Scioto Analysis
Economics | Public Policy

Subjective Well-Being in Ohio Survey Study

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Kennedy Addington, Maryamo Ali, Hifsah Ayub, Alex Bransteter, Hwiseo Choi, Mattison Koskela, and Kelsey Wolf

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Executive Summary

The "Subjective Well-Being in Ohio Survey Study" aimed to collect and analyze representative data from all 88 counties in Ohio regarding self-reported well-being. Subjective well-being, as defined by the Panel on Measuring Subjective Well-being in a Policy-Relevant Framework, refers to "how people experience and evaluate their lives and specific domains and activities in their lives" (Stone et al., 2013). The field of subjective well-being and happiness has been under-researched, with limited understanding of its relationship to external factors and policy and decision-making (Das, K.V. et al., 2020). The primary objective of this project was to identify potential trends and relationships within the collected data to better inform future policy and decision-making in Ohio.

Four main objectives were identified for the completion of this project:

1. Create the Survey
2. Determine Sample Populations
3. Distribute Survey
4. Analyze Survey Data

The team modeled the survey after the US Happiness Report and deployed it on February 5th, 2024 (Gross National Happiness USA, 2022). They downloaded the data collected for this project on March 20th, 2024, yielding 667 responses from 71 out of 88 counties in Ohio. Data from all 88 counties was not obtained due to survey distribution constraints from utilizing a convenience sampling methodology. Demographically, responses predominantly came from white women aged 21-30 and were unevenly dispersed throughout Ohio. Analysis of the free response question "What makes you happy?" revealed recurring themes through keywords, with Relationships and Social Connections being the most prevalent appearing 318 times, followed by

Health & Well-being 214 times, and Creativity and Hobbies 135 times. Trends in the data revealed a positive relationship between age and happiness, echoing findings from the US Happiness Report, which identified a U-shaped curve concerning age and happiness. Although not the same, these findings are similar in that the highest happiness scores were reported by older adults. Furthermore, survey data indicated a positive correlation between happiness and perceived worthwhileness, with happier respondents feeling more worthwhileness in life. Conversely, there was a negative relationship between anxiety and happiness, with more anxious respondents reporting lower levels of happiness on average. Despite the relevant and insightful conclusions drawn from survey responses, there remains potential for further data collection and analysis to be conducted to better understand subjective well-being in Ohio.

This study represents the first attempt at a statewide subjective well-being survey in Ohio and has revealed many avenues for future improvement. Ideally, subsequent statewide studies should secure grant funding to support a random sampling methodology, ensuring a representative and unbiased sample size conducive to statistically significant findings. Insights gained from a more robust study will offer valuable guidance for policy and decision-making in Ohio. Ultimately, conclusions drawn from this data could foster an improved understanding of happiness in Ohio and its various determinants, including age, gender, race, and ethnicity.

Introduction

In collaboration with Scioto Analysis, a statewide survey of subjective well-being was conducted, marking the final phase of a multi-year research project focused on understanding social well-being in Ohio. Scioto Analysis is a local Columbus company that specializes in economic and policy analysis and seeks to provide policymakers with evidence-based research to improve well-being. Scioto Analysis' project's initial phase involved an in-depth study of Ohio's

Genuine Progress Indicator, a holistic measure extending beyond Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to evaluate economic progress (Scioto Analysis, 2023). Subsequent phases examined poverty and inequality in Ohio, resulting in the creation of the Ohio Poverty Measure and the publication of an inequality report (Nagarathinam et al., 2021). Proceeding the Subjective Well-being in Ohio Survey Study was the creation of a Human Development Index (HDI) report led by a group of Ohio State University students in December 2023 (Scioto Analysis, 2023b). The data collected and conclusions drawn from the statewide well-being study aim to enhance policymakers' understanding of their communities.

The overarching goals of this study included the development of the survey instrument, identification of sample populations, survey dissemination, and data analysis. The quantitative, qualitative, and demographic questions within the survey were based on those utilized in the US Happiness Report conducted by Gross National Happiness USA (Gross National Happiness USA, 2022). The team made subtle modifications to the demographic questions from the US Happiness Report by adding multiracial options and varied gender options. They constructed the final survey using the platform “Qualtrics,” a software tool for building and distributing online surveys. Individuals who had access to the targeted community hubs and online platforms determined the sample population. Wider survey distribution across the state was accomplished by contacting various community hubs and groups. Following survey completion, data analysis identified potential correlations of how different demographics self-reported their happiness and anxiety levels.

Inferences can be made regarding happiness and anxiety levels among Ohio citizens upon analysis of the data collected. For example, a positive correlation existed between reported happiness and worthwhileness, while a negative correlation existed between reported anxiety and

happiness levels. Additionally, the data revealed an association between age and reported happiness, with reported happiness tending to increase with age. The team identified key themes contributing to happiness which included categories like family and relationships, health, and creativity.

Despite the various insights gained from the data, there exists room for refinement in the survey methodology. Developing a more robust survey with improved surveying methodology can yield a more representative dataset, thereby providing higher-quality information to policymakers needed to develop a better understanding of their community.

Methods & Materials

This study employed a statewide survey to gather comprehensive data on subjective well-being within Ohio.

