommended analyzing happiness from an eudaimonic perspective for future studies and to further examine the relationship between happiness and life satisfaction or eudaimonic wellbeing.

Moreover, in another study in Malaysia authors observed that, the effects of being unhappy among undergraduates were detrimental to individuals as well as to the society, and could have adverse consequences such as, leading to medical dropouts, problems in relationships and marriages, increased suicidal tendencies, inability to work effectively, and burnout (Teh et al., 2015). From the literature, it is evident that, there are a few studies about internal factors that contribute to happiness. However, to the best of this researcher's knowledge, there is as of yet no study that has examined happiness from a eudaimonic perspective in Malaysia. There are few studies in Malaysia up to date which one of them is investigated happiness among university students of UTAR (Khor, 2011). Thus, this warrants further research which is required in order to fill the gap and lack of data on the research of happiness among Malaysians. By examining a diverse sample of undergraduate students from different majors and races of various universities and colleges, the findings can be generalized and extrapolated to other undergraduate students in Malaysia.

In summary, the research gap that this study aims to fill, is to contribute to the paucity of information on eudaimonia and happiness in Malaysia, it will also help elucidate well-being in a non-Western society, especially in a Muslim country among undergraduate students, which has not previously been studied in depth. Also, there is a need for a theoretical approach, in order to investigate the missing elements in the existing research literature, such as identifying potential moderators such as autonomy and serial mediating variables of basic psychological needs satisfaction and subjective vitality. Moreover, this study will provide insight into, not only the negative psychological issues faced by Malaysian undergraduate students, but also determining the internal factors that can contribute to enhancing happiness and quality of life, from a positive approach. Finally, the depression happiness scale which was originally developed to address a gap in the measurement

literature, will most likely be applied more extensively by researchers and practitioners, in an attempt to assess change from states of psychopathology through to states of well-being, instead of only concentrating on one side of this distribution (Linley and Joseph, 2004; Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2014).

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

The present study looks into intrinsic, extrinsic aspirations, psychological needs and subjective vitality factors that influence on Malaysian students' happiness. Specifically, this study seeks answers to the following questions:

- What is the percentage of happiness and unhappiness among undergraduate students in public universities?
- Are there any relationships between intrinsic goals, extrinsic goals, psychological needs, vitality and happiness among undergraduate students in public universities?
- Which predictor significantly predicts happiness among undergraduate students in Malaysia?
- To what extent psychological needs and vitality mediate the relationship between the life aspirations and happiness among undergraduate students?
- To what extent autonomy moderate the relationship between intrinsic aspirations and happiness among undergraduate students?

#### **1.5 Research Objectives**

The main objective of this research is to gain the first-hand knowledge in Eudaimonia Well-being among Malaysian students by providing a link between intrinsic/extrinsic aspirations and Happiness. This research also has an effort to find the mediating functions of psychological needs and vitality between intrinsic/extrinsic aspirations and Happiness and moderation effect of autonomy in the research model. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. To determine the percentage of happiness and unhappiness feelings among undergraduate students.
2. To determine the relationship between intrinsic goals, extrinsic goals, psychological needs, and vitality with happiness.
3. To determine the unique predictor of happiness among undergraduate students.
4. To determine the mediating roles of psychological needs and subjective vitality in the relationship between life aspirations and happiness among undergraduate students.
5. To determine the moderating role of autonomy on the relationship between intrinsic aspirations and happiness among undergraduate students.

## 1.6 Research Hypothesis

The hypotheses guiding this research are included:

*Hypothesis 1:* There is a significant relationship between students' intrinsic aspirations and Happiness.

*Hypothesis 2:* There is a significant relationship between students' extrinsic aspirations and Happiness.

*Hypothesis 3:* There is a significant relationship between students' intrinsic aspirations and psychological needs.

*Hypothesis 4:* There is a significant relationship between students' extrinsic aspirations and psychological needs.

*Hypothesis 5:* There is a significant relationship between students' psychological needs and happiness.

*Hypothesis 6:* There is a significant relationship between students' intrinsic aspirations and subjective vitality.

