DO SOCIETAL EXPECTATIONS/PRESSURE DRIVE UNHAPPINESS IN SOUTH KOREA?

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ABSTRACT

While South Korea is ranked high in education, economies and technological development, the level of South Koreans' happiness has not grown simultaneously. This fact contradicts the common sense that improvements in living standards, such as income or education, lead to gains in happiness or individual wellbeing. In order to examine the phenomenon of decreasing perceived individual wellbeing in light of increasing income levels, I analyze the relationship between societal expectations/pressure and happiness in South Korea, using data from the World Value survey conducted in 2010. The uniquely high concentration on human capital in South Korea has played a major factor for extreme competitiveness. Since the financial crisis in 1997, the competitive job market has produced few job opportunities, which has caused a high level of social pressure. The major finding of this study is that the impact of societal expectations on unhappiness increases as people get older and it is more powerful among people of lower income. Also, social pressure has a greater negative effect on happiness for females than males in South Korea. Even when controlling for independent variables, including job security, wages, and high living costs, I show social pressure to have a first order impact on perceived well-being among Korean citizens. From a policy perspective, low levels of happiness can ultimately cause social instability and loss of human capital. Expected policy implications are increasing the number of college entrance exams and fostering work life balance initiatives. In this sense, the findings of this paper can serve as a guideline for the South Korean government

not only to improve the overall economic productivity of South Korean society, but also enhance the quality of life along important societal dimensions.

Key words: South Korea, happiness, societal expectations/pressure

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I. INTRODUCTION

The center of economic activity in Asia has shifted from east to west due to the rapid economic growth of China, India, and the rest of East Asia. Among East Asian countries, South Korea has played an important role as a nexus of global economic activity since its historical growth in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s (Harvie et al., 2003). Having almost no natural resources and suffering from over-population on the small Korean peninsula, South Korea adopted an export-oriented economic development strategy and is now one of the world's most affluent nations, ranking 15th in the world by nominal GDP (Harvie et al., 2003).

Since the economic boom of the 1960s, almost every key social indicator for Korea has signaled rapid improvements in living standards. For example, South Korean performance in education, democracy, savings, and involvement in politics has grown positively since 1960s. However, despite this positive progress, individual happiness, measured by self-reported ratings of people's life satisfaction and happiness, has declined substantially (Hagerty et al., 2002). The percentage of Koreans who described themselves as very happy dropped from 9.8% in 1990 to 4.3% in 2010 (World Value Survey, 2010). Measured on a scale from 1 (low) to 10 (high), life satisfaction fell from an average of 6.69 to 6.51. Most significantly, life satisfaction continues to plummet as people pass the age of 29, a general age group of people in the labor force, meaning that South Koreans tend to get more stressed as they become socioeconomically independent. One reason for this trend may be that socio-economic conditions in combination with social and traditional expectations in South Korea cause social pressure, which may reduce the level of life satisfaction.

In fact, scholars point to social pressure as one of the most important factors behind declines in life satisfaction (Adams et al., 2002). They argue that various forms of social pressure, for instance job insecurity, low wages, and high living costs, can adversely impact on individual's level of happiness. Specifically in South Korea, social pressure affects particular groups. Male suicide rates in Korea increased from 19 per 100,000 in 1995 to 50 in 2010, and female rates are the highest in the OECD, at 21 per 100,000. In addition, the number of people who were diagnosed with depression and bipolar disease in Korea rose sharply from 17 to 29 percent of the entire population from 2006 to 2010 (OECD Factbook 2013).

This paper will examine the questions whether a highly competitive economic system in combination with societal and traditional expectations towards the young Korean generation leads to an enhanced level of dissatisfaction and thus to a reduction in overall life satisfaction. My analysis uses evidence from a survey conducted as part of the World Values Survey (WVS) of 2010 (for further details on sampling methodology, the questionnaire, and data sets see the Appendix). The results indicate that among the 10 variables that I use to construct a Social Pressure Index (SPI), responsibility and hard work are negatively correlated with happiness and this effect is statistically significant at 1 percent level. Proper behavior and competition also respectively reduced subjective well-being. This implies that the current Korean society and economic market puts too much pressure on individuals. By understanding how closely individual happiness is tied to one's social characteristics such as responsibility, hard work, proper behavior, and competition, public policy might be used to better ensure that every citizen enjoys a happier life, which can benefit the society as a whole.