Survey Design Rationale

The inclusion of specific qualitative, quantitative, and free-response questions in the survey was guided by input from Scioto Analysis and aimed to maintain simplicity and accessibility for participants. Scioto Analysis sought to have this study directly comparable to the US Happiness Report, thus it was necessary to utilize similar questions. While acknowledging the potential limitations of the survey's depth was important, it was also essential to adhere to the guidelines set forth by the partner organization for consistency and comparability with previous research efforts. The questions were selected based on their simplicity and alignment with the objectives of the study, which aimed to measure subjective well-being across a diverse demographic population within Ohio.

Qualitative Questions

The survey featured six qualitative questions aimed at collecting demographic

information from participants. These questions covered respondents' county of residence, age, gender, race, and ethnicity (See Appendix A).

Quantitative Questions

The quantitative segment of the survey consisted of four questions. The team directly adapted the questions from the survey utilized in the US Happiness Report, which was conducted by Gross National Happiness USA. The questions were designed to measure subjective well-being and were assessed on a scale from 0 to 10, with response options ranging from "Not at all" to "Completely." The questions assessed the following:

- How satisfied are you with your life?
- To what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?
- How happy did you feel yesterday?
- How anxious did you feel yesterday?

Free-Response Question

A critical component of the survey design was the inclusion of the free-response question: "What makes you happy?" Participants were provided with the opportunity to elaborate on aspects of their lives that contribute to their happiness, allowing for a deeper understanding of subjective well-being. Further analysis of answers to the free-response question identified major themes related to happiness and well-being. The team extracted keywords and phrases from the responses and employed thematic analysis techniques to categorize the themes.

Survey Distribution

The team utilized convenience sampling for survey distribution largely through an email campaign that contacted every public library in the state of Ohio. Library patrons and staff received flyers containing a QR code linked to the online survey, powered by Qualtrics. This

approach leveraged the accessibility and community presence of public libraries to reach a diverse demographic of participants. The initial plan to collaborate with Ohio State University's Extension Office for outreach was unachievable due to the lack of Institutional Review Board involvement and approval, preventing the Extension Office's support for the project.

In response to limited resources and funding, the team implemented alternative distribution strategies. A flyer containing a brief overview of the study and a QR code to access the survey was emailed to all identified community hubs. They contacted all public universities in Ohio, as well as university libraries, student unions, and newspapers. Although many university community hubs were contacted, the responses varied. Many failed to respond and some contacts required a fee for advertising, which the study lacked funding for.

Furthermore, outreach efforts extended to various organizations and entities, including county commissioners, community colleges, Extension Area Leaders, and religious institutions across the state of Ohio. When reaching out to these organizations, the flyer was sent via email. The flyer can be found in Appendix C. In the later stages of the project, social media platforms like Facebook and Reddit were used to disseminate the survey and to ask community members to further share with their social networks. The team implemented this strategy due to a lack of responses from community hubs.

Results & Discussion

With the data collected, the research team identified correlations between the various quantitative and qualitative responses. The survey garnered 667 responses from 71 counties in Ohio. The correlations provide insight into well-being throughout Ohio.

Demographics

Table 1. Survey Demographics

Age Range	10-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71-80
Female							
American Indian or Alaska Native		4					
Asian	2	5	1	2			
Black or African American	7	9	3		1	1	1
Multiracial	1	9	2	1	1	1	
White	41	116	67	62	57	50	4
Male							
American Indian or Alaska Native		1					
Asian	2	5					
Black or African American	1	1			1	1	
Multiracial	2			1			1
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander			1				
White	12	66	34	28	15	8	9
Non-binary							
Asian		1					
Black or African American	3	1					
White	3	3	2	3		1	
Other							
White			1				
Prefer not to say							
White	3	6	2			1	
Total	**77**	**227**	**113**	**97**	**75**	**63**	**15**
Number of Total Responses							667

Summary of Respondents by Demographic Categories. The figure provides a detailed snapshot of the demographic composition of survey respondents, offering insights into the diversity of the surveyed population.

