



# A Study on the Effect of Self-Review Method on Women's Happiness

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## Quantitative Study

### Abstract

**Background:** The present study was conducted with the aim to investigate the effectiveness of self-review technique on women's happiness.

**Methods:** This experimental study was conducted with a pre-test and post-test and a control group. The Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI) was used to measure the dependent variable. In order to implement the research project, 22 individuals were randomly assigned to the control and experimental groups in the pre-test phase based on acquisition of the lowest happiness scores. The 8-session self-review single intervention was presented to the experimental group. Repeated measures ANOVA was used in order to analyze the data.

**Results:** The research findings indicated that the rate of happiness of individuals in the experimental group had significantly increased in the post-test and even follow-up stages ( $P < 0.01$ ).

**Conclusion:** In conclusion, the self-review method can be considered as a positive activity-based intervention.

**Keywords:** Self-review, Positive activity-based interventions, Happiness

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### Introduction

Happiness is considered as a central criterion for mental health (Taylor, & Brown, 1988). Moreover, it is associated with many concrete benefits such as increased physical health, decreased psychological injuries, increased compatibility skills, and even increased longevity (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2003). Previous research have provided evidences of

other benefits of positive emotion and happiness; sociability, better health status, success, self-regulation, and adjuvant activity (Boniwell, 2012). Happiness is pursued by the majority of people all over the world (Diener, 2000) and many people are searching for ways to make themselves happy (Bergsma, 2008). Therefore, it is not astonishing that being happy and having a complete life has been the subject contemplated by philosophers and enthusiasts over the years (Kesebir and Diener, 2008). Nevertheless, most of the studies carried out by psychologists in the twentieth century have

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focused on disorders such as depression, anxiety, and affective disorders rather than positive emotions such as happiness and well-being. The motivation for psychological studies has been to investigate mental illnesses and very few researches have been devoted to this category. However, it seems that happiness studies have increased significantly in recent years (Chamorro-premuzic, Bennett, & Furnham, 2007).

Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, and Schkade (2005) stated that three main factors play a role in individuals' level of happiness; happiness fixed point, living conditions, and goal-oriented activities. Happiness fixed point is the constant level of happiness which has been determined genetically and explains 50% of the difference variance in individuals' happiness. Living conditions consist of factors such as income, marital status, and religiosity which explain 10% of the difference variance in individuals' happiness. Goal-oriented activities are positive cognitive and behavioral activities that approximately explain 40% of the difference variance in individuals' happiness (Sheldon, & Lyubomirsky, 2007). It seems that increase in an individual's happiness fixed point and changes in their living environment are not useful methods for a sustainable increase in their happiness (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Layous, & Lyubomirsky, 2012). Therefore, performing goal-oriented activities is probably one of the best and most possible ways to increase happiness.

Positive activity interventions which include simple cognitive and behavioral strategies that are performed by the individual and have been designed to display thoughts and behaviors of normal, happy individuals, in turn, increase individuals' happiness (Layous, & Lyubomirsky, 2012). A number of positive activity interventions have shown their effectiveness in increasing happiness and reducing negative symptoms in randomized controlled interventions. These interventions include writing of words of gratitude (Layous, &

Lyubomirsky, 2011; Lyubomirsky, Dickerhoof, Boehm, & Sheldon, 2011), calculation of an individual's blessings (Chancellor, & Lyubomirsky, 2012, Froh, Sefick, & Emmons, 2008), practicing of optimism (Lyubomirsky et al., 2011; Boehm, Lyubomirsky, & Sheldon, 2011), performance of acts of kindness (Della Porta, & Lyubomirsky, 2012), embodiment of a bright future (Boehm et al., 2011), and efforts for a significant target (Snyder, & Omoto, 2001). The main goals of positive activity interventions (PAIs) are the invention of procedures for successful increasing of happiness, discovering the how and why of the effectiveness of these activities in increasing happiness, and identifying the optimal conditions for happiness (Nelson, & Lyubomirsky, 2012).

