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Subjective Wellbeing in ASEAN: A Cross-Country Study

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Abstract

Our paper reports and discusses issues relating to subjective wellbeing in selected countries in ASEAN (The Association of Southeast Asian Nations), a regional organization that coordinates and promotes the economic, social and cultural interests of member countries in Southeast Asia. Comparisons will be made across the five founding members of ASEAN, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand using data from the 2004, 2006 and 2007 AsiaBarometer Surveys. The indicators of subjective wellbeing used are perceptions of happiness, enjoyment, and achievement. We also examined the impact of selected demographic and non-demographic variables on these indicators.

Introduction

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations or ASEAN was established on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok by the five original Member Countries, namely, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. It is now a ten-member organization comprising the original founding members and Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam. As of 2006, the ASEAN region has a population of about 560 million, a total land area of 4.5 million square kilometers, a combined gross domestic product of almost US$ 1,100 billion, and a total trade of about US$ 1,400 billion (source: http://www.aseansec.org/64.htm).

In this paper, we report and discuss issues relating to subjective wellbeing in the five founding members of ASEAN, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and

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Thailand using data from the 2004, 2006, and 2007 AsiaBarometer Surveys. Although individual ASEAN countries may have studies on subjective wellbeing, there are very few, if any, studies that have systematically compared and discussed these issues across various ASEAN countries. This research is timely as ASEAN works toward a vision of 'ASEAN as a concert of Southeast Asian nations, outward looking, living in peace, stability and prosperity, bonded together in partnership in dynamic development and in a community of caring societies' (http://www.aseansec.org/64.htm).

Subjective wellbeing research is concerned with individuals' subjective experiences of their lives and 'the underlying assumption is that wellbeing can be defined by people's conscious experiences – in terms of hedonic feelings or cognitive satisfaction' (Diener and Suh, 1997: 191). Hence, empirical research on subjective wellbeing has focused on cognitive and affective measures such as happiness, enjoyment, satisfaction, accomplishment, and quality of life (e.g., Lu, 1995; Diener and Suh, 2000; Shin and Rutkowski, 2003, Cramer, Torgersen and Kringlen, 2004; Pichler, 2006, Trzcinski and Holst, 2008). In this paper, we explore the various aspects of subjective wellbeing by having the ASEAN residents evaluate how happy they were, whether they were enjoying life, and if they felt a sense of achievement. To gain better insights into the subjective wellbeing of ASEAN residents, we also examine the impact of four demographic variables (gender, age, education, and income) and five non-demographic variables (religiosity, national pride, satisfaction with the personal life, satisfaction with the interpersonal life, and satisfaction with the public life) on happiness, enjoyment, and achievement. We end the paper with a summary of the key findings and concluding remarks.

Method

Data sources

The datasets used for the analysis are from the AsiaBarometer Project. The AsiaBarometer Survey was launched in 2002 on the initiative of Takashi Inoguchi at Chuo University in Japan. This is a regional opinion survey conducted in a broader East Asia, encompassing East, Southeast, South, and Central Asia, with a focus on the lives of daily people. To date, six consecutive annual surveys (from 2003 to 2008) have been completed in 27 countries and two regions in Asia. The survey questionnaire focuses on the daily lives of ordinary people in Asia and has nine clusters (1) living conditions, (2) patterns of daily and economic life, (3) value priorities, (4) subjective quality of life, (5) quality of society, (6) identities, (7) political consciousness, (8) views on social issues, and (9) demographics. These clusters form a fairly consistent core for the surveys conducted across the various years. In our paper, we utilized the datasets from the 2004, 2006, and 2007 Surveys, focusing on five ASEAN countries. A brief background of these five countries is provided in Table 1.