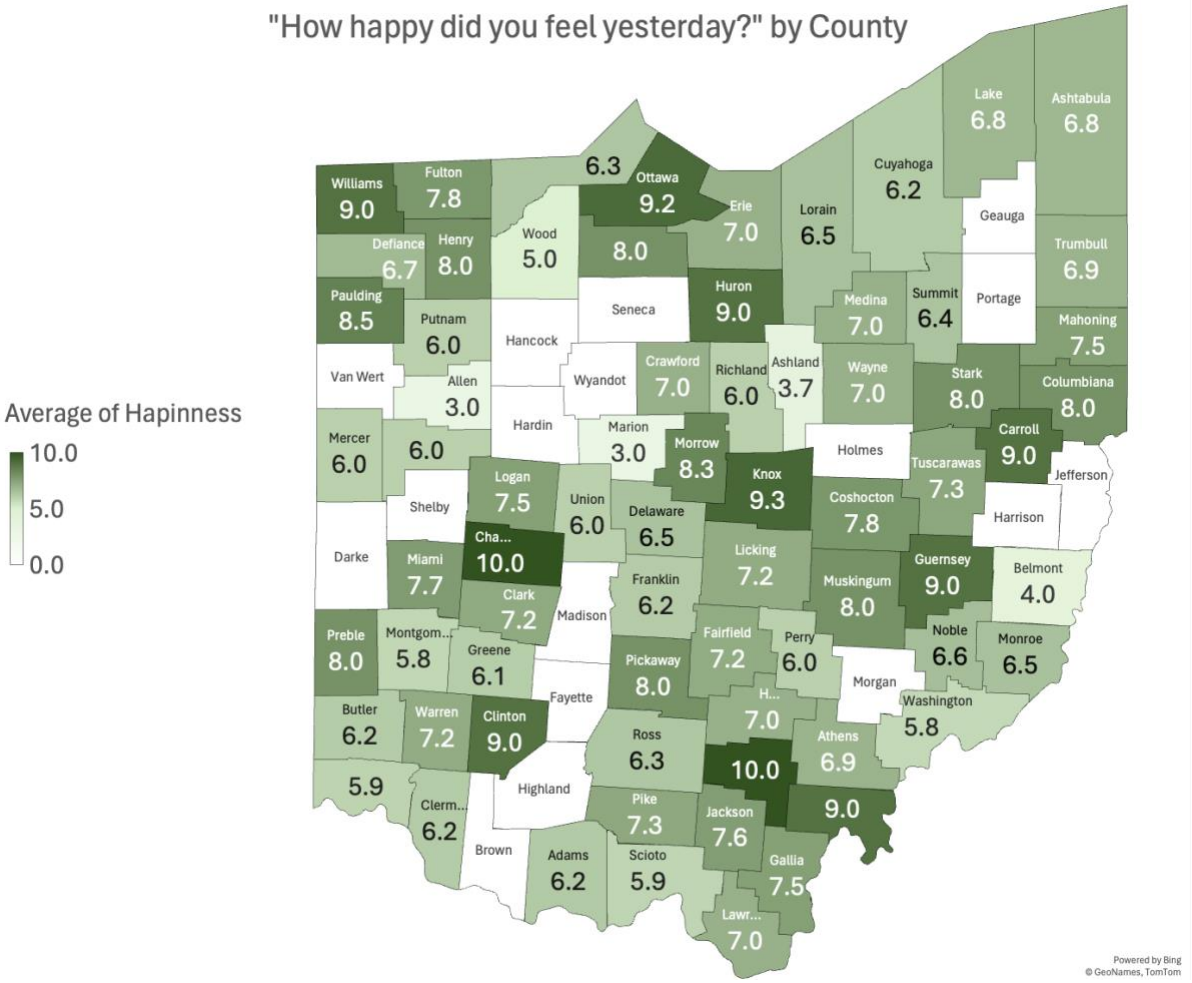
The age distribution of respondents varied, with two peaks in the 21-30 and 31-40 age brackets composed of 227 and 113 respondents. This suggests that the survey attracted a substantial proportion of individuals in their late twenties to early forties, potentially reflecting a demographic group actively engaged in the subject matter of the survey. Notably, there was also a significant representation of younger participants, with 77 respondents falling within the 10-20 age range. This demographic inclusion is valuable for capturing the perspectives and experiences of youth, who often possess unique insights and viewpoints.

Gender distribution reveals a higher participation of female respondents, who comprised 448 of the total responses, compared to male respondents, who constituted 189 of the surveyed population. This gender imbalance may influence the interpretation of survey findings, as it indicates a potential disparity in engagement or interest across gender lines.

The racial breakdown of respondents illustrates a predominantly white survey sample, with white respondents comprising the largest group across both genders, totaling 593 individuals. This was followed by 30 Black or African American respondents, 19 multiracial respondents, and 18 Asian respondents. The presence of respondents from diverse racial backgrounds facilitates a more nuanced understanding of perspectives and experiences shaped by cultural and racial identities. The team synthesized demographic characteristics into insights with meaningful analysis and conclusions as shown in Figure 5 below.

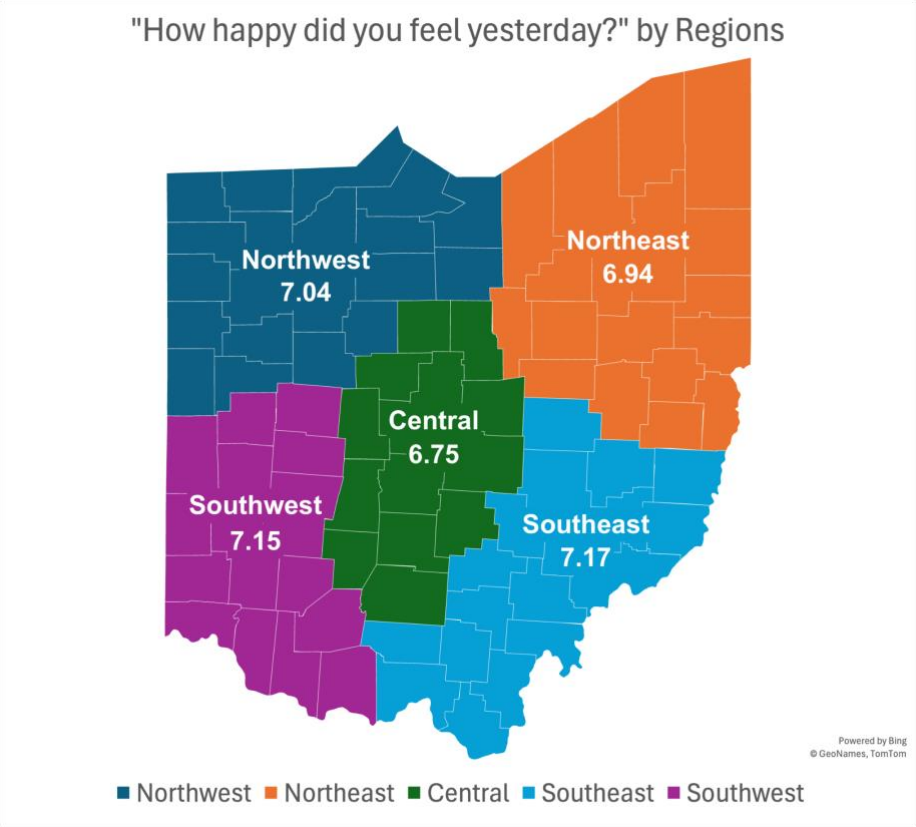
Geographic Distribution of Happiness

Figure 1. Map of Happiness



Map of Ohio counties depicting the average happiness levels based on responses to question 7. The gradient colors indicate happiness levels, with darker green representing higher happiness scores closer to 10, while lighter green hues indicate lower scores. Counties with white shading received no representative sampling.