The self-review method, which is fundamentally a cognitive restructuring method, familiarizes individuals with perceptions, thoughts, and feelings in relation to the self and replaces their negative perceptions, thoughts, and feelings with positive perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. This replacement leads to a change in individuals' thoughts in relation to the self and phenomena and causes emotional change in individuals (Pourhosein, 2010). Additionally, the more the individual is conscious of his/her internal and external features as well as self as a unified whole, the more appropriate his view and understanding of internal and external realities. Therefore, this consciousness of the whole self, along with organism form elements, has a direct significant correlation with a healthy human personality.

In general, the following theoretical and practical steps are traversed in the self-review therapy method:

1. Self-description
2. Self-review for self-consciousness
3. Recognition of negative thoughts
4. Reflection of the positive and negative thoughts to the individual
- 5 Reduction of psychic energy caused by negative thoughts using reflection technique

6. Substitution of positive thoughts for negative thoughts through assignment and reduction of negative thoughts generalization (performed through continuing sentences with the word "instead")

7. Keeping track of the previous steps (Pourhosein, 2010)

Regarding the self-review implementation method, we realize that simultaneously to the use of cognitive techniques to reduce cognitive errors such as overgeneralization, selective perception, over responsibility, self-reference, and biconceptual thinking in this method, the individual performs positive cognitive activity. In other words, the individual is trying to observe not only her/his negative features, but actively strives to seek out positive features and review her/his attributes, both positive and negative. In this method, the individual is asked to substitute one of his/her negative features with a positive feature using the word "instead" when he/she states that negative feature. In other words, the individual learns to pay attention to both negative traits and positive traits. Simultaneous and active attention to positive attributes fosters the individual's mind orientation for focusing on the positive attributes and this activity strengthens mind orientation toward positive cognitive activities. Furthermore, it transfers cognitive orientation from paying attention to negative features to paying attention to positive features. Thus, given that the self-review method is a positive intentional and active interventional activity to change attitude, it is expected to increase happiness.

Most of the researches conducted on self-review method have tried to investigate the effectiveness of this therapy method on the reduction of negative emotions such as depression and anxiety (Pourhosein, & Saberi, 2009). Moreover, its effectiveness on reducing depression and negative emotions has been confirmed. However, no research has been carried out concerning the effectiveness of this method on enhancing positive emotions.

Therefore, the main objective of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of self-review as an educational method on women's happiness.

## Methods

(A) Research design: Since the main goal of this research was the investigation of the effect of self-review on women's happiness, the full-experimental design with pretest-posttest and two experimental and control groups was utilized in the present study.

(B) Statistical population, the sample groups, and the process of implementing the research: The statistical population consisted of all women in Tehran, Iran, in 2013. For the selection of samples, some of the women were invited to participate in the research via available sampling and through announcements. Following this notification, 68 volunteers were entered into the study. Then, the Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI) was distributed among and completed by the subjects.

Based on the acquisition of the lowest scores in happiness, 44 individuals had the inclusion criteria. Thus, 22 subjects were randomly assigned to the experimental group and 22 individuals to the control group. The inclusion criteria were a happiness score one standard deviation lower than the average (equivalent to score 33), being a women, and willingness to participate in the research and presence in treatment sessions.

(C) Measurement tool: In this study, the OHI was used to measure subjects' happiness. The OHI (Argyle, Martin, & Crossland, 1989), as a widespread personal happiness measurement tool, was invented mainly for domestic use in the late 1980s in the experimental psychology department of Oxford University. The scale and some its features were developed by Argyle, Martin, and Lu (1995). Today, the inventory is widely used in researches related to happiness. In the Beck's Depression Inventory (Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Hock, & Erbaugh, 1961), was designed based on the Oxford Happiness Inventory; 20 items related to happiness were

reversed. Other items were added to these items and 29 items were placed on the final scale in order to cover other aspects of happiness. Each item is scored on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 0 to 3. Robbins, Francis, and Edwards (2010) reported a Cronbach's alpha or internal consistency equal to 0.92. Additionally, Hills, and Argyle (2001) reported a reliability of 0.91 and internal consistency ranging between 0.4 and 0.65.