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Table 1. *Brief background of five ASEAN countries*[*]

Profile	Indonesia	Malaysia	Philippines	Singapore	Thailand
Population	240.3 m	25.8 m	97.98 m	4.66 m	65.9 m
Urban to rural ratio	52%	70%	65%	100%	33%
Land area	1,904,568 sq. km	329,847 sq. km	300,000 sq. km	697 sq. km	513,120 sq. km
Type of Government	Parliamentary democracy	Constitutional monarchy	Bicameral congress	Unicameral parliament	Constitutional monarchy
GDP per capita	US$3,900	US$15,200	US$3,300	US$51,500	US$8,400
Ethnic groups	Javanese 40.6%, Sundanese 15%, Madurese 3.3%, Minangkabau 2.7%, Betawi 2.4%, Bugis 2.4%, Banten 2%, Banjar 1.7%, other or unspecified 29.9% .	Malay 50.4%, Chinese 23.7%, indigenous 11%, Indian 7.1%, others 7.8% .	Tagalog 28.1%, Cebuano 13.1%, Ilocano 9%, Bisaya/Binisaya 7.6%, Hiligaynon Ilonggo 7.5%, Bikol 6%, Waray 3.4%, other 25.3% .	Chinese 76.8%, Malay 13.9%, Indian 7.9%, other 1.4% .	Thai 75%, Chinese 14%, and Others 11%.

[*] *Sources*: CIA, The World Factbook – Indonesia; CIA, The World Factbook – Malaysia; CIA, The World Factbook – Philippines; CIA, The World Factbook – Singapore; CIA, The World Factbook – Thailand.

Variables used in analysis

For our analysis, we selected several key indicators of subjective wellbeing that would give a holistic perspective of how people in these countries felt about their quality of life. These indicators are happiness, enjoyment, and achievement. Considered together, these three indicators provide a fairly parsimonious conceptualization of subjective wellbeing. Happiness was measured in terms of responses to the question 'All things considered, would you say that you are happy these days?' Respondents indicated if they were 'very unhappy', 'not too happy', 'neither happy nor unhappy', 'quite happy' or 'very happy' on a scale of 1 (for 'very happy') to 5 (for 'very unhappy'). Enjoyment was measured by the question 'How often do you feel you are really enjoying life these days?' through the response categories of 'Often', 'Sometimes', 'Rarely', and 'Never'. Achievement was measured with the question 'How much do you feel you are accomplishing what you want out of your life?' They indicated their sense of achievement as 'A great deal', 'Some', 'Very little', or 'None'.

To examine how demographic and non-demographic factors contributed to the subjective wellbeing of people in ASEAN, we conducted regression analyses as follows. The indicators of subjective well-being (happiness, enjoyment, and achievement) were used as dependent variables. There were a total of nine independent variables. Four were demographic variables (gender, age, education, and income). Five were non-demographic variables (religiosity, national pride, satisfaction with the personal life sphere, satisfaction with the interpersonal life sphere, and satisfaction with the public life sphere).

The four demographic variables used for analysis are age, gender, education, and gross household income. For education, we have three levels, namely: low (those with no formal education or elementary school/junior high school/middle school qualifications), medium (those with high school, high-school-level-vocational-technical school or professional school/technical school qualifications), and high (those with university or graduate qualifications). This classification was used for Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. The exception was Malaysia, which grouped those with professional school/technical school qualifications as having high education. Similarly, we have three levels of gross annual household income, and these vary across the countries as follows. For Indonesia, the income levels are low (those earning less than 7.2 million rupiah), medium (those earning 7.2 million to 12 million rupiah), and high (those earning more than 12 million rupiah). For Malaysia, the income levels are low (those earning 10,000 ringgit or less), medium (those earning 10,001 to 30,000 ringgit), and high (those earning 30,001 ringgit and more). For the Philippines, the income levels are low (those earning 60,000 pesos or less), medium (those earning 60,001 to 100,000 pesos), and high (those earning more than 100,000 pesos). For Singapore, the income levels are low (those earning S$2,000 or less), medium (those earning S$2,001 to S$4,000), and high (those earning S$4,001 and more). For Thailand, the income levels are low (those earning 5,000 baht or less), medium (those earning 5,001 to 14,999 baht), and high (those earning 15,000 baht and

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Table 2. *Profile of respondents in ASEAN countries*

