



Love of Life among Palestinian Students in the West Bank and its Relationship with Selected Variables

Nahida Al-Arja ¹

¹ * Assistant Professor PhD, Social Sciences Department, Bethlehem University, Bethlehem, Palestine e-mail: narja@bethlehem.edu

Abstract

Love of life is defined as an overall positive attitude toward life and a liking for life. This study aimed to identify the level of love of life among a sample of Palestinian students in Bethlehem and Nablus governorates during the time of the popular revolt (2015) as well as to ascertain the (extent of) impact of selected demographic variables on this. An intentional random sample of 694 West Bank school and university students was chosen. They responded to the Love of Life Scale. The results revealed that the degree of love of life among West Bank students was average. The mean of the total degree (on the scale) was 3.4. No variance of statistical evidence was found on the love of life scale due to the following -socio-economic variables: gender, religion, place of residence and educational level of both parents (father and mother). However, variance of statistical significance was found due to religion in favor of Christians. The mean for Christian students was (53.58) compared to (53.48) scored by Muslim students. This is a relatively a close percentage. Place of residence findings showed some differences between village and camp in favor of village residents.

Keywords: Love of life, students, Palestine

Introduction

Affected and torn by numerous wars, events and catastrophes (the 1948 Nakba, 1967 war, First Uprising 1987, and Al-Aqsa Uprising 2000), it is absolutely normal for the Palestinians, to think of death more than of life. Death appears to be a daily routine for them caused by the bombing of Israeli war planes or shelling of tanks. Anxiety about death in the midst of such restless and agitated circumstances becomes an inevitable result. Conversely, an assessment of the degree of love of life among a sample of Palestinians might also reflect their psychological condition. In positive psychology, the concepts of good life, personal welfare, or a feeling that “everything is alright” are always explored, studied and assessed. It is possible to imagine “a good life” as a comprehensive structural concept which includes two basic components: happiness and satisfaction with life.

According to Diener (1998) good life is a psychological term which is generally referred to as “happiness”. However, this study prefers to use the concept of “good life” rather than “happiness,” since the latter has many different connotations (or implications). Good life refers to an evaluation of life by the individual himself/herself including the cognitive judgments of this life. For example, it relates to the extent of satisfaction with one’s life in addition to the emotional assessment of it. (Mood and Emotions)

However, several researchers (Diener, Lucas, Oishi, 2002) use the concept “happiness” in this regard (Abdel Khalek, 2016). Veenhoven (2011a), the founder of the World Database of Happiness, which includes reviews of 9884 studies, uses happiness as an umbrella term for all that is good and alright. Based on this sense, happiness is usually used interchangeably with terms like: good life or quality of life. He/She maintains that, “happiness is understood as the extent of a person’s love of his life or to the degree to which one evaluates one’s life as a whole positively” (Veenhoven, 2009).

Argyle, one of the most important figures in the field, has proposed/identified three possible components of happiness: positive emotion, satisfaction, and the absence of negative emotions such as depression or anxiety (Argyle, Martin, and Lu (1995). Accordingly, positive emotions are an integral component of happiness. Appositive emotion could be about things in the past, present or the future. Positive emotions about the future can include optimism, hope, faith, and trust. Positive emotions about the present can encompass: joy, ecstasy, serenity/tranquility, vitality, enthusiasm or frenzy, and pleasure. However, the most important

of positive emotions is euphoria/ elation/ enjoyment???, the feeling most people have in mind when they are usually talking about happiness, even though happiness is much more encompassing. On the other hand, past positive emotions may include: satisfaction, contentedness, achievement, pride, sincerity, and serenity; yet, it is not necessary that these emotions are always linked together (Seligman, 2005, p. 87).

According to Seligman (1995), the roots of our happiness as adults developed during our childhood. He asserts that teaching ten-year-old children optimistic thinking skills would halve the rate of depression that occurs to them during puberty and thereafter (in: Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002).

Most of us would not associate happiness with pre-adulthood years, which nowadays range from age 12 to 24. Everybody, including adolescents, often reflects on how hard and stressful it is to be in this period. And the more we say it, the truer it becomes, because we try to live up to the expectations we create. The same is true for modern adulthood. Everybody thinks it is hard to be an adult in our furiously changing world. Not to be stressed is a rarity. But alternative ways always exist. Happiness - not [to be] understood as perpetual pleasure and bliss, but as “engagement” and “loving life fully” -- is always a possibility for those who seek with dedication and acquire the right know-how. This goes for all stages, even for the most tumultuous one: adolescence (Polard, 2015).

Happiness has been the subject of research in a variety of fields. Kristbjörg, Haraldsdóttir (2015) showed that the majority of Icelandic secondary school students describe themselves as happy. Perception of financial status at home, physical health, emotional support from parents, and emotional support from friends were found to be strong predictors of Icelandic secondary school students’ happiness. Abdel Khalek (2015) concluded that those who consider themselves as having felt /experienced happiness, reported higher mental and physical health, and that being more religious demonstrated the importance of caring relationships for happiness among adolescents with schools, community, and parents. They stated that happiness was positively associated with meals with family and good connections with friends, school, family, and regular exercise. In contrast, the work of Lambert et al. (2014) indicates the importance of adolescents’ relationship with parents. Nickerson and Nagle (2004) also concluded that peer and parent relations were highly correlated with general life satisfaction and attachment relationships predicted positive well-being for adolescents.

Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi (2002) define positive psychology as the area that concerns the personal level which is linked with experience which is of the same value as happiness, satisfaction, and content (past time) present self-experience and emotional happiness (present time) and hope and optimism (in future). On the individual level, positive psychology deals with positive features, like ability to love whether towards others, or animals, plants, courage, talent and wisdom.

On the collective level (social), positive psychology addresses popular attributes which society seeks to acquire and develop. It is these attributes which different institutions like schools, clubs, places of worship, seek to strengthen among their members in the civil society more than focusing on care of others, courtesy, teamwork, or responsibility (Younes, 2011).

Abdel Khalek (2016) assumed that “love of life”, a new concept in the field, is one of the components of good self-life (Abdel Khalek, 2003, 2013b, 2007a, 2004). The definition of love of life is to have a positive attitude by the individual towards his life in general, positive evaluation, holding fast to it, delightful attachment, and good appreciation. There has been

very little research on love of life in the Arab world. Abdel Khalek (2013) conducted a study on Kuwaiti and Lebanese nationals and found that Kuwaitis, of both sexes, love life more than Lebanese with a substantial difference. It was also found that there was a statistically significant difference between the means of male and female on psychological health scale (Abdel Khalek (2013)). To the best of our knowledge, there has been no studies on love of life in Palestine. It is hoped that the present research will fill this research gap. The main goal of this study is to identify the level of love of life among a sample of Palestinian students in Bethlehem and Nablus governorates during the time of the popular revolt as well as to identify the impact of several demographic variables on it.

Method

Participants and Procedures

The study sample consisted of 694 West Bank school and university students (private and government) in Palestine.

Instrumentation

The questionnaire battery, including a consent form, a demographic sheet, and the Arab version? Of love of life scale was administered. The Love of Life Scale (Abdel-Khalek, 2016) contains 16 items. Each item is answered and rated on a 5-point Likert-type format, anchored by 1: No and 5: Very much. The total scores range from 15 to 75, with higher scores denoting a higher death obsession. Cronbach's Alpha reliability of the love of life among Palestinian students was (95, 0) denoting high internal consistency and temporal stability. The descriptive analytical method in this study was adopted in order to answer the questions and assumptions presented by the study.

Analysis

Data analysis and sample size calculations were performed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences Software (SPSS, version 19).

Results

According to the findings of the present study of the total sample of participants (n=694), it was found out that the degree of love of life among West Bank students scored average. The mean of the total degree on the scale scored (3.4) with a standard deviation of (0.88).

Table 1. *Numbers, means, standard deviations of the degree of love of life among West Bank school and university students*

Variable	Mean	Number	Standard Deviation
Love of life degree	3.4	694	0.88

A. Gender

It is clear that there are no significant statistical differences in the total degree between males and females. The mean of male students was (52.96) and females (54.33); it is a relatively close percentage since the level of significance scored (120).

As for the dimension of the gender, there were statistically significant differences regarding the dimension of targeted sense of life. The significance level was (.006) in favor of the females; the females mean reached (14.65) while that of the males reached (14.36).

Table 2. Results of t-test for variances in total means of love of life among students related to gender variable

Dimension	Gender	N	Mean	Std	T	Degree of freedom	Level of significance
Love of life	Male	157	52.96	12.69	-.806	2.437	.120
	Female	104	54.33	14.61			
Positive attitude towards life	Male	176	24.35	6.31	-.783	.966	.326
	Female	122	24.38	6.96			
Happy consequences of love of life	Male	174	14.40	14.40	-.35	2.081	.150
	Female	118	14.69	14.69			
Meaningfulness of life	Male	179	14.36	14.36	-.643	7.765	.006
	Female	121	14.65	14.65			

B. Religion

It is clear that there were statistically significant differences in the total degree of love of life between Christians and Muslims. The mean scored by Christian students was (53.58) while the mean for Muslim students was (53.48), which is a relatively close percentage. The level of significance was (0.012). As for the dimension of religion, it was found that the differences regarding the three dimensions were statistically significant.

Table 3. Findings of t-test of the differences in the total means of Love of Life among students due to the religion variable

Dimension	Religion	N	Mean	Std	T value	Degree of freedom	Level of significance
Love of life	Christian	29	53.58	17.12	.037	6.476	.012
	Muslim	213	53.48	13.01			
	Total	250	14.65	3.42			

C. Place of Residence

It is clear that there were statistically significant differences in the total degree of love of life. Tukey test was used to identify these differences. Findings showed that differences between a village and a camp were in favor of the village residents. The mean of the village scored (56.41) and (50.73) for the camp where significance level reached (.045).

