

Subjective Happiness and Academic Engagement of Undergraduate Nursing Students: A Correlational Study

Lisans Hemşirelik Öğrencilerinin Öznel Mutluluk ve Akademik Katılımları: Korelasyonel Bir Çalışma

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ABSTRACT

Happiness constitutes a fundamental component influencing individuals' lifelong attitudes and career trajectories. This study aimed to investigate the relationship between subjective happiness and academic engagement among undergraduate nursing students.

Employing a descriptive, cross-sectional, and correlational design, the study was conducted with a sample of 350 students. Data were collected through the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale – Short Form for Students (UWES-S-9[©]) and analysed using PSPP version 1.6.2-g78a33a.

The mean subjective happiness score was 5.00 ± 1.17 , and the mean academic engagement score was 3.75 ± 1.42 , indicating moderate levels. Students aged 30 years and older, as well as those with middle or upper-middle income levels, demonstrated significantly higher happiness scores compared to their counterparts aged 20–25 years and those with lower income levels. Furthermore, students who chose the nursing program out of genuine interest and those who indicated a willingness to choose it again exhibited higher scores in both happiness and academic engagement. A significant positive association was observed between subjective happiness and academic engagement.

To enhance students' well-being, implementing social and financial support initiatives, promoting peer mentoring programs, and facilitating experience-sharing activities are recommended. Providing comprehensive information about nursing career pathways may also strengthen students' connection to the profession.

Keywords: Academic Success, Education, Happiness, Nursing Students, Professional Competence.

ÖZ

Mutluluk, bireylerin yaşam boyu tutumlarını ve kariyer eğilimlerini şekillendiren temel bir unsurdur. Bu araştırma, lisans hemşirelik öğrencilerinin öznel mutluluk düzeyleri ile akademik katılımları arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemeyi amaçlamıştır.

Tanımlayıcı, kesitsel ve korelasyonel bir desenle yürütülen çalışma, 350 öğrenci ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Veriler, Öznel Mutluluk Ölçeği (SHS) ve Utrecht İş Katılım Ölçeği – Öğrenciler için Kısa Form (UWES-S-9[©]) kullanılarak toplanmış, PSPP 1.6.2-g78a33a sürümü aracılığıyla analiz edilmiştir.

Katılımcıların öznel mutluluk ortalama puanı $5,00 \pm 1,17$, akademik katılım ortalama puanı ise $3,75 \pm 1,42$ olarak saptanmış; her iki değişken de orta düzeyde bulunmuştur. Yaşı 30 ve üzeri olanlar ile orta veya üst-orta gelir düzeyine sahip öğrenciler, 20–25 yaş aralığındaki ve düşük gelir düzeyindeki akranlarına kıyasla anlamlı düzeyde daha yüksek mutluluk puanları göstermiştir. Ayrıca, hemşirelik bölümünü isteyerek tercih eden ve tekrar seçme eğiliminde olan öğrenciler, hem mutluluk hem de akademik katılım açısından daha yüksek puanlar elde etmiştir. Öznel mutluluk ile akademik katılım arasında anlamlı ve pozitif bir ilişki belirlenmiştir.

Öğrenci mutluluğunu desteklemek amacıyla sosyal ve finansal destek mekanizmalarının güçlendirilmesi, akran mentörlük programlarının teşvik edilmesi ve deneyim paylaşımına yönelik etkinliklerin artırılması önerilmektedir. Bunun yanı sıra, hemşirelik mesleğindeki kariyer olanaklarına ilişkin kapsamlı bilgi sağlanması, öğrencilerin mesleğe olan aidiyet duygusunu güçlendirebilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Akademik Başarı, Eğitim, Mutluluk, Hemşirelik Öğrencileri, Mesleki Yeterlilik.

Key Points

- Undergraduate nursing students' subjective happiness levels were moderate.
- Undergraduate nursing students' academic engagement levels were moderate.
- Innovative teaching methods may improve students' happiness levels.
- Information about the course may help students connect to the profession.