	Indonesia		Malaysia		Philippines		Singapore		Thailand	
Demographics	2004	2007	2004	2007	2004	2007	2004	2006	2004	2007
Gender										
Male	50.0	43.1	49.2	49.7	50.0	49.4	44.8	45.8	49.2	47.6
Female	50.0	56.9	50.8	50.3	50.0	50.6	55.2	54.2	50.8	52.4
Age										
20–29	31.5	36.0	30.9	33.2	28.7	27.6	22.5	19.7	23.6	25.0
30–39	33.0	30.5	29.2	25.0	28.0	26.6	28.6	27.7	26.2	26.7
40–49	22.1	19.8	24.0	22.0	24.8	20.4	29.5	28.3	28.1	23.6
50–59	13.4	9.1	15.9	13.5	18.5	15.9	19.4	17.2	22.1	15.7
60–69	0.0	4.6	0.0	6.3	0.0	9.5	0.0	7.0	0.0	9.0
Education										
Low	58.6	61.3	38.6	41.7	20.7	33.0	20.7	18.5	73.4	58.4
Medium	36.0	33.1	48.5	43.9	53.6	40.3	62.2	63.3	17.9	15.1
High	5.4	5.6	12.9	14.4	25.8	26.7	17.3	18.2	8.7	26.5
Marital status										
Never married	8.1	17.7	28.3	28.3	23.6	16.5	26.8	25.7	19.3	21.7
Married	87.8	75.6	67.4	67.4	71.9	77.5	68.0	69.7	72.1	71.1
Widowed	2.1	4.3	3.0	3.0	3.2	3.9	2.0	1.6	1.6	4.3
Divorced	2.0	2.4	1.3	1.3	1.4	2.4	3.2	2.9	7.0	2.9
Gross annual household Income										
Low	35.8	22.7	26.3	20.4	28.1	43.4	31.5	27.8	34.2	6.0
Medium	38.8	42.0	47.9	53.8	32.3	27.3	38.2	38.0	43.4	47.0
High	25.4	35.3	25.8	25.8	39.6	29.3	30.3	34.2	22.4	47.0
Total	800	1,000	800	1,000	800	1,000	800	1,038	800	1,000

Source: AsiaBarometer Surveys 2004, 2006, 2007.

more). Table 2 presents the profiles of respondents who were surveyed in 2004, 2006, and 2007.

Following Tambyah *et al.* (2009), the 16 life satisfaction domains were grouped as follows: (1) personal life sphere (comprising satisfaction with standard of living, household income, health, education, and job) (2) interpersonal life sphere (comprising satisfaction with housing, friendships, neighbors, family life, leisure, and spiritual life) and (3) public life sphere (comprising satisfaction with public safety, environment, welfare system, and democratic system). The personal life sphere comprises domains that influence a person's sense of subjective well-being in terms of being healthy, employed, and possessing sufficient financial resources. The public life sphere contains domains that contribute to a pleasant living environment in one's society. The interpersonal life sphere highlights the various relationships that give emotional

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Table 3. *Level of happiness*

	Very happy (a)	Quite) happy (b)	Neither happy nor unhappy	Not too happy (c)	Very unhappy (d)	Mean scoree on scale
Indonesia (2004)	15.4%	70.5%	5.8%	8.1%	0.2%	2.07
(2007)	13.0%	53.4%	25.3%	7.7%	0.6%	2.30
Malaysia (2004)	25.6%	61.6%	9.6%	3.5%	0.1%	1.91
(2007)	32.9%	55.3%	7.9%	3.9%	0%	1.83
Philippines (2004)	32.1%	42.7%	15.1%	8.7%	1.3%	2.04
(2007)	38.8%	47.1%	9.7%	3.9%	0.4%	1.80
Singapore (2004)	27.9%	53.1%	13.1%	4.5%	1.4%	1.98
(2006)	27.5%	51.1%	15.4%	5.2%	0.9%	2.01
Thailand (2004)	21.3%	56.9%	14.1%	6.3%	1.3%	2.09
(2007)	22.7%	57.9%	15.5%	3.6%	0.3%	2.01

meaning and support to a person (such as one's spouse, family, friends, neighbors, and religious community). National pride was assessed by the question 'How proud are you of being (of a particular nationality)?' For religiosity, respondents were asked to indicate how often they prayed or meditated.