*Hypothesis 7:* There is a significant relationship between students' extrinsic aspirations and subjective vitality.

*Hypothesis 8:* There is a significant relationship between students' subjective vitality and happiness.

*Hypothesis 9:* Psychological needs mediate the relationship between students' intrinsic aspirations and happiness.

*Hypothesis 10:* Psychological needs mediate the relationship between students' extrinsic aspirations and happiness.

*Hypothesis 11:* Subjective vitality mediates the relationship between students' intrinsic aspirations and happiness.



*Hypothesis 12:* Subjective vitality mediates the relationship between students' extrinsic aspirations and happiness.

*Hypothesis 13:* There is a significant relationship between students' psychological needs and subjective vitality.

*Hypothesis 14:* Psychological needs and subjective vitality operate as serial multiple-mediators between undergraduate's intrinsic aspiration and Happiness.

*Hypothesis 15:* Psychological needs and subjective vitality operate as serial multiple-mediators between undergraduate's extrinsic aspiration and Happiness.

*Hypothesis 16:* Autonomy moderates the relationship between student's intrinsic aspirations and happiness.

## **1.7 Significance of Study**

The current study is significant in various points of view. The finding of this study may contribute to literature, universities and community programs, and parents as well as students' knowledge.

### **1.7.1 Contribution to Literature**

The search for happiness has always been an essential goal for human life. Individuals who experience more happiness, are more likely to be mentally healthy and, will have the ability to adapt to various circumstances in life. Therefore, the study of happiness and its origin, is not only pertinent and relevant but also fundamental.

For over three decades, researchers have attempted to determine and elucidate the correlation between wellbeing and life satisfaction among individuals, groups, and nations. Classically, these have been assessed objectively, and on a macro level, with regard to external factors including, political freedom, economic resources and fulfillment of basic human needs (Dolan et al., 2006). Diener and Seligman argue that, if people's ultimate goal is well-being, and happiness and life satisfaction are just means to achieve this end, then it becomes essential to apply measures of wellbeing and happiness when assessing the health of an individual, region or country.

Wellbeing, on an individual level has been defined in various terms, as, cognitive, affective, and psychological processes. A number of different demographic aspects namely, age, education, health, and marital status, have been associated in varying degrees to happiness measures, in large first world countries, however, there is a paucity of research on this subject in smaller, especially non-Western societies. This study henceforth, intends to determine and examine measures of happiness among Malaysian undergraduate students, as well as to identify robust predictors of these measures. Consequently, the present investigation is a preliminary attempt, which will contribute to the growing literature on wellbeing measures in Malaysia, as a non-Western society.

Malaysia is a diverse nation, in terms of ethnicity, language, race, and religion. Due to its rich diversity, Malaysia has become the focus of a number of growing studies on wellbeing. However, thus far, only a few (if any) studies have examined happiness from a eudaimonic perspective among the Malaysian population. Moreover, the role of psychological needs has been studied extensively in Western societies, but the current study is the first of its kind in Malaysia, which will examine this variable and its role as a mediator between happiness and life aspirations. Also, subjective vitality, a second mediator following psychological needs, will be investigated to determine how it operates as a serial multiple-mediator and how it mediates the association between life aspirations and happiness.

The main expected findings of this research include, a deeper understanding of the different types of aspirations involved, and how they can facilitate happiness among undergraduate students in Malaysia, and consequently improve quality of life. In addition, as previous studies have not presented any models combining serial multiple-mediation with moderation, this study will provide insight into examining the theory and methodology for studying psychological needs, subjective vitality and autonomy among undergraduate students in Malaysia.

#### **1.7.2 Contribution to Universities/Community Programs & Parents/Students' Knowledge**

The results of this study can potentially help in designing appropriate intervention strategies, as well as planning modifications in the undergraduate curricula, in order to improve the level of well-being among students. The accreditation standards for undergraduate students, in universities, require creating programs that promote well-being among students, to assist in their adjustment to the emotional, physical, mental and spiritual demands of their universities. In other words, if the findings of this study reveal that, there is a positive correlation between student aspirations and happiness, it could facilitate in establishing university policies. Universities could carry out various activities to try and enhance the level of happiness among university students, rather than solely focusing on academic performance of students. Besides the educational institutions, the parents and students themselves, need to be

aware of the factors that affect their level of happiness, so they have a better understanding of how to improve it further.