Prior to the research, necessary permissions were obtained from a University Research Ethics Committee (approval date: February 5, 2024; decision number: 6.635.096)

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INTRODUCTION

Happiness plays a fundamental role in people's lives. Happy individuals tend to be more satisfied while carrying out their tasks, perform at a higher level and generally exhibit more positive behaviours towards success.^{1,2} Happiness as a psychological approach, which focuses on a person's subjective experiences, includes positive emotions, satisfaction with life and the absence of negative emotions, thus comprising emotional and cognitive domains.^{3,4} Their life trajectory influences individuals' happiness at a given time. It can be affected by various factors such as health status, culture, gender, age, family and professional experience, and financial situation, among others.⁵

The happiness levels of healthcare students can influence both their personal quality of life and behaviours related to academic and professional life. This means that nursing students' attitudes during their education can provide insight into how they will act as professionals. Ultimately, this can impact the quality of care they provide to patients and the community.⁶

Several studies have specifically investigated happiness among nursing students. In Malaysia, most nursing students reported feeling happy.⁶ In India, the majority of nursing students described themselves as neither very happy nor unhappy.⁷ Among Iranian students, subjective happiness scores were low.² In a study conducted with Portuguese nursing students, the results were satisfactory, and statistically significant differences were found between affective-social status and subjective happiness.⁸ In Brazil, one study found a significant variation in happiness levels among undergraduate nursing students.⁹ Another Brazilian study showed that nursing students associated their perceived happiness with healthy social relationships, having a life project, and professional growth.¹⁰ These findings indicate that multiple factors influence nursing students' happiness and may vary considerably depending on personal, academic, and social circumstances.

Nursing education plays a crucial role in preparing qualified and participative nurses. However, the academic experience is not limited to the theoretical and practical domains. Student engagement emerges as a crucial factor in determining educational success and the development of future professionals.^{11,12} When considering the uniqueness of nursing education, where theory is closely intertwined with practice, it becomes imperative to understand how students engage with the curriculum, the practical opportunities, and the challenges inherent in the profession, i.e., whether students are actively engaged with the course.¹³

Academic engagement consists of three essential elements: behavioural, emotional and cognitive.^{12,14} Behavioural engagement includes academic and social participation. Emotional engagement involves interactions with educators, colleagues, and other individuals related to the training process, as well as connections with the institution and the profession itself. Cognitive engagement, in turn, is based on the concept of investment, incorporating reflection and a willingness to put in the effort required to understand complex ideas and master difficult skills.¹⁴ Student engagement is an essential indicator for course evaluation and plays an important role in students' success in completing the course.¹¹

Research carried out in various countries has analysed the academic engagement of undergraduate nursing students. According to studies conducted in other countries^{12,13,15,16} and also in Brazil,^{17,18} nursing students are engaged in the course; however, factors such as high workload and a stressful learning environment can negatively influence student engagement in the long term.^{13,16}

The relationship between happiness and engagement during the years of education can reflect on the future professional satisfaction of nursing students. Students who maintain high levels of happiness and engagement throughout their education may be more likely

to become satisfied and engaged professionals in their careers.^{6,11,16} Identifying correlations between happiness and academic engagement can provide information for implementing educational strategies. These strategies may include developing psychological support programs, mentoring, and activities that promote a more positive educational environment^{11,12}

Although issues related to both happiness and academic engagement among university students, particularly those in the health field, have been widely explored in the scientific literature, studies specifically examining the relationship between these two variables are still limited. Existing research has largely addressed happiness and engagement as separate constructs, without examining how they may interact and influence each other, particularly among nursing students.^{6,7,16} Understanding this relationship is essential, as

higher levels of subjective happiness may contribute to greater academic engagement, ultimately benefiting students' professional development and well-being. The reverse may also be true, as more academically engaged students may experience higher levels of happiness. This study contributes to the literature by addressing this gap, providing empirical evidence on the association between nursing students' subjective happiness and their academic engagement. Furthermore, the findings can inform the development of educational strategies to promote student well-being and engagement and offer insights for nurse managers to foster positive and supportive work environments. Based on these considerations, this study aimed to investigate the relationship between subjective happiness and academic engagement among undergraduate nursing students.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Research Question

Is there a relationship between the subjective happiness levels of undergraduate nursing students and their academic engagement?

Design and Sample

This is a descriptive, cross-sectional, correlational study. It was guided by the Strengthening the Reporting of Observational Studies in Epidemiology (STROBE) tool.¹⁹ A convenient sampling method was used. The research population consisted of undergraduate nursing students from different regions of Brazil. The inclusion criteria for participation in the survey were (a) being an undergraduate nursing student, (b) studying at a public or private university located in Brazil, and (c) having accepted to participate in the survey. As the precise count of nursing students meeting the specified criteria was unavailable, the sample size calculation was performed considering a very large or unknown population. Thus, 273 participants were deemed sufficient for the study, assuming a 90% confidence interval and a 0.05 margin of error. There were 350

responses to the survey, and all of them were included in the study.