Results

Happiness

The percentages of respondents who indicated their level of happiness are reported in Table 3. We also computed the means for the survey question on happiness. Lower means indicate greater happiness. In 2004, which is the base year for all countries, the means ranged from 1.91 to 2.07, indicating that generally the respondents for the various ASEAN countries were a happy lot. The Malaysians were the happiest people, followed by the Singaporeans, Filipinos, Indonesians, and Thais. In 2006/7, the means ranged from 1.80 to 2.30, and within a wider spectrum when compared to 2004. The Filipinos (mean of 1.80) overtook the Malaysians (mean of 1.83) as the happiest people. Singaporeans and the Thais were in the middle with a similar mean of 2.01. The Indonesians were the unhappiest (mean of 2.30) and they had grown more unhappy compared to three years ago (mean of 2.07 in 2004). Singapore also had a slight dip in happiness (1.98 in 2004 to 2.01 in 2006). However, there was an improvement for the Filipinos, Malaysians, and Thais.

Enjoyment and achievement

In addition to happiness, we also examined other aspects of subjective wellbeing such as enjoyment (Table 4) and achievement (Table 5). Lower means indicate higher levels of enjoyment or achievement. As there were no measurements taken in 2004,

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Table 4. *Levels of enjoyment (2006/7)**

	Often (a)	Sometimes (b)	Rarely (c)	Never (d)	Mean score on scale
Indonesia	30.4	52.9	15.3	1.4	1.88
Malaysia	45.4	44.9	8.9	0.7	1.65
Philippines	35.9	51.9	11.7	0.5	1.77
Singapore	34.3	54.2	10.0	1.5	1.79
Thailand	40.4	47.8	11.4	0.4	1.72

Source: * Survey for Singapore was conducted in 2006, all others in 2007.

Table 5. *Levels of achievement (2006/7)**

	A great deal (a)	Some (b)	Very little (c)	None (d)	Mean score on scale
Indonesia	25.4	59.0	14.0	1.6	1.92
Malaysia	23.7	58.1	16.2	2.0	1.96
Philippines	23.6	51.4	20.6	4.4	2.06
Singapore	16.9	59.1	20.7	3.2	2.10
Thailand	9.4	65.5	16.9	8.2	2.24

Source: * Survey for Singapore was conducted in 2006, all others in 2007.

we report only the figures for 2006 and 2007. As mentioned previously, the happiness means showed that Malaysians were generally very happy in 2007 (see Table 3) while the Indonesians were the least happy. This sentiment is also reflected in the response to the question on enjoyment. As shown in Table 4, comparing the enjoyment means, Malaysians enjoyed life the most while the Indonesians enjoyed life the least. However, the poor sentiment and lower levels of enjoyment did not deter the Indonesians to reflect that, on balance, they actually accomplished the most (see Table 5). Singaporeans, on the other hand, were lowly ranked in terms of their feelings of enjoyment and achievement (see the fourth-ranked means in Tables 4 and 5) although they had higher scores on happiness. As these responses were based on respondents' perceptions, the patterns emerging from these responses could reflect different interpretations of what constitutes happiness and enjoyment, and different levels of expectations as far as accomplishment is concerned.

The impact of demographic and non-demographic factors

In the following sections, we discuss the results of the regression analyses according to the various countries.

