

SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING AND HAPPINESS AMONG BOARDING SCHOOL STUDENTS EXPERIENCING BULLYING IN ACEH

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Abstract: Bullying can occur anywhere and can be experienced by anyone, even at school. This condition affects students' subjective well-being and ultimately impacts their happiness during the learning process at school. This study aims to investigate the influence of subjective well-being on the happiness of boarding school students who are victims of bullying in Aceh. The respondents in this study consisted of 313 students from boarding schools in Aceh Besar and Banda Aceh. The measurement tools used were a modified version of the Subjective Well-Being Inventory (SUBI) and the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire. Data were analyzed using simple linear regression analysis, with a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.387 and a significance level of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), indicating a positive relationship between subjective well-being and happiness. The higher the level of subjective well-being felt by students, the greater their happiness. Conversely, the lower the level of subjective well-being felt by students, the lower their happiness among boarding school students who are victims of bullying in Aceh. Further research needs to consider other psychosocial variables and cross-cultural perspectives to deepen our understanding of the role of subjective well-being in adolescent happiness.

Keywords: bullying; boarding school; subjective well-being; happiness; students.

Abstrak: Bullying dapat terjadi di mana saja dan dapat dialami oleh siapa saja, bahkan di sekolah. Kondisi ini memengaruhi kesejahteraan subjektif siswa dan pada akhirnya berdampak pada kebahagiaan mereka selama proses pembelajaran di sekolah. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui pengaruh kesejahteraan subjektif terhadap kebahagiaan siswa sekolah asrama yang menjadi korban bullying di Aceh. Responden dalam penelitian ini terdiri dari 313 siswa dari sekolah asrama di Aceh Besar dan Banda Aceh. Alat ukur yang digunakan adalah versi modifikasi dari Inventori Kesejahteraan Subjektif (SUBI) dan Kuesioner Kebahagiaan Oxford. Data dianalisis menggunakan teknik analisis regresi linier sederhana, dengan nilai korelasi (r) sebesar 0,387 dan tingkat signifikansi sebesar 0,000 ($p < 0,05$) artinya terdapat pengaruh positif antara kesejahteraan subjektif dan kebahagiaan. Semakin tinggi tingkat kesejahteraan subjektif yang dirasakan oleh siswa, semakin besar kebahagiaan mereka. Sebaliknya, semakin rendah tingkat kesejahteraan subjektif yang dirasakan oleh siswa, semakin rendah pula kebahagiaan di antara siswa sekolah asrama yang menjadi korban bullying di Aceh. Penelitian selanjutnya perlu mempertimbangkan variabel psikososial lain serta perspektif lintas budaya untuk memperdalam pemahaman tentang peran subjective well-being terhadap kebahagiaan remaja.

Kata kunci: Kesejahteraan subjektif, kebahagiaan, perundungan, siswa, sekolah asrama.

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Introduction

Bullying behavior can occur anywhere and can be experienced by anyone, even in school environments. Bullying has a detrimental effect on the mental health of its victims, leading to a decrease in their well-being and a sense of loss of happiness in their lives. Victims often endure trauma as a result of the bullying directed towards them. Ideally, school should be a place for enjoyment and learning, but the prevalence of bullying in such an environment adds to the unfortunate reality of education in Indonesia. When students face bullying at school, those with close friendships are more likely to receive timely psychological support. However, students without a close support network may become more isolated, feel dissatisfied with their school experience, and experience a decline in their subjective well-being (Diener, Lucas & Oishi, 2005).

In recent years, bullying in schools has increasingly become a major threat to the safety of educational institutions. According to the CDC's National Health Interview Survey, approximately 34% of teenagers aged 12–17 reported being bullied in the past 12 months during July 2021–December 2023 (Haile et al., 2024). This issue significantly affects students' daily functioning and gradually erodes their overall well-being from an early stage. Research examining the connection between school bullying and subjective well-being consistently finds that bullying acts as a major barrier to students' psychological wellness (Woods & Wolke, 2004; Chrysanthou & Vasilakis, 2019). Numerous studies report that adolescents who have experienced bullying tend to exhibit considerably lower levels of subjective well-being

compared to their peers, with the psychological consequences of school-based violence often outweighing other contributing factors (Pople et al., 2015). Moreover, persistent exposure to bullying over time has been shown to contribute to growing emotional distress, fostering increased feelings of unfairness and dissatisfaction among youth (Kochel et al., 2012).