Data Collection

An online survey was used for data collection. Google Forms was utilized to formulate and distribute the data collection tool. Google Forms is increasingly being used in science due to its practicality for both researchers and research participants.²⁰ Especially in this study, the use of the method was essential to reach students from different geographical regions in a practical, economical and fast way. A professional social media application was used to reach possible participants. Instant messages were sent to individuals residing in different regions of Brazil who identified themselves as undergraduate nursing students on their profiles. Messages included information about the study and the link to the Informed Consent Form (ICF) and the data collection tool. Data were collected between March 25, 2024 and September 25, 2024.

Measures

The first section of the data collection tool contained questions aimed at characterizing

the participants, such as age, gender, marital status, socioeconomic status, living arrangement, state of study, type of educational institution, length of course, current period, reason that influenced their choice of profession and whether they would choose the nursing course again. The second section of the questionnaire consisted of the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale - Short Form for Students (UWES-S-9)[©].

The Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS), developed by Lyubomirsky and Lepper,²¹ which presented a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86, consists of four items. Two of these items involve statements in which participants are asked to evaluate themselves in comparison with other individuals, while the other two items refer to descriptions of happiness and unhappiness. Respondents are asked to indicate the extent to which these statements characterize them using a seven-position visual analog scale. The item 4 is "reverse coded" with a descending sequence.^{21,22,23} The Brazilian version of the scale used in this study was formulated by Ortiz²³ in her master's thesis. Ortiz et al.²⁴ subsequently assessed the psychometric properties of the SHS in a sample of Brazilian adolescents, reporting a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.51. The scale's total score is obtained by summing up all item scores and dividing by four. Thus, the minimum score that can be obtained is one, and the maximum score is seven. Scores between 4.5 and 5.5 are considered moderate.²⁵

The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale - Short Form for Students (UWES-S-9)[©] is based on the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) and adapted to focus on students' specific experiences (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.84$). The scale was developed by Schaufeli and Bakker²⁶ and translated into several languages. In this study, the Brazilian Portuguese version translated by Angst et al.²⁷ was used, based on the original scale, demonstrating a Cronbach's alpha of 0.84. The (UWES-S-9)[©] comprises nine items that cover aspects such as vigor, dedication and

absorption in the academic context. The answers are Likert-type from 0 to 6, where "0" corresponds to never and "6" to always/every day. Accordingly, the scale ranges from a minimum score of 0 to a maximum of 6. Scores of ≤ 1.77 indicate a very low level, 1.78–2.88 a low level, 2.89–4.66 a moderate level, 4.67–5.50 a high level, and ≥ 5.51 a very high level.²⁶

Data Analysis

PSPP program version 1.6.2-g78a33a was used. This is an easy-to-use, freely accessible program similar to SPSS. Frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations were used to present the descriptive statistics. Scatter plots and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test were used to assess the normality of the data distribution. The differences between the groups in the participants' socio-demographic variables and their subjective happiness and academic engagement scores were examined using the Kruskal-Wallis H and Mann-Whitney U tests. The post-Hoc Bonferroni test was applied to identify the groups that exhibited significant differences. The correlation between subjective happiness and academic engagement was analysed using Spearman's Correlation Test. Also, regression analysis was performed. Statistical significance was defined as $p < 0.05$.

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted according to the Helsinki Declaration. Participant anonymity was ensured. The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Anna Nery School of Nursing – Sao Francisco de Assis School Hospital of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro through the Brazil Platform (approval date: 05.02.2024; decision number: 6.635.096). Participants were asked to read a consent form and indicate their consent. Permission was obtained by e-mail to use the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS). The use of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale - Short Form for Students (UWES-S-9)[©] is authorized for non-commercial scientific research.²⁶