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Table 6a. *Determinants of happiness, enjoyment, and accomplishment: Indonesia*

Independent variables: demographic variables	Dependent variable: happiness*	Dependent variable: enjoyment*	Dependent variable: achievement*
Constant	**0.832 ($p<0.000$)**	**0.965 ($p<0.000$)**	**1.120 ($p<0.000$)**
Age	0.052	**0.119 ($p<0.001$)**	**0.023 ($p<0.028$)**
Gender	0.066	−0.001	0.043
Education	−0.006	−0.030	−0.047
Household income	0.004	**−0.086 ($p<0.020$)**	−0.072
Satisfaction with personal life	**0.354 ($p<0.000$)**	**0.212 ($p<0.000$)**	**0.278 ($p<0.000$)**
Satisfaction with public life	**−0.115 ($p<0.000$)**	−0.046	0.004
Satisfaction with interpersonal life	**0.193 ($p<0.000$)**	**0.239 ($p<0.000$)**	0.055
How proud are you of being Indonesia?	0.064	0.064	0.064
How often do you pray or meditate?	−0.059	**−0.074 ($p<0.033$)**	−0.045
R-square	0.215	0.201	0.144
F-value	**20.872 ($p<0.000$)**	**19.125 ($p<0.000$)**	**12.831 ($p<0.000$)**

Notes: *Figures shown are standardized coefficients. Figures in bold indicate significant at $p<0.05$.

Indonesia. The combined effects of demographic and non-demographic factors on happiness, enjoyment, and achievement were significant (the R-square for the multiple regression ranged from 0.144 to 0.215 and the *F*-values ranged from 12.831 to 20.872, $p < 0.000$, see Table 6a). None of the demographic variables was significant in explaining why Indonesians were happy. Instead, the satisfaction with their personal and interpersonal lives contributed to the Indonesians' happiness, but dissatisfaction with their public life discounted this happiness. Demographically, older Indonesians, those with lower income, and those who are less religious enjoyed life more. Satisfaction with their personal and interpersonal lives also contributed positively towards their enjoyment of life. For accomplishment, older Indonesians and those who are satisfied with their personal lives had a greater sense of achievement.

Malaysia. The combined effects of demographic and non-demographic factors on happiness, enjoyment, and achievement were significant (the R-square for the multiple regression ranged from 0.137 to 0.254 and the *F*-values ranged from 8.886 to 19.109, $p < 0.000$, see Table 6b). Being male and deriving satisfaction from their personal and interpersonal lives contributed to the Malaysians' happiness. Demographics did not explain why the Malaysians enjoyed life, but satisfaction with their personal and interpersonal lives did. With regard to accomplishment, having high incomes did not

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Table 6b. *Determinants of happiness, enjoyment and accomplishment: Malaysia*

Independent variables: demographic variables	Dependent variable: happiness*	Dependent variable: enjoyment*	Dependent variable: achievement*
Constant	**0.492 ($p<0.041$)**	**0.586 ($p<0.005$)**	**1.375 ($p<0.000$)**
Age	0.039	0.042	−0.055
Gender	**−0.085 ($p<0.032$)**	−0.038	−0.015
Education	0.023	−0.031	−0.008
Household income	−0.069	−0.068	**−0.134 ($p<0.004$)**
Satisfaction with personal life	**0.272 ($p<0.000$)**	**0.154 ($p<0.004$)**	**0.183 ($p<0.001$)**
Satisfaction with public life	0.026	0.013	−0.012
Satisfaction with Interpersonal life	**0.251 ($p<0.000$)**	**0.283 ($p<0.000$)**	**0.147 ($p<0.009$)**
How proud are you of being Malaysian?	−0.023	0.065	0.090
How often do you pray or meditate?	0.004	0.006	−0.002
R-square	0.254	0.212	0.137
F-value	**19.109 ($p<0.000$)**	**15.088 ($p<0.000$)**	**8.886 ($p<0.000$)**

Notes: *Figures shown are standardized coefficients. Figures in bold indicate significant at $p<0.05$.

help in boosting the Malaysians' sense of accomplishment, but satisfaction with their personal and interpersonal lives were contributing factors.