Although numerous studies have examined the relationship between bullying and students' subjective well-being in regular schools, research specifically investigating bullying within boarding school environments remains limited. Boarding schools differ from regular schools because students live together for extended periods, creating more complex and continuous social interactions. This condition can amplify the impact of bullying, not only during school hours but also outside class time, potentially worsening students' subjective well-being and happiness (Wolke et al., 2020; Hong et al., 2023).

Furthermore, research focusing on boarding schools in Aceh is particularly important due to the unique cultural and social factors in the region. Aceh has strong social norms and values that influence how students interact and respond to conflicts, including bullying (Rahim et al., 2022). Therefore, understanding bullying within the social and cultural context of Aceh can help identify specific protective and risk factors relevant to this environment.

The target age range is 12 to 18 years old, typically students in junior and senior high school. This age group is especially vulnerable to bullying due to sensitive psychological transitions and a heightened need for peer acceptance (Mynard & Joseph, 2021; Smith & Gray, 2022). Research

focusing on this age and grade level is important to gain an accurate understanding of the impact of bullying on subjective well-being during this critical developmental phase.

Happiness plays a vital role in supporting students' success across academic, social, career, and personal domains. According to Ensyek, happiness can be described as a state composed of continuous pleasures, free from sorrow or distress (Azizi et al., 2017). According to the Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language, happiness is defined as a state of joy and peace in life, both physically and spiritually, as well as a sense of fortune and well-being. Surya (2001) explains that happiness is fundamentally a human experience that emerges in response to various aspects encountered throughout one's life journey. If bullying in schools continues to be allowed, it will impact students' mental health and could trigger the emergence of larger mental health issues that we certainly do not want (Kallmen & Hallgren, 2021).

Previous research has shown that bullying is associated with a decrease in subjective well-being and happiness among adolescents (Woods & Wolke, 2004; Pople et al., 2015; Wolke et al., 2020). Subjective well-being describes long-term evaluations of life satisfaction, while happiness reflects daily affective states (Diener, Lucas, & Oishi, 2005). In the context of boarding schools, intense and continuous social interactions amplify the impact of bullying, thereby reducing both aspects (Hong et al., 2023). Therefore, it is important to simultaneously investigate subjective well-being and happiness among bullying victims in boarding schools to obtain a comprehensive understanding of their psychological condition. Thus, the research hypothesis is that there is a

significant positive relationship between subjective well-being and happiness among boarding school students who are victims of bullying.

Method

The research methods used in this study are descriptive analysis and simple linear regression. The population in this study consists of boarding school students in Aceh, using a purposive sampling technique and cluster sampling. This technique involves several considerations for selecting samples based on opportunities or chances that align with the desired criteria in the research. Based on this consideration, the respondents involved in this study were boarding school students from Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar. Participants were selected using purposive sampling and cluster sampling techniques, which involve selecting samples based on specific considerations aligned with the objectives and criteria of the study. The inclusion criteria for this research were as follows: (1) students currently enrolled in a boarding school, (2) studying in the Banda Aceh or Aceh Besar areas, and (3) having experienced bullying during their time in the boarding school environment.

Participants who had experienced bullying were identified through a screening process utilizing a bullying questionnaire in the form of a checklist, which included three types of bullying, each accompanied by a brief and clear description. Participants were asked to indicate the types of bullying they had experienced, either individually or in combination. This study employed two psychological measurement tools: the subjective well-being scale and the happiness scale. The

subjective well-being scale is a modified version of the Subjective Well-Being Inventory (SUBI) developed by Sell and Nagpal (1992), comprising ten statement items that have been adapted from the original format. Similarly, the happiness scale is based on a revised version of the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire, originally created by Michael Argyle and Peter Hills (2001) at Oxford University, and also consists of ten modified items. In addition, the questionnaire used in this research is designed to collect descriptive quantitative data related to bullying, to determine whether the sample in this study meets the previously established criteria, namely boarding school students who have experienced bullying.