RESULTS

Participants' Characteristics

The sample predominantly consisted of female participants (n=278, 79.4%) and individuals aged 20 to 25 (n=242, 69.1%). Most participants were single (n = 285, 81.4%), identified their socioeconomic status as low middle class (n=143, 40.9%), and reported living with their family (n=306, 87.4%). Detailed demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Participants (N=350)

	n	%
Gender		
Female	278	79.4
Male	72	20.6
Age		
Less than 20	18	5.1
20-25	242	69.1
26-30	40	11.5
More than 30	50	14.3
Marital status		
Single	285	81.4
Married	44	12.6
Stable union	21	6.0
Socioeconomic status		
Low income	94	26.8
Low middle class	143	40.9
Middle class	101	28.9
Upper middle class	12	3.4
Living arrangement		
With family	306	87.4
With friends	14	4.0
Alone	30	8.6

n: Frequency; %: Percentage

Regarding academic characteristics and course-related choices, most participants were studying in the South-eastern region (n=237, 67.7%) and enrolled in private universities (n=286, 81.7%). The majority were pursuing a 5-year (total of 10 semesters) nursing program (n=217, 62.0%), with the largest group currently in the eighth semester (n = 64, 18.3%). When asked about their reasons for choosing the nursing course, most indicated a genuine liking for the profession (n=286, 81.7%). Additionally, when asked if they would choose to pursue the nursing course

again, most participants responded affirmatively (n=284, 81.1%). Details are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The Participants' Academic Characteristics and Course-Related Choices (N=350)

	n	%
Region of study		
Central-Western	16	4.5
Northern	9	2.6
North-eastern	50	14.3
Southern	38	10.9
South-eastern	237	67.7
Type of university		
Private	286	81.7
Public	64	18.3
Number of semesters		
Eight (4 years)	101	28.9
Nine (4,5 years)	32	9.1
Ten (5 years)	217	62.0
Actual semester		
First	12	3.4
Second	21	6.0
Third	14	4.0
Fourth	24	6.9
Fifth	34	9.7
Sixth	52	14.9
Seventh	34	9.7
Eighth	64	18.3
Nineth	33	9.4
Tenth	62	17.7
Reason for choosing the course		
Liking the profession	286	81.7
Job opportunity	37	10.6
Influence of family/friends	27	7.7
Choosing the nursing course again		
Yes	284	81.1
No	66	18.9

n: Frequency; %: Percentage

Subjective happiness and academic engagement results

The Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) exhibited reasonable reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.69. The Utrecht Work Engagement Scale - Short Form for Students (UWES-S-9)[©] demonstrated excellent reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.95. The total mean score of participants for subjective happiness was 5.00±1.17. Regarding academic engagement, the total mean score among participants was

3.75±1.42. Among the subdimensions of the UWES-S-9[©], 'dedication' yielded the highest mean score (4.07±1.59), while 'vigor'

recorded the lowest mean score (3.35±1.45) (see Table 3).

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics and Levels of the Subjective Happiness Scale and the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale - Short Form for Students

	n	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	Skewness	Kurtosis	Cronbach alpha
SHS	350	1.25	7.00	5.00	1.17	-0.41	-0.24	0.69
UWES-S-9 [©]	350	0.22	6.00	3.75	1.42	-0.38	-0.92	0.95
Vigor	350	0.00	6.00	3.35	1.45	-0.10	-1.02	0.85
Dedication	350	0.00	6.00	4.07	1.59	-0.45	-1.04	0.91
Absorption	350	0.00	6.00	3.85	1.52	-0.39	-0.89	0.86

n: Frequency; Min: minimum; Max: maximum

Comparisons between subjective happiness and academic engagement according to the participants' characteristics were conducted using the Kruskal–Wallis H and Mann–Whitney U tests. These non-parametric tests were applied to verify the existence of statistically significant differences among groups formed based on demographic and academic variables. Statistically significant differences were found in the subjective happiness scores according to age [H = 8.04, p < 0.05], socioeconomic status [H = 19.00, p < 0.001], the reason for choosing the course [H = 8.97, p < 0.05], and the participants' willingness to choose the nursing course again [U = 5931.00, p < 0.001]. Regarding academic engagement, significant differences were observed only in relation to the participants' willingness to choose the nursing course again [U = 4786.50, p < 0.001].

For the purpose of identifying which specific groups differed from each other, the Bonferroni test was employed for pairwise post hoc comparisons. The post hoc analysis indicated that students aged over 30 years obtained significantly higher subjective happiness scores than those aged 20–25 years. Differences were also observed according to

socioeconomic status: middle-class students reported higher happiness scores than those from low-income and lower-middle-class backgrounds, while participants from the upper-middle class achieved higher scores compared to individuals from low-income groups. Regarding the reason for choosing the course, those who reported having chosen nursing out of genuine liking for the profession presented significantly higher happiness scores than participants who made their choice due to family or friends' influence.