Sabet and Lotfi Kashani (2010) conducted a study on 500 students for the normalization of the OHI. The results showed that the alpha coefficient for 29 items was equal to 0.9 and reliability coefficient of the inventory using Cronbach's alpha was equal to 0.88 and 0.91 for groups of boys and girls, respectively. The validity of the inventory was evaluated through construct validity and was found to be acceptable. The factor analysis also shows that the factor analysis of the inventory stresses on the existence of a factor in measurement. Additionally, in another study by Abedi, Mirshah jafari, and Liaghatdar (2006) conducted on 727 students to standardize the OHI, the results showed that the OHI had an appropriate reliability and validity. Its internal consistency, using Cronbach's alpha, was calculated as equal to 0.85. The reliability of the inventory was also calculated as equal to 0.79 and 0.78 using the Spearman-Brown prediction formula and Gutmann method, respectively. In this study, the mean  $\pm$  standard deviation of happiness was  $4.44 \pm 3.13$ .

The implementation method: After completion of the OHI in the pretest stage, participants whose happiness score was one standard deviation below the mean value (equivalent to 33) were selected as members of

the sample group. Accordingly, 22 individuals were randomly assigned to the experimental group and 22 individuals to the control group. The members of the experimental group received 8 weekly therapeutic sessions lasting 1 hour. The OHI was again completed after the treatment sessions as posttest and 5 months later as follow-up by both experimental and control group participants at Tehran University.

## Results

In this study, the basic hypothesis of the self-review therapeutic method increases happiness in the experimental group was investigated. In the final analysis, 19 subjects were present in the experimental group and 18 subjects in the control group. The withdrawal of individuals from the study was because of personal problems. The indicators related to the age of the experimental and control group participants are presented in table 1.

Independent t-test showed a significant difference in relation to mean age of participants between the experimental and control groups ( $t = 0.72$ ). The repeated measures ANOVA test was used to investigate the main hypothesis of the study. Using this test requires the establishing of two conditions, namely non-significance of Mauchly's sphericity test and homogeneity of covariance.

Mauchly's sphericity test results showed that the research data in this scale had single exponential distribution and a multivariate normal distribution ( $w$  Mauchly = 0.90,  $\chi^2 = 12.25$ , and  $df = 2$ ). Covariance test results also revealed the homogeneity of covariance ( $M$ -Box = 8.92,  $F = 1.34$ ,  $df_1 = 6$ ,  $df_2 = 8.79$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ). Table 2 shows ANOVA results between the main factors and the interaction between them.

**Table 1.** Indicators related to the age of individuals in experiments and control groups

Group	n	Mean $\pm$ SD	Maximum	Minimum
Experiment	19	$25.63 \pm 4.63$	32	18
Control	18	$26.88 \pm 5.91$	40	20
Total	37	$26.24 \pm 5.26$	40	18

SD: Standard deviation

**Table 2.** ANOVA of main and interactive factors in happiness

Factor	Index	Wilks's Lambda Index	df	P	Test power
Within-subjects		0.34	2	0.001	1.00
The interaction between the within-subject factor and between-subject factor		0.26	2	0.001	1.00
Group		F index 29	1	0.001	0.99

df: Degree of freedom

**Table 3.** The results of contrast between the pretest-posttest, posttest-follow-up, and pretest-follow-up scores of the happiness scale