Philippines. The combined effects of demographic and non-demographic factors on happiness, enjoyment, and achievement were significant (the R-square for the multiple regression ranged from 0.169 to 0.211 and the *F*-values ranged from 14.216 to 18.697, $p < 0.000$, see Table 6c). Education seemed to adversely affect the Filipinos' sense of happiness. Similar to the Indonesians and the Malaysians, the satisfaction from their personal and interpersonal lives contributed to the Filipinos' happiness. These same variables also positively affected the Filipinos' enjoyment of life. However, like the Malaysians, having high incomes did not help in boosting the Filipinos' sense of accomplishment, but satisfaction with their personal and interpersonal lives did.

Singapore. The combined effects of demographic and non-demographic factors on happiness, enjoyment, and achievement were significant (the R-square for the multiple regression ranged from 0.152 to 0.291 and the *F*-values ranged from 10.795 to 24.903, $p < 0.000$, see Table 6d). Similar to the Indonesians and Thais, none of the demographics explained why Singaporeans were happy. Like the Indonesians, Malaysians, and the Filipinos, satisfaction with personal and interpersonal life contributed to Singaporeans' happiness. However, unlike these countries, Singapore is

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Table 6c. *Determinants of happiness, enjoyment and accomplishment: Philippines*

Independent variables: demographic variables	Dependent variable: happiness*	Dependent variable: enjoyment*	Dependent variable: achievement*
Constant	**1.256 ($p<0.000$)**	**1.216 ($p<0.000$)**	**0.952 ($p<0.000$)**
Age	−0.048	0.033	0.019
Gender	−0.069	0.014	−0.012
Education	**−0.115 ($p<0.006$)**	**−0.130 ($p<0.002$)**	0.014
Household income	0.000	−0.055	**−0.083 ($p<0.034$)**
Satisfaction with personal life	**0.209 ($p<0.000$)**	**0.244 ($p<0.000$)**	**0.142 ($p<0.004$)**
Satisfaction with public life	−0.039	−0.053	0.010
Satisfaction with interpersonal life	**0.214 ($p<0.000$)**	**0.181 ($p<0.000$)**	**0.331 ($p<0.000$)**
How proud are you of being Filipino?	0.059	0.017	−0.002
How often do you pray or meditate?	−0.007	0.019	0.021
R-square	0.169	0.187	0.211
F-value	**14.216 ($p<0.000$)**	**16.079 ($p<0.000$)**	**18.697 ($p<0.000$)**

Notes: *Figures shown are standardized coefficients. Figures in bold indicate significant at $p<0.05$.

the only country in which the people's sense of national pride contributed much to their happiness. This sense of national pride, together with the satisfaction with their personal and interpersonal lives also contributed to Singaporeans' enjoyment of life. Younger Singaporeans and those with lower income had greater sense of accomplishment. Those who are satisfied with their personal life and had a sense of national pride felt positively about their happiness, enjoyment, and achievement.

Thailand. The combined effects of demographic and non-demographic factors on happiness, enjoyment, and achievement were significant (the R-square for the multiple regression ranged from 0.197 to 0.240 and the *F*-values ranged from 18.853 to 24.212, $p < 0.000$, see Table 6e). Similar to the Indonesians, none of the demographics explained why the Thais were happy. However, unlike the Indonesians and the Malaysians, satisfaction with all three spheres of life (personal, public, and interpersonal) contributed to the Thais' happiness. Also, unlike the Indonesians, but like the Filipinos and the Malaysians, none of the demographic variables had an impact on the Thais' enjoyment of life, but satisfaction with their personal and interpersonal lives did. However, unlike the Indonesians, Filipinos, and the Malaysians, age, education, and income all have a negative effect on the Thais' sense of accomplishment. Younger, less educated and lower-income Thais felt they had a sense of achievement. Those who

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Table 6d. *Determinants of happiness, enjoyment and accomplishment: Singapore*