II. BACKGROUD AND PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Many socio-economists have focused on the association between subjective well-being or personal happiness and socio-economic factors (Cramm et al., 2012). However, further investigation has to be conducted to see how socio-economic factors, transformed into the unique cultures of certain countries, play their role in determining subjective well-being. Tella et al. (2003) found that microeconomic changes, such as in an individual's economic status, have strong effects on the happiness of nations. They used "Happiness Equations" that have similar structures in different countries. But their experiment was only conducted in 12 European countries and the United States, and did not consider different cultural aspects in other countries. Such attempts generally ignore underlying country specific characteristics such as customs, culture, and history which might account for different people's level of happiness.

In order to calibrate impacts of different variables, sociologists and psychologists create indexes. For instance, Mackinnon et al. (2004) conducted an experiment on depression and they first collected and determined survey items that are most useful in creating a National Depression Index. They devised a method of expressing factor scores in a readily interpretable manner and established index values for the population. T.C. Wild et al. (2006) also created a social pressure index to estimate the effect of social pressures on alcohol and drug treatment clinic attendance and motivation. They used the sum of the scale ratings ranging from 1 (= no pressure) to 5 (= extreme pressure), for all social network targets. Similarly, Dijkstra et al. (1999) used social pressure index to examine the effectiveness of a social influence approach to smoking prevention. They calculated the sum of smoking related questions ranging from 0 (=never) to 4 (=very often). This is a good method of constructing a social pressure index since this study also relied on survey.

Moreover, studies have reported that income, age, sex and good education are positively associated with personal happiness (Blanchflower and Oswald 2004; Leung et al. 2011). However, further researches also increasingly prove that on individual's subjective well-being cannot be solely explained by individual characteristics but that areas where people live are important for explaining subjective well-being (Farrell et al. 2004; Deneulin and Townsend 2007; Cramm et al. 2012).

Early researchers merely regarded other characteristics, which might be caused by socioeconomic factors, as less important than socioeconomic factors themselves. For instance, Duesenberry (1949) suggested that subjective well-being is mainly dependent on individual's income. His argument mainly relied on economic factors that might neglect other important causes, such as family and a person's societal status. Also, Winkelmann (2009) examined the association between income and subjective well-being at the individual-level and found that social capital is associated with subjective well-being. These studies have shown limitations in explaining that personal happiness is not only correlated with economic factors, but also correlated with other unique characteristics of region, ideology and cultural background.

Brockmann et al. (2008) found that, at low standards of living, life satisfaction increases most strongly when there are material improvements through income or other venues of personal wealth. His argument can explain the subjective well-being of people in a low income level cohort, but hardly prove the cause of happiness in upper income level cohorts. Also, according to Chen (2011), individuals with more education attainment have more broad social networks and more extensive connectivity to the society; these life conditions are positively related to happiness. This finding partially explains that happiness is also related to factors that are not

necessarily economic factors, but Chen's analysis needs to be applicable to other cohorts with different cultural backgrounds.

There are also researches of life satisfaction and subjective health. According to Kye et al. (2014), middle-aged South Koreans, who are less likely to be happier than younger and older South Koreans, tend to have more health related problems with higher stress levels. In addition, Kim et al. (2011) claims that middle-aged South Korean males have an increasing tendency toward suicide[1]. This sounds an alarm about how a low-level happiness can adversely affect South Koreans' quality of life.

III. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Although recent studies have explored the relationship between life satisfaction and socio-economic outcomes, more narrow studies that focus on life satisfaction and socio-economic factors in particular cultures have to be done to explain the unique trend in South Korea. Individuals in East Asian cultural contexts are highly motivated to adjust and fit themselves to the others in the society. People regard themselves as interdependent entities to social roles which lead them to react to societal expectations (Weisz et al., 1984; Morling et al., 2002). This implies that happiness in East Asian cultures is linked to how ones realize their social relationship to a society that they are involved in. In contrast to Western individualistic countries, people in collectivistic nations have interdependent self-concepts and are more focused on others. Ensuring whether one's behaviors fit into what is acceptable to the whole group is a very important concept in countries with collectivism. This feature is compounded by

[1] See Figure 3 in Appendix

South Korea's characteristic of intense focus on human capital. Competitiveness accompanied for the East Asian culture of interdependency creates high societal pressure on oneself compared to others in the society. In addition, responsibility for family support in a competitive society generates social pressure on middle-aged head of households. The main purpose of this study is to investigate the association between societal expectations and subjective well-being at the individual level using time series models. Table 1, which reports results of the World Value Survey (WVS) 2010, explains how South Koreans perceive their level of happiness. Most of them feel that they are rather happy, which is the second highest level among choices. However, East Asian culture might work as a fixed effect making them perceive themselves to be happier than they really are. People answered more negatively on specific questionnaires regarding unemployment, education, and work-life balance. Also, according to Gallup Korea, 31% of South Koreans are unhappy with the current unemployment rate, and 73% of them work additional hours after 6 PM, a standard clock out time.