Figure 2. Map of Happiness by Regions in Ohio

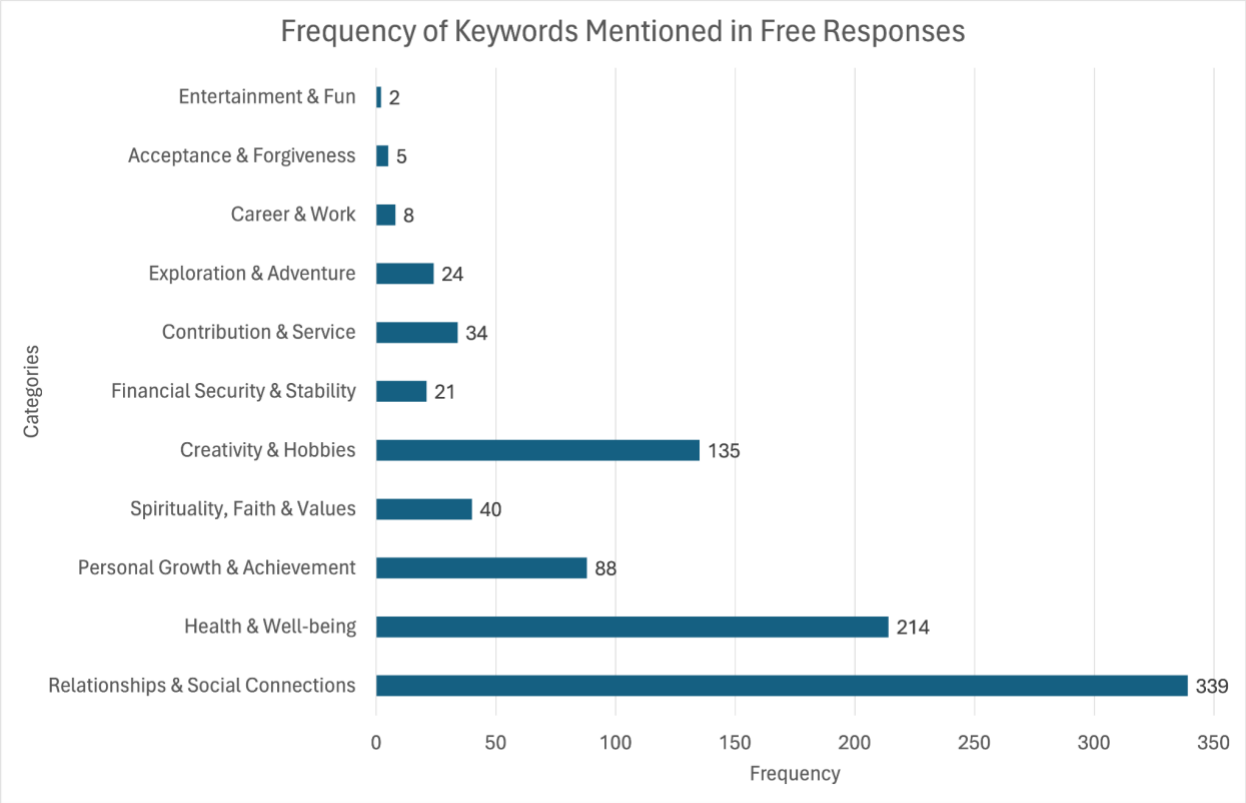


Map of Ohio State counties segmented into Northeast, Northwest, Central, Southeast, and Southwest regions, illustrating the average happiness levels among residents.

Some counties had substantially fewer responses, which led to disproportionately high average happiness levels. Due to this, the counties were grouped into larger regions, which consisted of Northeast, Northwest, Central, Southeast, and Southwest. This segmentation strategy aims to minimize the impact of singular high responses within individual counties, ensuring a more equitable assessment of happiness levels statewide. By averaging happiness levels across regions, a more accurate portrayal of overall community well-being is achieved, enhancing the reliability and validity of the analysis. Yet, it also leads to a more generalized understanding of well-being that is not as representative of each county. Based on the data collected, this regional approach facilitates a better understanding and comparison of happiness trends within and between different geographical areas of Ohio.