Independent variables: demographic variables	Dependent variable: happiness*	Dependent variable: enjoyment*	Dependent variable: achievement*
Constant	0.040	**0.855 ($p<0.000$)**	**1.904 ($p<0.000$)**
Age	0.018	−0.040	**−0.096 ($p<0.024$)**
Gender	−0.037	−0.030	−0.076
Education	0.041	−0.055	−0.053
Household income	−0.007	−0.036	**−0.156 ($p<0.000$)**
Satisfaction with personal life	**0.276 ($p<0.000$)**	**0.193 ($p<0.000$)**	**0.225 ($p<0.000$)**
Satisfaction with public life	0.069	−0.001	0.017
Satisfaction with Interpersonal life	**0.213 ($p<0.000$)**	**0.189 ($p<0.000$)**	0.059
How proud are you of being Singaporean?	**0.149 ($p<0.000$)**	**0.151 ($p<0.000$)**	**0.124 ($p<0.000$)**
How often do you pray or meditate?	0.027	0.036	−0.009
R-square	0.291	0.177	0.152
F-value	24.903 ($p<0.000$)	13.029 ($p<0.000$)	10.795 ($p<0.000$)

Notes: *Figures shown are standardized coefficients. Figures in bold indicate significant at $p<0.05$.

are satisfied with their personal and interpersonal lives felt happier, enjoyed life, and had greater sense of achievement. Those who are satisfied with their public life are happier.

Discussion

Summary of key findings

Generally, the respondents for the various ASEAN countries were a contented lot with happiness means of less than or equal to 2.09 in 2004. The Malaysians were the most happy, followed by the Singaporeans, Filipinos, Indonesians, and the Thais. While Malaysians and Singaporeans were almost as happy in 2007 and 2006 respectively compared to 2004, the Philippines had the largest improvement in their happiness mean. Thailand also had a slight increase. On the other hand, Indonesia suffered a decline in their happiness mean, making them the unhappiest lot in 2007.

In terms of other aspects of subjective wellbeing such as enjoyment and achievement (only 2006/7 figures are reported), the Malaysians who were generally happy enjoyed life the most while the Indonesians who were generally unhappy enjoyed life the least. Interestingly, the Indonesians felt that they had accomplished the most although their scores on happiness and enjoyment were ranked below the

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Table 6e. *Determinants of happiness, enjoyment and accomplishment: Thailand*

Independent variables: demographic variables	Dependent variable: happiness*	Dependent variable: enjoyment*	Dependent variable: achievement*
Constant	**1.098 ($p<0.000$)**	**1.079 ($p<0.000$)**	**2.403 ($p<0.000$)**
Age	0.056	0.030	**−0.158 ($p<0.000$)**
Gender	−0.043	−0.057	−0.059
Education	−0.061	−0.035	**−0.106 ($p<0.006$)**
Household income	−0.029	−0.067	**−0.118 ($p<0.002$)**
Satisfaction with personal life	**0.201 ($p<0.000$)**	**0.299 ($p<0.000$)**	**0.245 ($p<0.000$)**
Satisfaction with public life	**0.120 ($p<0.003$)**	−0.074	−0.039
Satisfaction with interpersonal life	**0.261 ($p<0.000$)**	**0.252 ($p<0.000$)**	**0.186 ($p<0.000$)**
How proud are you of being Thai?	−0.063	−0.006	−0.031
How often do you pray or meditate?	−0.014	−0.020	−0.050
R-square	0.240	0.226	0.197
F-value	24.212 ($p<0.000$)	22.107 ($p<0.000$)	18.853 ($p<0.000$)

Notes: *Figures shown are standardized coefficients. Figures in bold indicate significant at $p<0.05$.

other countries surveyed. Ironically, Singaporeans had higher scores on happiness, but felt that they had not achieved or enjoyed much.

Demographic and non-demographic factors contributed differently towards the general wellbeing of people in ASEAN. The demographic factors of age, gender, education, and income played a significant role in explaining the wellbeing of people in ASEAN either singly or in combination. Age contributed positively towards Indonesians' enjoyment and achievement (older Indonesians enjoyed life more and felt they had achieved more) while it contributed negatively towards Singaporeans' and the Thais' sense of achievement (older Singaporeans and older Thais had a lower sense of achievement). Gender was only significant in the case of Malaysian males who were happier compared to their female counterparts. Education had a negative impact on the happiness and enjoyment of the Filipinos (the more educated Filipinos were less happy and enjoyed life to a lesser extent) and a negative impact on the Thais' sense of achievement (the more educated Thais felt they had achieved less). Income had a consistently negative impact on achievement for Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand (the higher income groups in these countries felt they had achieved less) and a negative impact on enjoyment for Indonesia (the higher income Indonesians enjoyed life to a lesser degree). Generally, demographic factors seem to play a lesser role (two significant effects) in impacting the happiness aspect of wellbeing for people in ASEAN.