Moreover, other social trends, including the suicide rate, do not reflect individual subjective responses on the WVS. South Korea's suicide rate remained the highest among OECD countries for 10 consecutive years, from 2002 to 2012, and the rate reached 28.1 for every 100,000 people in 2012. Kwon et al. (2009) found the reasons from the insufficient government provided social safety network and the increase of unemployment rates. Middle-age workers have to support their families who do not receive enough social benefits from the government, and unemployment is more prevalent among entry-level workers who are just out of colleges. These trends are compounded by the special cultural context of Confucian identities, which later will be explained in the paper.

Table 1: Happiness Level by Sex and Age

		Sex		*Age*		
	Total	Male	Female	Up to 29	30-49	50 and more
Very happy	15.2	14.0	16.5	15.7	18.1	11.2
Rather happy	74.8	73.4	76.1	75.0	72.3	77.7
Not very happy	9.2	12.1	6.4	9.0	8.4	10.3
Not at all happy	0.7	0.6	0.8	0.2	1.0	0.7
N	1,200	593	607	246	538	416

Source: WVS 2010

In order to test my key hypothesis, that in South Korea social pressure reduces individual happiness, I use a linear probability model. The linear probability model explains the direct causal relationship between the dependent and independent variables, and it is well suited to answer my research question.

In this study, the dependent variable is life satisfaction. The concept of life satisfaction refers to ‘‘the degree to which a person positively evaluates the overall quality of his/her life as-a-whole’’ (Veenhoven 1996). Following standard practice, the World Values Survey measures life satisfaction by asking people how satisfied they are with their lives. Besides life satisfaction, happiness is another aspect of subjective well-being which is included in the WVS. As life satisfaction does, this variable also shows a decline in South Korea.

As other social scientists, my analysis will focus on life satisfaction for the following reason. Blanchflower and et al., (2005) said that happiness is a mood related and situational aspect of subjective well-being; it is fickle and subject to emotional fluctuations. In contrast, life satisfaction reflects a more cognitive and evaluation of subjective well-being which goes beyond situational fluctuations and is thus more socially sustainable. However, despite the conceptual differences, due to the similarities of the two words, I use the terms life satisfaction, subjective well-being and happiness interchangeably.

As a general principle, the subjective well-being of South Koreans is based on hard work. People work hard to be happy with their given economic and social environment. This study of happiness in South Korea uses different model specifications to explain each variables and provides complementary interpretations of the factors affecting happiness. The basic model, an ordinary least squares model that shows the relationship between social pressure and happiness, takes the following form:

$$Y_i = \alpha + \beta_1 X_i + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

where Yi represents subjective well-being or happiness, Xi is social pressure/societal expectation, and i denotes South Korea. In this specification, $\beta_1$would then express the effect of the social pressure on the subjective well-being or happiness in South Korea.

My first analysis uses the basic happiness model to measure the direct effect of social pressure on the level of happiness in South Korea. Subjective well-being is measured on a 1-10 point scale, with 1 being lowest and 10 begin highest level of subjective well-being. The ten-point scale provides more differentiated information than the four-point happiness scale used in the WVS and is more suited to quantitative analysis.

To operationalize my research question of relationship between social pressure and individual happiness among South Koreans, I use measures of income, education, subjective health and competition as my control variables. Social scientists have argued that these variables are the major measures that constitute social pressure (Oshio et al., 2010).

IV. DATA DESCRIPTION

This paper follows the example of recent studies using data from the World Value Survey (WVS). The formal name of the data set in this paper is *World Value Survey – South Korea 2010*. The sample size data consists of 1,200 individuals who were interviewed from February to August in 2010. The data represent adults who are 20 years old and older, who are living in private dwelling units, and both genders of the national population. Among the 1,200 individual, I am particularly interested in the middle-aged people who are generally the heads of households and young professionals who are about to begin their careers, for both genders. Researching happiness in South Korea requires data that represents different age groups of the population.