Reported Qualitative Sources of Happiness

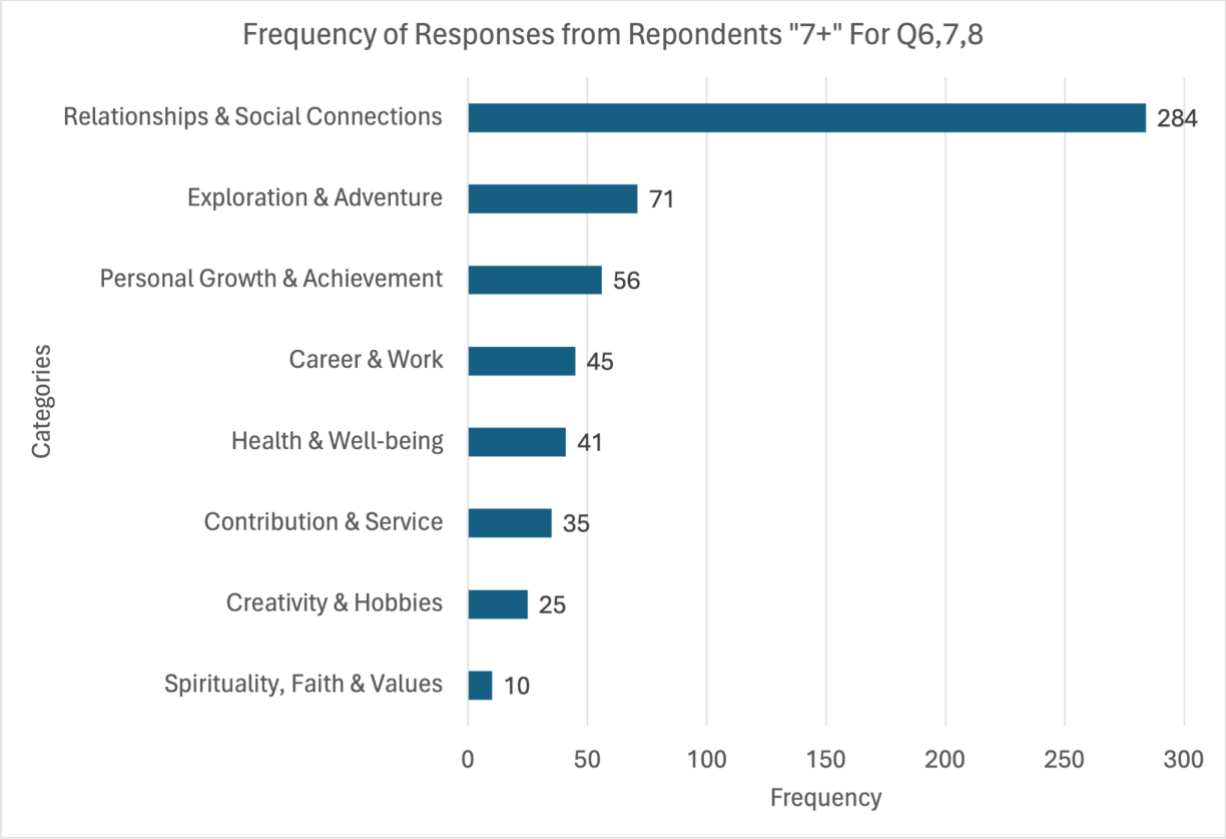
Figure 3. Definition of "Happiness"



This chart illustrates the prevalent themes and concepts contributing to individuals' happiness in their diverse responses.

An analysis of responses revealed a diverse spectrum of factors contributing to individuals' happiness and well-being. A significant amount of the responses fell into the categories of Relationships & Social Connections, Health & Well-being, and Personal Growth & Achievement. These findings underscore the importance of interpersonal bonds, physical and mental health, and personal development in fostering happiness. Additionally, Spiritual & Faith-based values emerged as significant contributors to individuals' sense of fulfillment, suggesting the importance of spiritual practices and belief systems in promoting well-being. Creativity & Hobbies were also identified as key sources of joy, highlighting the role of leisure activities and creative expression in enhancing life satisfaction.

Figure 4. "Happiness" Defined for People Reporting the Highest Well-Being



Frequency of Keywords in Free Response Answers to 'What makes you happy?' Survey Question, Limited to Respondents Scoring 7 or Higher in Questions 6, 7, and 8.

The figure above illustrates the frequency of keywords identified in responses to the survey question, "What makes you happy?" The analysis is focused on respondents who scored 7 or higher in Questions 6, 7, and 8. Each keyword represents a significant aspect contributing to the happiness of individuals within this subset. Among the highlighted keywords, Relationships & Social Connections emerge as the most frequently mentioned source of happiness, with a notable count of 284 mentions. This underscores the profound impact that interpersonal relationships and social interactions have on individuals' well-being. Following closely, Exploration & Adventure, Personal Growth & Achievement, and Relationship & Social Connections also garnered substantial mentions, with counts of 71, 56, and 45 respectively. These findings suggest that individuals derive happiness from experiences that promote personal

development, novelty, and meaningful connections with others. Health & Well-being, Contribution & Service, and Career & Work are also identified as significant contributors to happiness, with counts ranging between 35 and 41 mentions. Additionally, Creativity & Hobbies, Spirituality, Faith & Values, are highlighted as important factors, with counts of 25 and 10 mentions respectively. These results showcase the diverse array of sources of happiness within this respondent group.