This research measurement tool also underwent reliability testing, item discrimination power testing, and reliability testing before the data processing was conducted. The content validity test was used to get the validity test findings for both scales. The Content Validity Ratio (CVR), which is calculated based on assessments from Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), was the method used to determine content validity in this study. Two expert evaluators reviewed the items on both the subjective well-being and happiness scales. All items achieved CVR values above zero, indicating that they were deemed valid. To assess the discriminative power of each item, the correlation coefficient between the distribution of individual item scores and the overall scale scores was also calculated. This computation will yield the total item correlation. A higher positive correlation between an individual item score and the total scale score suggests stronger alignment with the underlying construct, thereby indicating greater discriminative power. Within the subjective well-being scale, only

eight items achieved a correlation coefficient of ≥ 0.25 , signifying acceptable discriminative capacity. In contrast, two items were found to be invalid, having r values below 0.25, which implies insufficient discriminative ability and renders them unsuitable for use in subsequent research. Meanwhile, on the happiness scale, all items (10 items) achieved a correlation coefficient value of ≥ 0.25 , so their discriminative power is considered satisfactory, and all items can be used for further research.

The reliability testing of the subjective well-being scale was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, the scale yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.758. Following the removal of two low-performing items, the second phase produced an improved alpha value of 0.811. These results indicate that the subjective well-being scale demonstrates good reliability, falling within the high reliability category. Meanwhile, the happiness scale underwent a single-phase reliability test, resulting in a Cronbach's alpha of 0.873. No items were eliminated during item analysis, and the scale is considered to have high reliability. Based on the results of these tests, the researchers can use these measuring instruments for research data collection.

Results

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the research participants, which include gender, age, and the type of bullying experienced. A total of 313 high school students from Islamic boarding schools (SMA level) in Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar participated in this study. The demographic distribution is as follows:

Tabel 1. *Demographic Data of Research Participants (N = 313)*

Category	Sub-Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Total
Gender	Male	136	43.5%	313 (100%)
	Female	177	56.5%	
Age	15 years old	58	18.2%	313 (100%)
	16 years old	172	55.0%	
	17 years old	83	26.0%	
Class Level	Grade X	169	54.0%	313 (100%)
	Grade XI	144	46.0%	
	Grade XII	0	0.0%	
Type of Bullying	Verbal Bullying	109	34.8%	313 (100%)
	Physical Bully			

As shown in Table 1, the majority of participants were female (56.5%) and predominantly 16 years old (55%). Regarding the type of bullying experienced, physical bullying was the most frequently reported (45.7%), followed by verbal bullying (34.8%) and psychological or relational bullying (19.2%).

To examine the descriptive data regarding the subjective well-being and happiness variables among the research participants, the categorization results are as follows.

Tabel 2. *subjective well-being categorisation*

Category	Interval	Respondent (n)	Percentage (%)
Low	$X < 26,8$	41	13,1%
Medium	$26,6 \leq X < 40,48$	222	70,9%
High	$40,48 < X$	50	16%
Total		313	100%

Based on Table 2 above, the empirical data categorizing subjective well-being among the participants of this study reveals that 41 students (13.1%) exhibit low subjective well-being, 222 students (70.9%) have moderate subjective well-being, and 50 students (16%) display high subjective well-being.

Tabel 3. *Happiness categorisation*

Category	Interval	Respondent (n)	Percentage (%)
Low	$X < 30,64$	48	15,3%
Medium	$30,64 \leq X < 47,74$	209	66,8%
High	$47,74 < X$	56	17,9%
Total		313	100%

Based on Table 3 above, the empirical data on the categorization of happiness among the participants in this study shows that 48 students (15.3%) have low happiness, 209 students (66.8%) have moderate happiness, and 56 students (17.9%) have high happiness.

Prior to conducting the simple linear regression analysis, several prerequisite tests were performed to ensure that the assumptions for parametric testing were met. These tests included normality, linearity, heteroscedasticity, and autocorrelation. The normality test was initially conducted using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov method. Results showed that the *subjective well-being* variable was normally distributed ($p = 0.440 > 0.05$), while the *happiness* variable was not ($p = 0.006 < 0.05$). Therefore, a secondary normality test using skewness and kurtosis was performed. Both

variables fell within the acceptable range of -1.96 to +1.96, confirming normal distribution.

The linearity test, conducted using the F Linearity method, produced a significant result ($F = 61.955$, $p = 0.000$), indicating a linear relationship between subjective well-being and happiness. The heteroscedasticity test showed a significance value of $p = 0.110$ (> 0.05), indicating that the residuals were randomly distributed and the assumption of homoscedasticity was met. Finally, the autocorrelation test using the Durbin-Watson statistic yielded a value of 1.992, which falls between 1 and 3. This result indicates the absence of autocorrelation in the regression model.