In order to look at the effect of social pressure on subjective well-being, I used several variables that work as major indicators to capture social pressure among South Koreans. Also, these variables are key components of the social pressure index, which will be discussed later in this paper. Table 2 describes the variables. While many factors that might affect South Korean's daily lives in many aspects, these are the main variables that can cause social pressure. Other Scholars such as Vrij et al. (1992) included similar variables, including personal belief and social behavior, as social pressure factors to measure the level of social pressure of black citizens on white citizens in the US.

Table 2: Descriptions of Variables

Variable	Short form	Source	Description
Life Satisfaction	V23	WVS (2010)	Respondents' current satisfaction of life
Work	V8	WVS (2010)	Important quality of life: work
Hard work as a virtue	V13	WVS (2010)	Important qualities that children are encouraged to learn at home
Feeling of	V14	WVS (2010)	Important qualities that children are

responsibility			encouraged to learn at home
Determination and perseverance	V18	WVS (2010)	Important qualities that children are encouraged to learn at home
Obedience	V21	WVS (2010)	Important qualities that children are encouraged to learn at home
Good of society	V74	WVS (2010)	It is important to this person to do something for the good of society
Proper behavior	V77	WVS (2010)	Behave properly; avoid doing anything people would say is wrong
Custom	V79	WVS (2010)	Following the customs handed down by one's religion or family
Competition	V99	WVS (2010)	The effect of competition in life
Hard work	V100	WVS (2010)	Hard work brings success

Source: WVS, 2010

Table 3 provides descriptive statistics for each variable. All variables were originally scaled from -1, which indicated 'No Answer', but I excluded -1, and rescaled from 1 to minimize statistical errors. 'Life Satisfaction', 'Competition', and 'Hard work' have a scale from 1-10, in which 1 indicates completely dissatisfied and 10 indicates completely satisfied. 'Work' has a scale from 1-4, with 1 being very important and 4 being not at all important. 'Responsibility', 'Perseverance', and 'Obedience' are dichotomous variables, with 1 being yes and 2 being no. 'Good of Society' and 'Custom' have a scale from 1-6, where 1 indicates very much like me and 6 indicates not at all like me.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Life Satisfaction	1200	6.531667	2.030788	1	10
Work	1200	1.499167	0.7898433	1	4
Hard work as a virtue	1200	1.3625	0.4809225	1	2
Responsibility	1200	1.1125	0.3161124	1	2
Perseverance	1200	1.453333	0.498025	1	2
Obedience	1200	1.918333	0.2739704	1	2
Good of Society	1200	3.280833	1.394125	1	6
Proper Behavior	1200	2.576243	1.200004	1	6
Custom	1200	3.513333	1.462283	1	6
Competition	1200	3.853333	1.999205	1	10
Hard work	1200	4.269167	2.509043	1	10

Source: WVS, 2010

Table 4 shows the correlation between two variables. Correlations of Life Satisfaction and other variables explain how different factors might either positively or negatively impact one's happiness. The table indicates that, among other variables, hard work adversely affects life satisfaction the most. It was also expected that responsibility and good of society would influence people's life satisfaction. Yet these factors have slightly less impact than the perception of hard work. Although the notion of work might have greatly decreased South Korean's happiness, it is still important to run an experiment to see how unique cultural and social pressures in the country affect people's life satisfaction. To do this, I sum all the variables, except for Life Satisfaction, and get a mean to create a Social Pressure Index (SPI) that I use as a main independent variable of my research.

V. Estimation Results

A) OLS Estimation

The OLS results for the basic life satisfaction model are presented in Table 4. Column one describes strictly the effect of the social pressure on the South Korean's happiness. This indicates that without controlling for any other factors, for every one percent increase in the social pressure, we would expect a 0.6346 level of decrease in the South Korean's life satisfaction as measured by the WVS life satisfaction scale. This result is consistent with the most recent research in this field showing that various factors in social pressure reduce life satisfaction (Ferrer-i-Carbonell 2012; Weisz et al., 1984; and Morling et al., 2002). For example, Clark et al. (2008) examines the negative effect of unemployment on happiness; and Van Praag et al. (2003) presented a model of how financial security and health status impact life satisfaction.