Demographics and Happiness

Figure 5. Race & Happiness

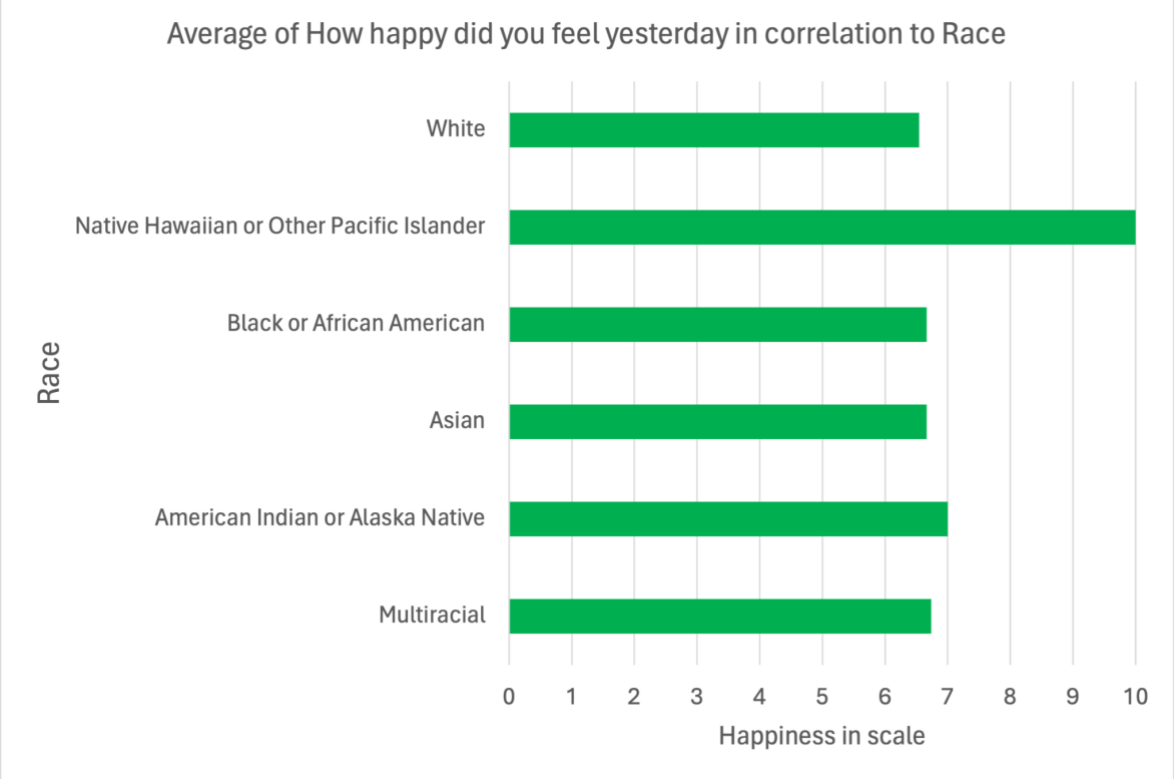
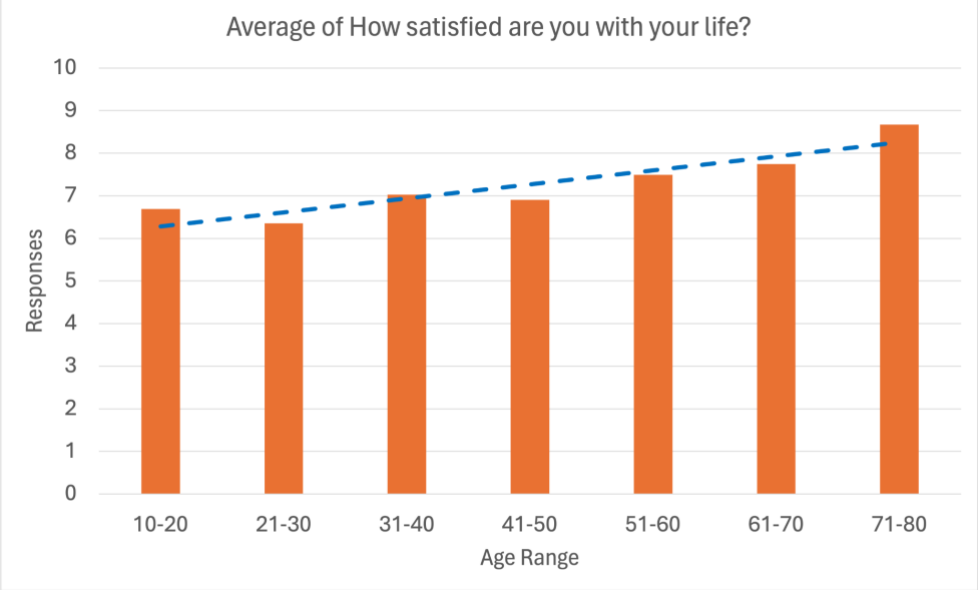


Chart illustrating the Correlation of Average Happiness Across Different Races in Ohio. The data depicts a uniform distribution, with all racial groups averaging a happiness rating of 7, indicating widespread happiness regardless of race.

The figure above displays the correlation of average happiness levels among racial groups in Ohio. The data reveals a consistent trend of all racial groups exhibiting a happiness rating between 6 and 7. While Native Hawaiians or Other Pacific Islanders have averaged a high

happiness rating of 10, it is important to note that the sample size may not be a reliable representation due to the low response rate of this particular racial demographic. This uniform distribution may suggest a prevalent sense of contentment across diverse racial demographics within the state. Such findings indicate the resilience of happiness irrespective of racial background, reflecting a positive self-reported well-being within Ohio. However, the sample size of participants of color was significantly lower than white participants, potentially resulting in unrepresentative data. This may be due to a disproportionate representation of racial demographics in Ohio. In 2020, 77.0% of Ohio's population was white while only 12.5% was Black (United States Census Bureau, 2021). These percentages are of populations that only identify as one race. In comparison, the survey's respondents were 88.8% white and only 4.5% Black. Understanding this uniformity in happiness levels across races can contribute to fostering inclusive policies and societal cohesion, but it must be understood that the racial demographics in the study were not proportional to those in Ohio.