In summary, the aim of this study is to contribute further to the already existing research literature, on the effects of aspirations on personal well-being as well as on the sources of happiness.

## **1.8 Scope and Limitation of the Study**

The scope of this research is universities in Malaysia. The filling out of the present research questionnaires have been done in Malaysia which has thirteen states. Specifically, this study has been carried out in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur (Federal Territory) which are situated in the Klang-valley. Most of public and private universities and colleges are also located there such as: Universiti Malaya, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Universiti Putra Malaysia, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, International Islamic University Malaysia, Lim Kok Wing University, Sun Way College and INTI College. This dissertation is limited to the undergraduate students in three public universities located in Klang Valley namely UPM, UKM and UM.

## **1.9 Definition of Terminology**

The studied variables are defined conceptually and operationally in this part.

### **I. Happiness**

**Conceptual:** According to Seligman et.al (2005), happiness refers to the positive emotion and the pleasurable feeling or pleasurable life. Besides, it also involved engaged and meaningful life. The concept of happiness has been associated with others such as well-being. So they are often regarded as synonymous (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005).

**Operational:** Happiness refers to the respondent's score on the short depression-happiness scale (Joseph et al., 2004). This scale provides a continuous measure of the depression-happiness continuum. Thus, it remains unique in its dual measurement of depression and happiness as opposite ends of a single continuum. For the current study as the likert scale of this study is set on 1 (Never) to 4 (Often), so the cut-off point is 2.67. Thus the higher scores (above of cut-off point) are indicative of happiness, and lower scores (lower of cut-off point) are representative of depression.



## II. Psychological Needs

**Conceptual:** Basic psychological needs are thought to be species-typical motivational drives such as competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Their satisfaction is crucial for the achievement of wellbeing (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Maslow, 1954; Tay and Diener, 2011).

**Operational:** Psychological needs refers to the respondent's score on the Basic Need Satisfaction in General Scale (BNSG-S) was developed by Deci and Ryan (2000). This scale consists 21-item questionnaire evaluates the individuals' satisfaction of intrinsic needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness. Higher scores are indicative of a higher level of satisfaction of needs and lower scores are indicative of a lower level of satisfaction of needs. The likert scale of this study is set on 1 (Not at all true) to 7 (Very true).

## III. Life Aspirations

**Conceptual:** Long-term goals that people use them to guide their activities. Empirically, these goals fall into two general categories which have been labeled intrinsic aspirations and extrinsic aspirations (Kasser and Ryan, 1996). Intrinsic aspirations include four life goals in this study i.e. relationship, community feeling, spirituality, and personal growth, whereas extrinsic aspirations include three goals i.e. wealth, fame, and image.

**Operational:** Life Aspirations refer to the respondent's score on the Aspiration Index (AI) which divided to two main categories of intrinsic goals and extrinsic goals (Kasser and Ryan, 1996). Each category included several sub-dimensions. The 35-item Aspiration Index is employed to assess participants' important aspirations by using 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Not at all important) to 7 (Very important). Higher scores are indicative of a higher level of life goals' importance and lower scores are indicative of a lower level of importance.

## IV. Subjective Vitality

**Conceptual:** Subjective vitality has been defined as "energy that is perceived to emanate from the self" (Ryan and Frederick, 1997). The origin of the concept of vitality is based on the self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Ryan and Deci, 2000).

**Operational:** Subjective vitality refers to the respondent's score on the Subjective Vitality Scale (Ryan and Frederick, 1997). Participants indicated their responses on a seven-point Likert scale, with 1 representing strongly disagree to 7 representing

strongly agree. A higher score represented a higher level of subjective vitality and vice versa.

## V. Demographic Characteristics

**Conceptual:** demographic characteristics are one's series of characteristics and properties to display respondents' description (Christenson et al., 1992).

**Operational:** demographic characteristics in the current study refer to the gender, ethnic, age, educational level, marital status, and religion.



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