Table 4: OLS Results for the Life Satisfaction Model with Controls for Region, Households, Savings, Income Level, Age, and Education

Dependent Variable: Life Satisfaction

	Model 1	Model 2 includes Region Only	Model 3 includes Controls Only	Model 4 includes Region and Controls
SPI	-.6346***	-.6263***	-.5454***	-.5389***
	(.1214)	(.1217)	(.1196)	(.1199)
Region		-.0514***		-.0417***
		(.0128)		(.0131)
Households			.0595	.0522
			(.1091)	(.1087)
Savings			-.1575**	-.1655***
			(.0630)	(.0623)
Income Level			.2779***	.2746***
			(.0366)	(.0365)
Age			-.0015	-.0025
			(.0051)	(.0051)
Education			.0426	.0193
			(.0456)	(.0459)
Constant	8.104	21110.6	6.4763	17135.39
R^2	0.0281	0.0424	0.1207	0.1297
N	1,200	1,200	1,200	1,200

Notes: *** p < 0.01; ** p< 0.05; * p<0.10; Calculations based upon WVS data for year 2010 for 1,200 individuals in South Korea. Standard errors in parentheses

Source: WVS 2010

Column 2 reports the results of the model controlling for the region. Once again the result is highly significant and shows about a 0.083 point increase in the independent negative effect on an individual's life satisfaction. In column 3, the model adds various controls for the SPI such as whether the respondent is a main source of income of the family, how much they save, their level of income, age, and education. The results are, again, consistent with previous research. The model indicates that financial stability largely affects an individual's life satisfaction. Although it is true that income does not always promote a happier life (Easterlin, 1974), it is still an important factor of people that affects life satisfaction in general. However, this result is subject to change when we add other control variables that might affect an individual's life satisfaction. According to Rojas (2011), even though subjective well-being is

positively related to one's financial status, a rise in income does not lead to greater happiness since there are other factors that also increase happiness. In other words, people's life satisfaction can be low despite their level of income.

Finally, column 4 reports results controlling for region and control variables in column 3. Including all control variables does not significantly increase the magnitude of standard errors of the variables. The coefficients on SPI, region, savings, and income level are still statistically significant and their results are almost identical to the other columns. Moreover, savings becomes statistically significant at .01, level which indicates that savings do matter to an individual's life satisfaction.

Table 6 shows the OLS results for the life satisfaction model with each variable included the SPI. Columns 1 to 10 indicates which variables statistically significantly affect an individual's level of happiness. Column 2, 3, 7, 9, and 10 report variables that have the most negative impacts, with more than a 0.05 level of statistical significance. Column 2 explains that people's regarding hard work as an individual virtue reduces their happiness level by 0.3. Also, Column 10 shows that actual hard work also decreases people's life satisfaction by 0.08. Fisher (2010) claims that people achieve happiness through their hard work; that the factors that influence their life satisfaction are job satisfaction, task, individual's expectations and others. When these factors are absent, people feel a very low level of life satisfaction, which is the case in South Korea. According to Park and Lee's comparison data on working conditions in South Korea and EU countries, Korean workers work longer hours than workers in the majority of EU countries and their work satisfaction is much lower than workers in EU countries.

Table 5: OLS Results for the Life Satisfaction Model with Controls for SPI variables (Work, Hard work Virtue, Responsibility, Perseverance, Obedience, Good of Society, Proper Behavior, Custom, Competition, Hard work), Region, Households, Savings, Income Level, Age, and Education

DepVar: Life Satisfaction

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Work	-.0588									
	(.0794)									
Hard work Virtue		-.3022**								
		(.1191)								
Responsibility			-.6400***							
			(.2213)							
Perseverance				-.0619						
				(.1128)						
Obedience					-.1445					
					(.2192)					
Good of Society						-.0862				
						(.0409)				
Proper behavior							-.1190**			
							(.0501)			
Custom								-.0590		
								(.0425)		
Competition									-.0760**	
									(.0323)	
Hard work										-.0848***
										(.0234)
Region	-.0427***	-.0424***	-.0392***	-.0429***	-.0421***	-.0412***	-.042***	-.0419***	-.0433***	-.0450***
	(.0131)	(.0130)	(.0126)	(.0132)	(.0133)	(.0132)	(.0132)	(.0132)	(.0132)	(.0132)
Controls										
Households	.0242	.0224	.0097	.0118	.0071	.0167	.0233	.0083	.0259	.0202
	(.1085)	(.1081)	(.1056)	(.1076)	(.1078)	(.1081)	(.1086)	(.1081)	(.1080)	(.1071)
Savings	-.1895***	-.1912***	-.1930***	-.1927***	-.1891***	-.1889***	-.1907***	-.1898***	-.1779***	-.1703***
	(.0622)	(.0622)	(.0616)	(.0624)	(.0624)	(.0623)	(.0625)	(.0625)	(.0628)	(.0614)
Income Level	.2850***	.2853***	.2908***	.2847***	.2865***	.2798***	.2849***	.2844***	.2841***	.2762***
	(.0368)	(.0367)	(.0364)	(.0369)	(.0370)	(.0369)	(.0369)	(.0368)	(.0369)	(.0368)
Age	.0009	-.0003	.0000	.0009	.0003	-3.96e-06	-.0005	-.001	.0011	-.0006
	(.0052)	(.0052)	(.0051)	(.0052)	(.0052)	(.0051)	(.0052)	(.0053)	(.0052)	(.0051)
Education	.0246	.0255	.0159	.0254	-.0421***	.0189	.021	.028	.0239	.0268
	(.0463)	(.0461)	(.0463)	(.0460)	(.0461)	(.0461)	(.0462)	(.0460)	(.0461)	(.0460)
Constant	17512.79	17429.27	16105.18	17625.37	17305.83	16930.85	17246.39	17204.6	17793.58	18479.19
R^2	0.1109	0.1155	0.1202	0.1107	0.1108	0.1138	0.1160	0.1120	0.1159	0.1211
N	1,200	1,200	1,200	1,200	1,200	1,200	1,200	1,200	1,200	1,200