Figure 6. Age & Happiness

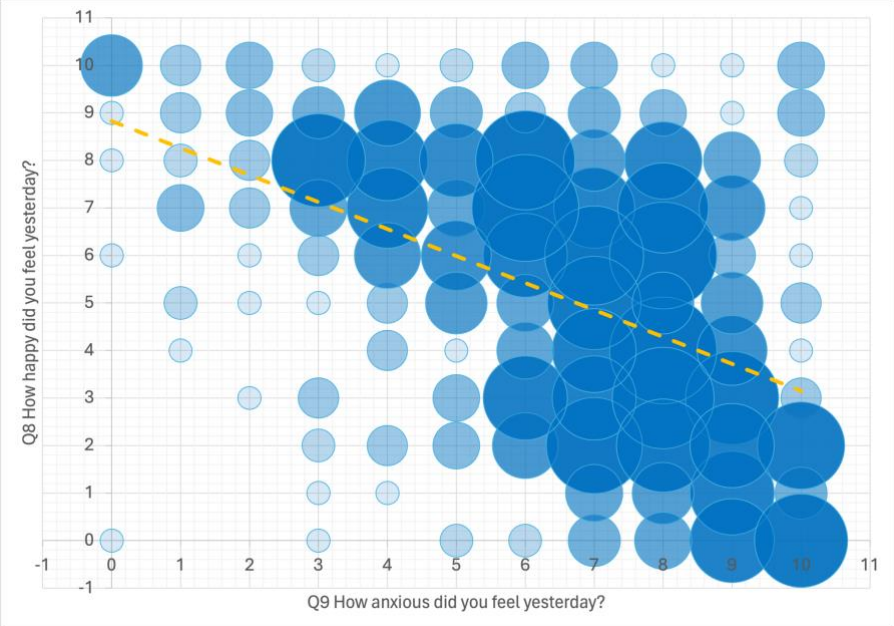


This chart displays the correlation between age and average happiness levels from a diverse demographic survey. The blue-dotted trendline indicates that as age increases, reported happiness tends to rise.

Figure 6 illustrates the correlation between age and average happiness levels. Each bar represents the mean happiness score reported by individuals within specific age brackets. The trendline depicts a discernible positive relationship between age and happiness with slight fluctuations. As age increases, there is a tendency towards higher reported levels of happiness, indicating a potential developmental trajectory of subjective well-being across the lifespan. This trend demonstrates the complexity of factors influencing happiness across different stages of life, encompassing social, psychological, and environmental variables. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for formulating targeted interventions and policies aimed at promoting well-being and quality of life across diverse age groups.

Correlation between Quantitative Responses

Figure 7. Anxiety & Happiness



Bubble chart illustrating the correlation between responses to Question 8 and Question 9. Each bubble's size corresponds to the frequency of specific combinations of anxiety and happiness responses, with larger bubbles indicating more frequent responses. The negative trendline in yellow highlights a well-hypothesized inverse relationship between anxiety and happiness levels.

The correlation bubble chart presented in Figure 7 reveals a significant relationship between respondents' reported levels of happiness and anxiety. Through an analysis of responses

to Question 8 ("How happy did you feel yesterday?") and Question 9 ("How anxious did you feel yesterday?"), a clear negative trendline emerges, indicating that as reported happiness levels decrease, reported anxiety levels tend to increase. This observation aligns with a well-established hypothesis suggesting an inverse relationship between happiness and anxiety (Hill et al., 2023).

The size of each bubble on the chart reflects the frequency of specific combinations of responses. These findings carry significant implications for understanding the interplay between happiness and anxiety within the surveyed population. By recognizing the negative correlation between these emotional states, policymakers, healthcare professionals, and researchers can develop targeted interventions and strategies aimed at promoting mental well-being and reducing anxiety levels.

Figure 8. Worthwhileness & Happiness

Bubble chart illustrating the correlation between responses to Question 7 and Question 8. The size of each bubble corresponds to the frequency of each combination of responses, with larger bubbles indicating higher frequency. A positive trendline in yellow highlights the overall positive correlation between perceived life worthwhileness and happiness levels.

Similar to Figure 7, Figure 8 depicts the correlation between participants' perceptions of life's worthwhileness and their reported happiness levels. Question 7 inquired about the extent to

which individuals feel their life pursuits are worthwhile, while Question 8 sought to gauge their happiness levels from the preceding day. The presence of a positive trendline, depicted in yellow, highlights a noteworthy correlation between perceived life worthwhileness and reported happiness. This observation suggests that individuals who perceive their actions as more meaningful tend to report higher levels of happiness in their daily lives. Such findings may have implications for understanding the interplay between subjective perceptions of life satisfaction and emotional well-being.

Recommendations

This project was the first statewide subjective well-being survey in Ohio, thus the insights gained from this study should be utilized to improve future studies and policy-making. Although this study provides valuable insights regarding happiness and well-being in Ohio, the data collected should primarily be used as a guide for further research. Due to funding and time constraints, the sample size collected for this study via convenience sampling does not provide a representative sample of the happiness and well-being of Ohio's residents. However, the data gathered provides insightful correlations and relationships between happiness, age, worthwhileness, and anxiousness. To address these shortcomings and strengthen the survey, there are 4 main recommendations Scioto Analysis should consider taking to bolster future studies: secure grant funding, utilize random sampling survey methodology, expand survey questions, and partner with Ohio State University Extension.

