



# Factors Affecting Happiness

**Name: Dr. Suraj Kumar**

**Designation: (Assistant Professor)**

**N.M.S.N Dass P.G college Budaun U.P**

**Mob. No. 8005145710**

**Postal Address: Room No 118 Department of Modern Indian Languages**

**N.M.S.N Dass P G College Budaun UP 243601**

## Abstract

Before going to discuss on the topic “Happiness: Nature Vs. Nurture” we need to know first what is happiness? According to Psychology happiness is nothing but a chemical named Dopamine which is released in our brain (in Pituitary gland). This hormone is released when we do something pleasurable like when we listen light music, getting massage or completing a physical exercise. Serotonin, Endorphins and oxytocin are also known as happy hormones. Researches says that 50% of our happiness comes from our gene(5-HTTLPR), 10% from our day to day lives and other 40% is depending on us. Nature or genetic happiness depends on our gene. At the time of birth specific variation of the gene 5-HTTLPR can lead to an overall higher life satisfaction rate but it does not give us the guarantee for a content life. The importance of nature vs. nurture in determining an individual’s happiness. Both nature (genetics) and nurture(environment) have similar significant and influence in the case of an individual’s happiness. Both play a significant role in the shaping of an individual’s happiness and personality traits as well. Gene can predispose individuals to certain personality traits and emotional disposition. An individual may have a genetic component to happiness. For example, identical twins are more likely to share similar level of happiness compared to fraternal twins.

Nurture(environment) also play an important role shaping an individual’s happiness positive and supportive environment make one’s happy while negative and stressful environments can lead to unhappiness. Despite all childhood experiences family dynamics, socio economic status and cultural factors play a significant role in shaping one’s values beliefs and expectations which in turn can influence their perception happiness.

Nature and nurture both are dependent on each other and both can make impact to shape one’s personality and happiness.

**Keywords:** Nature, Nurture, Happiness, Neurotransmitter, Dopamine, Serotonin, Oxytocin

## Introduction:

Happiness is influenced by nature or nurture is a complex question. The debates over whether happiness is much influenced by nature or nurture is ongoing till the date. Happiness comes from nature as well as from nurture. Researches suggests that a portion of our happiness comes from the gene(5-HTTLPR). This gene works as

transporter of chemical Serotonin often called happy hormone. The variation in this gene may affect the level of happiness. Genetic predisposition may affect our positive or negative outlook towards life. For example, to be much optimistic or pessimistic is the result of such a genetic predisposition. Besides this genetic predisposition and neurochemical factors may affect the level of happiness in our day to day lives. Neurotransmitters and hormones such as serotonin, dopamine and oxytocin influence our mood and happiness. The level of these hormones affects the level of happiness. Here I would like to pay your attention towards the gene 5-HTTLPR because the variation of this gene can affect the functioning of these hormones in the brain.

Nurture (Environment or experiences) is also responsible for our happiness. Calm and peaceful environment gives us a happy and peaceful life while stressful atmosphere or environment makes us unhappy or dejected. Besides these all, early childhood experiences, social relationships, cultural and socioeconomic factors and life events also affect our level of happiness.

It's important to note that the relative influence of nature and nurture on happiness can vary from person to person. Some individuals may have a genetic predisposition for happiness but their environment and life experiences can still have a substantial impact. Similarly, those with genetic predisposition for lower happiness can still find ways to increase their well-being through positive experiences and environmental changes.

### **Review of Literature:**

Several researches have conducted on the happiness and the factors affecting happiness such as the study by Morten L. Kringelbach and Kent C. Berridge (2009). They worked on "The neuroscience of Happiness and Pleasure" and reveal the fact about the neurotransmitter's role in shaping the level of happiness.

One more study by Lykken & Tellegen 1996 and shows the genetic make-up and its impact on happiness. Bartels & Boomsma (2009) have studied on the impact of gene on happiness. They studied on identical twins and families and found that genetic similarities and variation plays a significant role in the shaping of an individual's happiness.

### **The impact of Nature on Happiness:**

Genetic predisposition plays an important role in shaping our happiness. Studies on identical twins and family-based researches reveal the fact that the substantial heritability component in happiness. This study shows that around 30-50% the variance in an individual's happiness may be attributed to their genetic make-up. (Lykken & Tellegen 1996, Bartels & Boomsma 2009). Specific genes linked to neurotransmitters such as serotonin and dopamine have been implicated in mood regulation and happiness (Canli et al. 2006). These genetic variations can affect the individual's emotional set point, which acts as a baseline for experiencing happiness and other emotions. One thing I would like to add here and that is Sonja Lyubomirsky's research who is the author of "The How of Happiness". She discloses in her research that 50% of our happiness comes from our genetics. But it is not 100% clear which genes specifically code for happiness. In spite of all Researchers uncover over 300 genomes that they have linked to happiness.