Source	Time	Total squares	df	Mean squares	F	P	Test power
Within-subject	Pretest-posttest	365.97	1	365.97	27.83	0.001	1.00
	Posttest-follow-up	1.00	1	1.00	0.127	0.72	0.05
	Pretest-follow-up	2751.84	1	2751.84	61.93	0.001	1.00
Interactive Factor	Pretest-posttest	2480.14	1	2480.14	180.87	0.001	1.00
	Posttest-follow-up	0.46	1	0.46	0.59	0.81	0.33
	Pretest-follow-up	4307.62	1	4307.62	96.94	0.001	1.00

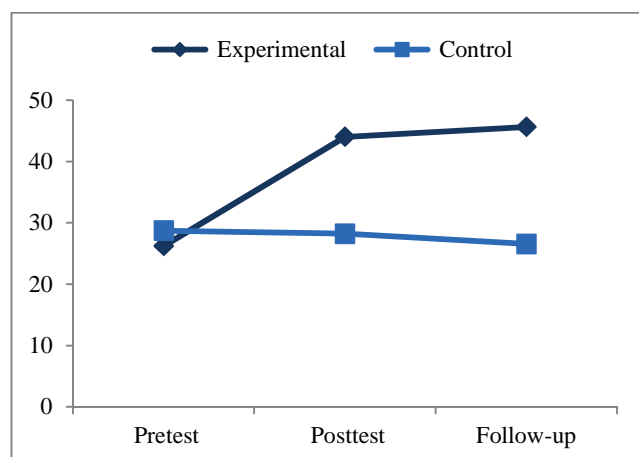
df: Degree of freedom

The MANOVA table with regard to Wilks's Lambda Index showed that the MANOVA for intragroup factor (time) and the interaction between group and time was significant. Additionally, the group effect was also significant ( $F = 29$ ), demonstrating the difference between the scores of experimental and control groups. The significance of within-subjects factor (time) means that there is a significant difference between scores of individuals' happiness at pretest, posttest, and follow-up. Additionally, the significance of interaction effects of group and time means that there is a significant difference between the experimental and control groups during that time period. The contrast tests related to repeated measures and the repeated and simple options were used for further investigation of the differences observed in the interaction between time and group. The results of the analysis are illustrated in table 3.

The results in relation to interaction effect of time and group show that the difference between pretest and posttest in both experimental and control groups is significant. This means that the increase in mean happiness scores in the experimental group (pretest = 26.21

and posttest = 44.00) was significant compared to the control group (pretest = 28.72 and posttest = 28.22). This significant increase can be relevant to the independent variable (self-review therapeutic method). Non-significance of differences observed in follow-up (experiment = 45.63 and control = 26.55) means that the increase in happiness score in the experimental group has persisted until follow-up. Moreover, regarding the persistence of the therapeutic effect until follow-up, the results concerning the significance of interactive effect of time and group indicate that in the pretest-follow-up comparison the difference between control and experimental groups was significant. The increase in the mean happiness scores in the experimental group (pretest = 26.21 and follow-up = 45.63), compared to control group scores (pretest = 28.72 and follow-up = 26.55), was significant. This significant increase during the time from pretest to follow-up can be relevant to the independent variable (self-review therapeutic method). The process of change in happiness scores at pretest, posttest, and follow-up in both experimental and control groups is depicted in figure 1.





**Figure 1.** The process of change in happiness scores in the experimental and control groups at pretest, posttest, and follow-up

## Discussion

The findings of this study showed a significant increase in individuals' happiness in the experimental group in comparison to the control group. A 5-month follow-up of individuals' happiness revealed that the effectiveness of this method has persisted during this time. This method improved positive emotions and reduced negative emotions through voluntary effort, orientation toward positivism, and the reduction of valuation of negative events. This intervention was presented on the premise that reduced attention to and valuation of negative characteristics and increased attention to and valuation of positive attributes (positive cognitive activity) leads to increased happiness. Various researches have shown that paying attention to the key features of self (Brown, & Kobayashi, 2002) and the calculation of assets or blessings as a positive cognitive activity (Chancellor, & Lyubomirsky, 2012; Froh et al., 2008) leads to increased happiness. In the self-review method, the individual is asked to write a positive feature in continuation of any of the features that are perceived to be negative and review these positive features. This process is paying attention to positive features and a kind of positive cognitive activity leading to increased happiness. Additionally, capitalizing

on negative characteristics is reduced through correction of cognitive errors, decreased generalization, and normalization, which eventually result in the enhancing of an individual's feelings.