Furthermore, significant differences were also identified based on the participants' willingness to choose the nursing course again. Students who stated they would choose the same course once more obtained higher scores in both subjective happiness and academic engagement. These results indicate that this variable was associated with variations in both constructs. Detailed information regarding the statistical values, mean ranks, and significance levels is presented in Table 4. No statistically significant differences were observed between the scores of the two scales and the other characteristics analysed in this study.

Table 4. Comparison of Subjective Happiness and Academic Engagement Scores According to the Characteristics of the Participants

Comparison with SHS	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	Statistic	p-value	Significant Comparisons (Bonferroni)
Age					
Less than 20	5.04	1.65			
20-25	4.92	1.12	H=8.04	0.045	4>2
26-30	4.95	1.11			
More than 30	5.41	1.17			
Socioeconomic status					
Low income	4.72	1.21			
Low middle class	4.89	1.20	H=19.00	<0.001	3>1-2
Middle class	5.32	0.97			4>1
Upper middle class	5.77	1.06			
Reason for choosing the course					
Liking the profession	5.09	1.11			
Job opportunity	4.64	1.33	H = 8.97	0.011	1 > 3
Influence of family/friends	4.48	1.35			
Choosing the nursing course again					
Yes	5.14	1.13	U=5931.00	<0.001	1>2
No	4.40	1.15			
Comparison with UWES-S-9 [®]	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	Statistic	p-value	Significant Comparisons
Choosing the nursing course again					
Yes	3.98	1.36	U=4786.50	<0.001	1>2
No	2.78	1.24			

H: Kruskal-Wallis H test; U: Mann-Whitney U test

In the correlation analysis conducted, a positive, albeit weak, relationship was identified between subjective happiness and academic engagement among the participants

($r = 0.27, p < 0.001$). Similar results were found for each subdimension of the Academic Engagement Scale (Table 5).

Table 5. Correlation Between Subjective Happiness and Academic Engagement

		Vigor	Dedication	Absorption	UWES-S-9 [®]
SHS	p-value	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
	r	0.25	0.24	0.24	0.27

r: Correlation coefficient

The regression results showed that subjective happiness impacts the academic engagement of nursing students. The beta coefficient (0.25) indicated that academic engagement also tends to increase as subjective happiness increases. The t-value (4.81) and the p-value (<0.001) confirmed that

this relationship is statistically significant. However, the R^2 (0.06) revealed that only 6% of the variance in academic engagement can be explained by subjective happiness, suggesting that other factors also influence engagement. The F-value (23.11) indicated that the model is significant overall (Table 6).

Table 6. Regression analysis of the relationship between subjective happiness and academic engagement

Dependent	Independent	Beta	t-value	p-value	R ²	F-value
UWES-S-9 [©]	SHS	0.25	4.81	<0.001	0.06	23.11

DISCUSSION

The present study investigated the relationship between undergraduate nursing students' subjective happiness and academic engagement. Participants had moderate levels of subjective happiness. These results are in line with those of many previous studies. In a study conducted in India, the happiness levels of nursing students were identified as moderate,⁷ and similar results were observed in Portuguese nursing students.⁸ In Brazil, 88.4% of nursing students who participated in a study rated themselves as happy.¹⁰ Another study conducted in Brazil with nursing students reported satisfactory levels of subjective happiness.¹¹

The academic engagement scores of the students participating in this study were also moderate; the same was observed for the "vigor", "dedication" and "absorption" dimensions. The "dedication" dimension had the highest score, while the "vigor" dimension had the lowest. These are very relevant findings since the "dedication" dimension is related to a sense of meaning, inspiration, enthusiasm and pride in the course. In contrast, the "vigor" dimension is related to high levels of energy and resilience, the willingness to invest effort, not to tire easily, and to persist in the face of difficulties.²⁷