Based on the results of these assumption tests, the data met all necessary criteria, and the regression model was deemed appropriate for further analysis. Consequently, the researchers proceeded with hypothesis testing using Pearson's product-moment correlation to examine the relationship between subjective well-being and happiness. The results of this correlation analysis are presented in the following table.

Tabel 4. Hypothesis Result

Variabel	r	r^2	p
Subjective Well-Being* Happiness	0,387	0,150	0,000

Based on the correlation results, it is known that the correlation between subjective well-being and happiness can be seen from the calculated r value of 0.387, which is classified as weak (< 0.5). This correlation value is positive, indicating that the relationship pattern between subjective well-being and happiness is positive or direct, meaning there is a positive influence of subjective well-being on happiness. This means that the stronger the subjective well-being felt by

boarding school students, the greater the happiness experienced by these students. The significance test results revealed a p -value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), indicating a highly significant positive influence of subjective well-being on happiness. Therefore, the research hypothesis is supported. The coefficient of determination (r^2) was found to be 0.150, suggesting that 15% of the variance in happiness can be explained by subjective well-being, while the remaining 85% is attributed to other influencing factors beyond subjective well-being.

The simple linear regression results for subjective well-being and happiness among boarding school students are shown in table 5

Tabel 5. Simple linear regression equation results

Model	B	Std.Error ²	Beta
1 Constanta	22,919	2,243	
Subjective Well-Being	0,484	0,065	0,387

Based on the table above, the regression equation (regression model) can be formulated as: $Y = 22.919 + 0.484$ subjective well-being. The regression coefficient for the subjective well-being variable is positive, with a value of 0.484. The constant value of 22.919 indicates that when the subjective well-being variable is 0, happiness will have a value of 22.919. This means that for every 1-unit increase in subjective well-being, happiness will increase by 0.484 units.

Discussion

The current study found a statistically significant but weak positive relationship between subjective well-being and happiness among boarding school students who have experienced

bullying in Aceh. The findings of this study are consistent with those of Abdullahi, Orji, Rabiyyu, and Kawu (2020), who reported that subjective well-being has a significant influence on happiness. Subjective well-being includes multiple components such as happiness, life satisfaction, the presence of positive emotions, and the absence of negative emotions. Evidence suggests that activities and experiences promoting subjective well-being positively contribute to both physical health and emotional happiness. For instance, adolescents who report higher levels of subjective well-being marked by frequent positive emotions and greater life satisfaction tend to exhibit better mental health and overall functioning. Similarly, research by Hastuti, Heng, and Soetikno (2020) emphasizes that subjective well-being is a multidimensional construct reflecting individuals' evaluations of their lives and experiences, which in turn plays a crucial role in shaping their sense of happiness. This involves cognitive evaluation, such as life satisfaction, and affective experiences, including emotions and moods. The relationship between subjective well-being and happiness is quite significant, as higher levels of subjective well-being are associated with increased happiness and life satisfaction.

Subjective well-being is therefore an important determinant of happiness, encompassing emotional and cognitive evaluations of life. Understanding the nuances of subjective well-being can help in developing strategies to enhance happiness, particularly in vulnerable populations such as bullying victims. Previous studies have shown that individuals with high levels of subjective well-being tend to experience positive emotions and evaluate their surroundings in a favorable light even

in challenging circumstances (Myers & Diener, 1995). In contrast, those with lower subjective well-being often assess the same situations negatively and are more likely to experience negative emotions such as anxiety, depression, anger, and aggression, leading to diminished happiness. Ryff (1989) also defines subjective well-being as an overall sense of satisfaction and positive feelings toward various aspects of life, including oneself, others, family, and career. Additional studies have further revealed that bullying has a substantial adverse effect on children's subjective well-being, with bullying behavior accounting for approximately 5% of the variance in children's subjective well-being particularly in Indonesia. Traditional bullying, cyberbullying, and sibling bullying all contribute to reducing children's well-being, and the link between bullying and subjective well-being has been observed across different contexts. For instance, international surveys have consistently found that bullying is negatively correlated with students' life satisfaction across countries, with more frequent bullying leading to a decline in subjective well-being.

Although this study confirmed a significant relationship between subjective well-being and happiness, the strength of the correlation was relatively weak ($r = 0.387$; $r^2 = 0.150$). This indicates that subjective well-being explained only 15% of the variance in happiness, suggesting that other factors played a more dominant role. Previous studies have highlighted that victims of bullying often experience psychological distress such as anxiety, low self-esteem, and depressive symptoms, which can undermine the positive effects of subjective well-being on happiness (Moore et al., 2017; Armitage, 2021). Thus, while subjective well-being

encompasses cognitive (life satisfaction) and affective (positive emotions) dimensions, the affective benefits may be overshadowed by the negative emotional consequences of bullying.