For future subjective well-being studies in Ohio, acquiring funding to sponsor a random sampling methodology may provide a more robust dataset. A future capstone group can utilize the findings of this study to help obtain grant funding for a random sampling list. Funding could be utilized to ensure all groups in Ohio are represented in the study. Investing in postcards or

mailers would allow individuals without internet access to participate in the survey, such as Ohio's large rural or Amish communities.

Throughout this survey, the researchers primarily used convenience sampling for data collection. The reliance on flyers and online posts for spreading the survey limited the sample size in a way that provided access only to those who went to certain locations or were users of certain social media platforms. Additionally, convenience sampling presents biases in terms of the data collection due to how the researchers may choose to distribute the survey. To minimize the biases, it is recommended to use random sampling, which will provide a higher number of respondents and fewer biases. Simple random sampling can be applied by randomly choosing a statistically significant portion of each county and distributing the survey to those individuals (UC Berkeley, n.d.). This methodology presents errors if the group randomly chosen does not accurately depict the county's demographic makeup. Proportional stratified random sampling would ensure that each demographic group is evenly represented. This methodology involves dividing the counties into strata, based on chosen demographics, such as age, race, and ethnicity (UC Berkeley, n.d.). The strata are proportional to the population they are representing, ensuring that an accurate, proportional representation of each county is created. Based on the goals of this study, it is recommended that a future study redistributes the survey utilizing proportional stratified random sampling. A random sampling survey methodology would ensure a representative sample of Ohio and a statistically significant number of respondents. Utilizing proportional stratified random sampling will be more costly than the convenience sampling method that was done in this project, but it will produce reliable data, which will allow policymakers to have a more accurate understanding of their communities.

The third recommendation is to expand the survey questions. The current survey does not collect data on common indicators of well-being and happiness. The World Health Organization has outlined that well-being consists of "social, economic, and environmental conditions" (World Health Organization, n.d.). Including complex questions that utilize reputable indicators will enhance the data and allow for a deeper understanding of individuals' well-being. Developing questions that target specific indicators of well-being will allow policymakers to understand how and why community members are unhappy; this allows policymakers to better utilize the study to influence their actions.

Lastly, a partnership between Scioto Analysis and Ohio State University Extension (OSUE) will provide beneficial support for the study. OSUE has ties to all Ohio counties and would be an excellent partner in helping to distribute and promote the survey throughout the state. This will be a vital asset to future iterations of this study. Additionally, to receive OSUE support, the involvement of an Institutional Review Board (IRB) is required for this study. Therefore, planning must be done to ensure that IRB approval is received in the necessary timeframe for the future study. Overall, this study is an important step in understanding well-being in Ohio and it is the first of its kind. While there are various recommendations for future studies, the effort, commitment, and results from this study should not be overlooked and can provide valuable and influential insights into Ohioans' subjective well-being.

Conclusion

The "Subjective Well-Being in Ohio Survey Study" aimed to gather and analyze data from all 88 counties in Ohio to understand subjective well-being. The survey, modeled after the US Gross National Happiness Report, collected 667 responses from 71 counties in Ohio and found many relationships and trends among the survey responses (GNH USA, 2022). Among

these findings, a positive relationship between age and happiness, as well as happiness and worthwhileness was concluded from the data. Additionally, a negative relationship was found between anxiety and happiness. From the survey's free-response question "What makes you happy?", the themes of Relationships and Social Connections, Health and Well-being, and Creativity and Hobbies were among the most prevalent answers. Future studies should prioritize gaining grant funding for larger-scale research which will allow for a better understanding of subjective well-being. Securing funding will enable the usage of a random sampling methodology, which will provide more representative data across Ohio. This will ensure a representative sample without biases, making the data more statistically significant. Improvements to the data quality will improve the applicability of this study for policymakers. Additionally, expanding upon the questions in the survey will allow for a greater number of indicators to be tracked. Implementing random sampling and securing grant funding will benefit Scioto Analysis in several ways: improved data quality, increased statistical significance, and expanded research opportunities. Random sampling and grant funding will improve the quality and impact of future studies regarding subjective well-being in Ohio.

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Appendix A. Survey Questions

These are the survey questions used in the study. Please refer to the QR Code in Appendix C to view the choices of options.

1. Which county do you reside in? (Try typing the first few letters of your county name in drop down name to aid your search)
2. What is your age?
3. What is your gender? (Please choose one)
4. What is your race? (Choose multiple if applicable.)
5. What is your ethnicity? (Please choose one)
6. How satisfied are you with your life? (0 being "Not at all", 10 being "Completely")
7. To what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?
8. How happy did you feel yesterday?
9. How anxious did you feel yesterday?
10. What makes you happy?

Appendix B. Data Index

Data Set #1: Capstone Survey Results (March 20).xlsx

Sources: EEDS 2024 Capstone Project Scioto Analysis Group

Description: This dataset includes the raw data from the survey results collected and downloaded on March 20th, 2024 from the Qualtrics website. A total of 667 respondents from February 5th to March 20th, 2024. The data was used to produce all of the figures and tables in the report.

Appendix C. Survey Flyer

The online Subjective Well-Being in Ohio Qualtrics survey can be accessed via the QR code, or link, shown in the flyer below.