The above results are consistent with those of previous research. In studies conducted in Egypt¹⁵ and Spain,¹⁶ the levels of engagement among nursing students were also moderate. However, in a second study conducted with Egyptian nursing students, most participants reached high levels of academic engagement.¹² Results similar to those of the present study were found in prior research conducted in Brazil. In a survey of Brazilian university students, including nursing students, moderate levels of academic engagement were identified.¹⁷ In another Brazilian study with students from various undergraduate health courses, medical

students, followed by nursing students, were the most engaged.¹⁸ On the other hand, despite having identified positive results regarding the academic engagement of nursing students, a study conducted in Pakistan highlighted that the participants had a high workload and that the learning environment was stressful.¹³ These facts may justify the lower scores in the "vigor" dimension of the participants in the present study, given that the nursing course requires long hours of theoretical and practical classes and that the hospital environment, where students do their internships, is stressful. The study by Öner and Sarıkaya Karabudak,²⁸ conducted with Turkish nursing students, supports these findings as it indicates that the negative emotions experienced by students during clinical placements affect psychological, academic, and physical domains. Also, in the study by Rodríguez-González et al.,¹⁶ the "vigor" dimension had the lowest score among nursing students. The "dedication" dimension, whose score was the highest in this study, also showed higher scores among Brazilian university students, including those in nursing programs.¹⁷

In a study conducted in Malaysia, younger nursing students had slightly higher happiness scores.⁶ In the study by Kumar et al.,⁷ conducted with Indian nursing students, age did not influence the happiness scores among the participants. A similar result was found in a study conducted in Türkiye, where the age variable did not generate a significant difference in the happiness levels of university students, including nursing students.²⁹ These results differ from those of the present study, in which participants over 30 tended to report higher subjective happiness scores than those aged 20–25. This tendency may be associated with several factors. Older students may experience greater emotional maturity, which helps them regulate their feelings and maintain a more optimistic outlook when

facing challenges. They may also draw on broader life experiences—such as balancing family responsibilities or managing professional demands—that foster resilience and a clearer sense of purpose. In addition, older students may have developed more effective stress-management skills, enabling them to cope better with competing pressures and obligations. Finally, career expectations often become more realistic with age; students over 30 may begin their studies with better-defined professional goals and practical insights into their field, which can minimize frustration. This combination of factors may help explain why students over 30 scored higher in subjective happiness than those aged 20–25.

Although money does not have the primary function of promoting happiness, it is fundamental in achieving personal goals. As a resource, money enables individuals to face challenges and reduce suffering, which can indirectly lead to increased happiness levels.³⁰ Therefore, it was expected that students from higher socio-economic classes would have higher happiness scores. In a study carried out in Türkiye with university students, including nursing students, those who reported an income above their expenses had higher happiness scores.²⁹ Also, in the study by Kumar et al.⁷ with Indian nursing students, participants who reported a higher family income presented higher happiness scores. These results align with those of the present study, in which middle-class students showed higher happiness scores than those from low-income and lower-middle-class backgrounds. Additionally, participants from the upper middle class had higher scores than individuals from low-income backgrounds.

The reasons students choose the nursing course are diverse, including the desire to help others, the influence of family and friends³¹ and job security.³² However, studies indicate that many nursing students considered the career as a second option, suggesting that the choice of the profession was not always based on a true vocation.^{31,32} Conversely, in the present study, most students indicated they chose nursing due to their affinity for the

profession and expressed that they would select nursing again if given the choice. These students had higher happiness scores. Similar findings were reported in two studies conducted with nursing students in India,^{7,33} where participants who chose the nursing course out of self-interest also obtained higher happiness scores.

In the present study, a positive association between the desire to choose the nursing course again and the students' levels of engagement was also identified. This result was expected, as it is understandable that students who are satisfied with their course, to the point of choosing it again, are more engaged. A similar result was observed in a study of Egyptian nursing students, in which a positive relationship between engagement and satisfaction with the course was identified.¹⁵ These results are significant because, as a study conducted in Türkiye points out, the potential success of nursing students during their educational journey can be negatively affected when their choice of profession is driven by concerns about the future, such as job availability, rather than a genuine vocation for nursing.³² It is believed that such students could reconsider their choice and opt for another profession if given the opportunity to decide again.

It is important to note that differences and similarities in subjective happiness and academic engagement among nursing students from different countries may be influenced by cultural factors. These factors may also affect how sociodemographic characteristics and career choice relate to these variables. Each culture has distinct ways of dealing with everyday challenges, different attitudes toward academic commitment, and varying levels of appreciation for the nursing profession. These cultural particularities may have influenced the results obtained in studies conducted in different contexts.