We can see the impact of neurobiology on our happiness. Brain releases chemicals like dopamine, serotonin and oxytocin which play a significant role to maintain the level of happiness. In all these chemicals dopamine plays a central role in experiencing pleasure and happiness. (Kringelbach and Berridge 2009).

### **The Impact of Nurture on Happiness:**

Environment and life experiences also play a significant role on our happiness. Research has shown 40% of our happiness depends on us. There are a lot of factors that affect the level of happiness in our day to day lives such as social relationships, cultural and environmental factors and socio-economic factors etc. Researches show a strong relationship between an individual's social relationship and his happiness. Positive interpersonal relationship including family, friends and romantic partners have a profound impact on one's well-being while social isolation and poor relationships can lead to unhappiness and mental health issues. (Lyubomirsky et al. 2005).

Along with social relationships, socioeconomic factors are also responsible for our happiness. Socioeconomic conditions can influence the quality of life, access to education, healthcare and opportunities for personal growth. All of the factors play a significant role in determining one's overall happiness. Like socioeconomic factors cultural and environmental factors play an important role in shaping an individual's level of happiness. For example, cultural attitudes towards individualism and collectivism can shape the importance, placed on personal versus social source of happiness. Life experiences also play a crucial role in shaping and influencing an individual's

overall well-being and happiness. Positive life experiences such as achieving personal goals, forming meaningful relationships, experiencing moments of joy and success, and pursuing one's passions can lead to increased happiness. These experiences provide a sense of fulfilment while negative life experiences such as loss, trauma, and failure may lead to stress, sadness and decreased overall well-being. Health related experiences, such as illness, recovery, or the maintenance of a healthy lifestyle, can have a direct impact on happiness. Good health often leads to greater well-being and happiness

Happiness can vary across different life stages. For instance, research has shown that tends to follow a U-shaped pattern, with lower levels in midlife and higher levels in youth and old age. Life experiences and individual's coping mechanism play a significant role in these fluctuations. People who develop effective coping strategies and adapt to difficult situations tend to maintain higher levels of happiness. Here I would like to include Martin Seligman's PERMA model which comprises five elements of happiness and well-being. These are Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and accomplishments. This theory suggests that happiness is not solely influenced by genetic factors but also the conscious choices and actions of individuals in their environment. (Seligman 2011).

### **Nature -Nurture Interaction in Happiness:**

The debate about whether nature or nurture has a greater impact on happiness, is the centre point of this research paper. Both nature and nurture have similar impact on one's happiness. If we focus on the interaction between gene and environment then we find that genetic predispositions can shape an individual response to environmental factors including stressors and supportive conditions. An individual's genetic make-up can affect how they perceive and react to life events, influencing their overall happiness. For example, a person with a genetic predisposition for high level of Serotonin might be less affected by the environmental stressors that can reduce happiness.

**Epigenetics:** It explores how environmental factors can modify gene expression. Epigenetic changes can occur in response to various environmental factors including diet, stress and exposure to toxins. These changes can influence gene expression and an individual's sensitivity to happiness or unhappiness. (Meaney et al 2010)

### **Life Events and Adaptation:**

Besides this our life events both positive and negative can influence our level of happiness. Sometimes this influence may be for a short period of time and sometimes for a longer one. However, the adaptation principles suggest that with the passes of time we cope up with the situation. And thus, we return back to our baseline level of happiness over time. (Lyubomirsky et al 2005)

### **The Role of Choice:**

Our choices also play a significant role in shaping our happiness and well-being. We have capacity to make choices that contribute to our happiness such as pursuing meaningful goals, fostering positive relationships and cultivating a positive mindset. (Seligman 2011) These choices are influenced by both genetic predisposition and environmental factors, highlighting synergy nature and nurture.

**Conclusion:** Happiness is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon influenced by both genetic and environmental factors. The nature vs. Nurture debate regarding happiness does not have a clear-cut answer because both have a similar and significant impact in shaping the happiness. Moreover, both are interlinked and interconnected to each other and also influenced to each other. Therefore, we cannot say whether happiness is influenced by nature or nurture. Both play a significant role to maintain the level of happiness.

### **Objectives of the study:**

To explore whether happiness is genetic?

To explore whether happiness depends on Nature or Nurture

To analyse the impact of genetic make-up on the level of happiness.

To examine the role of life experiences and environment to maintain the level of happiness.

To understand social and psychological aspects of happiness.

**Research Methodology:** The researcher will select secondary source method of data collection.

**Results:** 50% of our happiness comes from our gene (5-HTTLPR), 10% from our day to day lives and other 40% is depending on us. Hence Nature and Nurture both equally influence the level of happiness.

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