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The more salient effects were for enjoyment (three significant effects) and achievement (eight significant effects).

The non-demographic factors (religiosity, national pride, satisfaction with personal life, satisfaction with interpersonal life, and satisfaction with public life) exerted an interesting impact on the wellbeing of people in ASEAN. Satisfaction with personal life played a significant role in contributing positively to all three aspects of wellbeing (happiness, enjoyment, and achievement) across all five ASEAN countries. The pattern for satisfaction with interpersonal life was slightly different. While satisfaction with interpersonal life contributed positively towards happiness, enjoyment, and achievement for the Malaysians, Filipinos, and the Thais, it only contributed positively towards happiness and enjoyment for the Indonesians and the Singaporeans. Satisfaction with public life had no significant impact on the wellbeing of people in Malaysia, Philippines, and Singapore. However, this factor had a negative impact on Indonesians' happiness, but a positive impact on the happiness of the Thais. National identity had no significant impact on all aspects of wellbeing for all countries except Singapore, where it contributed positively towards happiness, enjoyment, and achievement. Religiosity had no significant impact on all aspects of wellbeing for all countries except for Indonesia where it contributed negatively towards enjoyment. Generally, satisfaction with personal life had the most salient impact on all aspects of wellbeing (15 significant effects), followed by satisfaction with interpersonal life (13 significant effects), and satisfaction with public life (two significant effects). The less salient factors were national pride (only for Singapore in terms of happiness, enjoyment, and achievement) and religiosity (only for the enjoyment of Indonesians).

Implications

As shown in the analyses, the findings reveal the varying influences of demographic and non-demographic variables on the subjective wellbeing of residents in the five ASEAN countries. While the impact of demographic variables on happiness and enjoyment may be muted across the various countries, their effect on achievement was more pronounced. We noted that household income accounted for four out of the eight significant effects of demographic variables on achievement. Interestingly, higher incomes do not necessarily lead to a more enhanced sense of achievement. This is telling considering the emphasis that ASEAN countries have placed on economic growth and prosperity. While people are having higher incomes, they may not feel they have accomplished a lot given their rising expectations, increasing stress levels, and a faster pace of life. Governments and policymakers should pay attention to the impact of accelerated economic growth on the overall quality of life for their residents to mitigate some of these undesirable effects.

For the non-demographic variables, without exception, satisfaction with the personal life sphere (standard of living, household incomes, health, education, and job) had the most widespread impact on the ASEAN residents' happiness, enjoyment, and achievement. These domains mainly pertain to one's economic welfare and access

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to resources. Governments and policy makers should continue to ensure that the conditions necessary for sustainable employment and resource building are present. This could be challenging for ASEAN countries with large rural populations who may not have easy access to education and healthcare compared to urban residents.

The interpersonal life sphere (housing, friendship, neighbors, family life, leisure, and spiritual life) featured prominently for Indonesia and Singapore (for happiness and enjoyment) and for Malaysia and Thailand (for happiness, enjoyment, and achievement). The exception was the Philippines. Governments and policy makers should ensure that the social networks of family, friends, and the wider community are strengthened despite increasing urbanization and movements of residents. It is also important to create and maintain spaces for leisure, social interaction, and engagement with various levels of society.

Finally, for Singaporeans, as national identity plays an important role in subjective wellbeing, policy makers should continue to encourage and foster feelings of solidarity among its residents through various programs of nation building. However, this patriotic fervor should be tempered with an understanding of the need for regional cooperation and identity (such as in the case of ASEAN).

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