Cultural context also plays an important role. In collectivist cultures such as Indonesia, happiness is closely linked to social acceptance and harmonious relationships within the group (Uchida, Norasakkunkit, & Kitayama, 2004). Victims of bullying, who often experience social exclusion, may therefore report lower levels of happiness regardless of their individual subjective well-being. Moreover, family support has been shown to buffer the negative effects of bullying on adolescents' mental health (Holt et al., 2013). Without strong parental involvement, the protective role of subjective well-being is weakened. Similarly, peer support is a crucial determinant of adolescent happiness (Chu et al., 2010), and the lack of peer acceptance in bullying contexts diminishes the contribution of subjective well-being. The school environment is another significant determinant. Studies have found that school connectedness and supportive teacher-student relationships are strongly associated with both subjective well-being and happiness (Suldo et al., 2006; Tian, Chen, & Huebner, 2014). When schools fail to address bullying effectively, students' happiness is more affected by their immediate social environment than by their individual subjective well-being. Therefore, the weak role of subjective well-being in predicting happiness among bullying victims can be attributed to the interplay of cultural expectations, parental support, peer relationships, and school climate.

The current study provides a novel contribution by situating the findings in the unique cultural and educational context of Aceh, where

students live in boarding schools with continuous social interactions and strong collectivist norms. These conditions may intensify the effects of bullying while simultaneously shaping coping strategies that influence both well-being and perceived happiness (Uchida, Norasakkunkit, & Kitayama, 2004; Rahim, Hasan, & Abdullah, 2022). By highlighting that the correlation between subjective well-being and happiness remains weak in this setting, the study underscores the necessity of considering broader cultural and environmental moderators such as resilience, religiosity, or peer support that may explain why some students still report happiness despite exposure to bullying.

Previous research has consistently shown that bullying victimization is associated with psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, which may weaken the protective role of subjective well-being (Armitage, 2021). Moreover, family and peer support have been identified as critical buffers against the negative effects of bullying, with parental involvement and positive peer relationships serving to maintain adolescents' well-being despite adversity (Holt, Espelage, & Koenig, 2013). School climate is another significant determinant, as teacher support and school connectedness are strongly related to both subjective well-being and happiness (Tian, Chen, & Huebner, 2014).

From a practical standpoint, these findings suggest that interventions aimed at improving subjective well-being may indirectly promote happiness, even among bullying victims. Schools and dormitory administrators should consider implementing regular screening mechanisms to identify students at risk of low well-being, alongside school-based interventions such as peer mentoring

programs, resilience training, and counseling services. Evidence from meta-analyses has shown that structured school-based anti-bullying programs, such as the Bullying Prevention Program, are effective in reducing bullying and improving student outcomes (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). Furthermore, fostering a supportive school climate, promoting positive teacher–student relationships, and establishing clear anti-bullying policies can buffer the negative effects of bullying while simultaneously enhancing both subjective well-being and happiness.

Conclusion

This study revealed a statistically significant yet weak positive relationship between subjective well-being and happiness among boarding school students in Aceh who experienced bullying. While subjective well-being contributes to adolescents' happiness, its effect appears to be diminished by broader psychosocial and cultural factors, including bullying-related distress, peer exclusion, family support, school climate, and collectivist cultural norms. The unique boarding school environment characterized by continuous social interactions and strong social expectations may intensify both the negative impact of bullying and the coping strategies that influence students' perceptions of well-being and happiness.

These findings underscore the importance of addressing not only individual psychological resources but also the wider social and cultural environment in promoting adolescent happiness. School and dormitory administrators should implement systematic interventions such as regular screening for well-being, peer mentoring programs,

resilience training, counseling services, and the establishment of clear anti-bullying policies. By fostering a supportive school climate and strengthening teacher student relationships, educational institutions can buffer the adverse effects of bullying while enhancing both subjective well-being and happiness. Ultimately, integrating individual, social, and cultural perspectives is essential to strengthen the protective role of subjective well-being in promoting happiness among adolescents in boarding school contexts. Further research is suggested to explore other variables such as social support, self-esteem, or resilience, and to employ a cross-cultural approach to better understand the differing roles of subjective well-being in shaping adolescent happiness.

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