Although this study suggests that other factors also influence academic engagement, it was found that subjective happiness has a positive impact on undergraduate nursing students' academic engagement; as subjective happiness increases, academic engagement

tends to increase as well. It is also possible to presume a positive cycle between these two variables, meaning that more engaged students tend to be happier. Based on previous research, it can be assumed that happier individuals tend to be more motivated and energetic, which makes them more engaged in their work and studies.^{1,2} A study conducted with Iranian nursing students identified a direct and significant association between happiness and motivation for achievement. It was also noted that high motivation to achieve academic goals may, in turn, lead to increased happiness among students, suggesting a positive and bidirectional relationship between these two variables.²

These findings are relevant because, just as subjective happiness can increase the engagement of nursing students, it is believed that happier healthcare workers will have a greater capacity to generate positive patient outcomes. This is because happiness protects individuals' physical and mental health.¹ In her master's thesis, Marques³⁴ highlighted that factors such as valuing the tasks they perform, receiving social support and feedback, having autonomy, and engaging in a variety of activities positively influence the happiness of young people from Generation Z (those born after the end of the 1990s), as is the case with most of the participants in this study. It is, therefore, understood that when young people from Generation Z recognize the importance of their tasks, receive support from others, and feel capable of carrying out their responsibilities, they tend to feel happier.

When it comes to the engagement of nursing students, it can be directly related to the quality of care they will provide as nurses since students need to be engaged in theoretical and practical classes in order to become successful professionals.^{12,16} To

promote happiness and engagement with the course of future nurses it is essential to develop strategies such as formulating curricula that integrate innovative pedagogical projects, favouring extracurricular activities in which students can socialize and develop their skills, offering institutional support to help students deal with social, emotional and academic pressures, and ensuring adequate human resources, such as qualified educators who facilitate enriching experiences that encourage students.^{1,7,11,13,18}

Developing curricula based on simulation modules and problem-based learning methodologies is believed to significantly enhance critical thinking and decision-making skills. Promoting participation in peer-led study groups or student-organized health promotion campaigns can foster social interaction while reinforcing learning processes. The presence of educators trained in methods that encourage active student engagement, rather than passive listening, such as experiential learning through debriefing sessions after simulations or strategies like the flipped classroom, can lead to more dynamic, welcoming, and engaging educational environments. These strategies may positively impact students' subjective happiness and academic engagement, resulting in a more fulfilling and motivating educational experience.

In addition to focusing on the transmission of knowledge, educational institutions should also prioritize the overall well-being of their students. In this regard, institutional support should include academic advising services, financial incentives aimed at scientific development, and psychological counselling to help students cope with the emotional and academic challenges of the educational process.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

To the best of the author's knowledge, this is the first study conducted to investigate the correlation between Brazilian undergraduate nursing students' subjective happiness and academic engagement. Participants exhibited

moderate levels of both constructs. Students over 30 and those from middle and upper-middle-class backgrounds scored significantly higher in subjective happiness than their peers aged 20-25 and those from

lower-income backgrounds. Those who chose the nursing course out of genuine interest also reported higher levels of happiness, while students who indicated they would choose the course again achieved higher scores in both subjective happiness and academic engagement. It was identified that although other factors also impact participants' level of engagement, there is a positive relationship between levels of subjective happiness and academic engagement.

The results of this study highlight the importance of promoting and/or maintaining high levels of subjective happiness among nursing students. When seeking to educate nursing students, providing them with all the theoretical and practical knowledge they need to become competent nurses, it is crucial not to overlook the importance of their emotional well-being for their engagement and academic success. Developing social and financial support programs, implementing peer mentorship, and promoting experience-sharing among students of different age groups may improve students' subjective happiness levels. Furthermore, providing information about the course and the various fields in which nurses can work may help students feel more connected to the profession and develop a greater interest in the course.

In addition to its importance for education, this study may also provide valuable insights for nursing management. Students who show high levels of happiness and academic engagement during their education are more

likely to become satisfied and engaged nurses in the future. Work environments that support autonomy, provide feedback, offer meaningful activities, and offer social support can help nurses feel more committed, leading to improved quality of care.

Limitations of the Study

Despite offering valuable insights into undergraduate nursing students' subjective happiness and academic engagement, this study has several limitations. First, using a convenience sample, with more than half of the participants coming from the same region and attending private universities, may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, recruitment was restricted to students active on a specific professional social media platform. Finally, the reliance on self-report questionnaires introduces the potential for response bias, which is another limitation of the study.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares that she has no conflicts of interest or funding to disclose.

Author Contributions

A.L.F.A.; Concept and Design, Analysis/ Interpretation, Data Collection or Processing, Writing, Review and Correction, Final Approval.

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