Table 4. *One Way Anova analysis of the differences in the degree of love of life and its dimensions among students according to the place of residence*

Dimension	Source	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Squares Mean	F Value	Level of significance
Love of life	Between groups	1126.52	2	563.26	3.148	0.045
	Inside groups	45987.7	257	178.94		
	Total	47114.2	259			

D. Educational level of father

Table 5. shows that there were no statistically significant differences in the means of the subjects' degree differences on the love of life scale due to the educational level of the father since the statistical significance was greater than 0.05. at the total degree of love of life.

Table 5. *One Way Anova analysis of the differences in the degree of love of life and its dimensions among students according to educational level of father*

Dimension	Source	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Squares Mean	F Value	Level of significance
Love of life	Between groups	1567.73	5	313.547	1.739	.126
	Inside groups	45625.01	253	180.336		
	Total	47192.7	258			
	Inside groups	60.208	296	12.72		
	Total	62.596	298			

E. Educational level of mother

It is clear from Table 6 that there were no statistically significant differences in the means of the subjects' degree differences on the love of life scale due to the mother's educational level since the statistical significance was greater than 0.05. at the total degree of love of life.

Table 6. *One Way Anova analysis of the differences in the degree of love of life and its dimensions among students according to educational level of mother*

Dimension	Source	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Squares Mean	F Value	Level of significance
Love of life	Between groups	5	1021.58	204.31	1.123	.348
	Inside groups	251	45657.8	181.904		
	Total	256	46679.4			
	Inside groups	296	60.208	12.72		
	Total	298	62.596			

Discussion

This is the first study that examines love of life among Palestinian students in Bethlehem and Nablus during the popular revolt and its correlation with several demographic variables.

As for the first objective which relates to the investigation of the degree of love of life among West Bank students, the degree scored was average. The mean of this degree on the total degree reached (.304) with a standard deviation of (0.88). Bearing in mind that the study's sample of Palestinian male and female students are living under the yoke of Israeli occupation and are exposed to harsh conditions in their daily lives, it was expected that the averages of love of life would be low compared with subjects from other Arab countries, which are politically and economically much more stable. However, this apparently was not the case. It might be speculated that being exposed to harsh living conditions for a long period (i.e. since 1967), and that these conditions may be working in much the same way as the principle of "flooding" used in psychological therapy. This is consistent with the findings of Al-Arja (2004), which investigated death anxiety among Palestinians during and after the Second Intifada. It was found out that Palestinians score on death anxiety was average, i.e. less or equal to the mean of students in politically stable countries that are not under occupation.

The present findings also highlight/emphasize the adaptive energies as well as the huge adjustment potentials applied, adopted and used by the Palestinians as a result of activation of some personality traits mainly resilience, (Abdel Khalek, 2006). In addition, the findings also show that there were no statistically significant differences in the means of the sample subjects' degree differences on the scale of love of life relating to gender, religion, parents' academic level. This means that the harsh conditions the Palestinian people are experiencing almost constantly (like killing, shelling of homes, and detention of the youths in particular) will temporarily and intermittently constitute an obstacle for the love of life. Yet, the moment these causes cease to exist, the problem will no longer exist.

The present findings are consistent with Abdel Khalek (2013) which examined the absence of differences between males and females in the degree of love of life. The study was conducted on Kuwaiti and Lebanese nationals and showed that both male and female Kuwaitis loved life substantially more than their Lebanese counterparts. This researcher considers the lack of nonexistence of a significance of the parents' educational level might be attributed to the fact that all groups (uneducated or educated including all levels: elementary, preparatory, secondary, diploma, university, or higher) live under the same conditions, and are target to the same by shelling, arrest and martyrdom. Regardless of educational level, these harsh conditions have left a negative psychological impact on all categories, though not on their love of life.

This corresponds to what From (2016) calls the Art of Life, which is the ability to live ones reality with its good and bad and joy and sorrow. It is living life paradoxes. The strength of the Ego entails the ability to adapt, to feel frustrated and to delightfully live life. The study findings indicate statistically significant differences in the total degree of love of life due to the place of residence variable in favor of village residents. It might be suggested that village inhabitants have not been exposed to the same conditions that faced city dwellers have, especially those who live in camps and have been exposed to displacement more than time. They lost their homes and possessions in 1948 and had to live under harsh conditions in the camps. Moreover, these camp inhabitants are under constant shelling and killings; more importantly is the low socio-economic level they have been experiencing. As a result, the

frustration and aggression expressed by students greatly increased and not only sparked but also fueled the Uprising. The camp refugees felt the grievance incurred upon them by the occupation more than other Palestinians.

The study which was conducted on a Palestinian sample of school and university students concluded that the average degree of love of life is average. This means that despite several wars and so many catastrophes that were inflicted upon them, the Palestinians (students) continue to love life. This coincides with Abdel Khalek's study (2016) which indicates that love of life and holding fast to it become even more evident in times of catastrophe and war. A Palestinian can never be deterred no matter how hard the situation is; in fact, life has to go on as well as their innovation and success. This is reassuring for all Palestinians as this stresses the strength, resilience, and hope for a better future for Palestine.

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