Positive activities, emotions, behaviors, and thoughts increase positive behaviors and satisfaction of needs and all of these, in turn, increase happiness (Lyubomirsky, & Layos, 2013). In the study by Lyubomirsky and Layos (2013), positive activity of self-review in the experimental group led to increased happiness. Several factors can contribute to the effectiveness of this approach on a significant increase in happiness. These factors may include participants' interest and motivation, and intensity and duration of these positive activities that will be discussed in the following section.

The existence of several characteristics in a person may increase the effectiveness of this method. For example, those who enter into treatment with an extra incentive, report more happiness (Deci, & Rian, 2000; Lyubomirsky et al., 2011). Additionally, those who perform the exercises actively and diligently report more happiness (Lyubomirsky et al., 2011). The subjects participated in this study voluntarily, so it is likely that they had entered this study with interest and motivation. Furthermore, keeping track of home exercises per session may also have been effective on the effectiveness of this method through regular cognitive exercises.

Features of positive activities –including their dosage, variety, sequence, and built-in social support– all influence success in increasing happiness. For example, as with any medical or psychological treatment, the dosage (i.e., frequency and timing) of a positive activity matters. In one study, performing 5 kind acts in 1 day each week (for 6 weeks) resulted in more significant increases in wellbeing than did performing 5 kind acts throughout the week (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). However, positive activities can easily be performed too often. For example, in another study, the calculation of

blessings three times a week had less impact on increasing happiness than once a week (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). What is interesting is that both studies suggested that positive activities performed once a week are maximally effective, possibly because many cultural routines (involving work, worship, and even television) are conducted weekly (Lyubomirsky and Layous, 2013). The participants in the present study were participating in individual weekly sessions. In these sessions, cognitive activities performed at home were investigated and appropriate feedback was provided. The possibility exists that in accordance with several studies (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Lyubomirsky, & Layos, 2013; Boehm, & Lyubomirsky, 2009), the weekly performance of exercises may have a prominent role in the significant increase of happiness. The impact of the duration of activities in the increase in happiness also requires attention. The individuals should not overregulate this activity or perform it in small pieces, but in order to achieve maximum benefit from activities they must perform all of them occasionally. Finally, the increase in happiness necessitates change in a person's activity. In order to maintain the flow of novel positive experiences, one must continually adjust and alter factors such as when, how, where, and with whom one does the activity, thereby, forestalling the effects of hedonic adaptation. These include when, how, where, and with whom to perform the activity (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2007).

Sheldon and Lyubomirsky (2007) argue that the pursuit of happiness requires effort, in other words, deliberate actions. Fortunately, positive activities include those that feel like playing. This activity is more effective when it is appropriate to an individual's durable incentives, tasks, and interests. As a result, the activity is continuously stimulating and the possibility of its continuation increases. Increased happiness may require awareness of happiness, confirmation of its effectiveness, and determination of the purpose of the activity

which increases happiness. If people do not want to be happy, do not believe in the effectiveness of these activities, and be reluctant to invest in this conspectus, change in happiness is unlikely. However, over-focusing on the effects of happiness-enhancing activities may also have negative effects.

It seems that there is a need to pursue happiness and strive to achieve it in order to achieve happiness. Sheldon and Lyubomirsky (2006) stated that effort is needed in order to maintain long-term interest in pleasurable activities. Therefore, it seems that enabling individuals to perform cognitive, behavioral, and positive goal-oriented activities leads to more happiness. Thus, it can be concluded that happiness must be sought.

### Conflict of Interests

Authors have no conflict of interests.

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