Notes: *** p < 0.01; ** p< 0.05; * p<0.10; Calculations based upon WVS data for year 2010 for 1,200 individuals in South Korea. Standard errors in parentheses

Source: WVS 2010

Column 3 indicates that in South Korea, responsibility negatively affects people's happiness very substantially; as one unit increase in responsibility is accounted with a 0.64 decrease of life satisfaction. Palys et al., (1983) argued that persons with low life satisfaction reported greater responsibility in their lives. However, the authors found that workers who were involved in a work environment that was enjoyable with social support tended to have higher life satisfaction. In addition, South Korea and other East Asian countries have a strong Confucian work ethic. According to Lu et al. (2001), regarding hard work as a virtue is based on the Confucian work ethic which gives people a strong sense of high achievement motivation, commitment, responsibility, and loyalty. This has many similarities with Protestant work ethic and both ideologies influence people to regard work as having a central role in everyday lives. As people's idea of hard work as a virtue and responsibility increases. Therefore, it is not surprising that their life satisfaction decreases.

Column 7 shows that people's social obligation of behaving properly in a society also diminishes their level of life satisfaction. A one unit increase in proper behavior reduces life satisfaction by 0.12. This is mainly related to the fixed effect of how Asian people view themselves in a society. It is important to remember Kitayama and Markus's (2000) caveat that attempts to apply Western theories of happiness to other cultural contexts may misinterpret them. Confucian identities influence collectivism that requires members of society to have certain values such as perseverance, obedience, commitment to the good of society, and proper behavior toward others. Markus and Kitayama (1991) argued that interdependent people would acheive happiness through fulfilling the tasks with relevant others in a society, such as engaging in proper behavior and maintaining harmony. Unlike Western people who often possess a strong sense of individualism, Asian people's life satisfaction, including Koreans, is affected massively

by others. However, even though the idea of collectivism is important among people in Asian countries, Steele et al. argued that collectivism has diminished over time and people increasingly prioritize individualist factors in the assessment of their own happiness and life satisfaction. As a result, people's life satisfaction declines as the effect of collectivism declines and they feel more pressure about proper behavior and the good of society.

The negative coefficient on competition reflects an intense level of competition in South Korea. The coefficient on the competition variable indicates that competitiveness in South Korean society reduces life satisfaction by 0.08 as the competition variable increases by one level. Buss (2000) reported that the nature of having winners and losers in competition produces jealousy, which can undermine self-esteem, making a person feel insecure, rejected, and resentful. While Buss noted that a moderate level of competition can be a thrusting energy for moving forward, too much competition can endanger a society with stress and anxiety.

High competition also breaks the work-life balance. The collectivist mindset of togetherness boosts South Koreans' sense of responsibility and competition, which makes them prioritize work before anything else. According to Duxbury et al. (1992), choices made to balance work and life affect the individual's stress level, mental health, and overall life satisfaction on a personal level. Moreover, Marks et al. (1996) claimed that the effect of a broken work-life balance is magnified for middle-aged individuals who engage in multiple roles in life (e.g., parent, employee, and community leader) which give those increased expectations and pressures. Kossek and Ozeki (1998) claimed that expectations of different members of a role set, which is created by the effort to achieve work-life balance, may have a negative impact on life satisfaction.

It is important to navigate the background of South Korea to understand the unique important trend of the four variables: responsibility, hard work, proper behavior, and competition. People in South Korea is greatly driven by certain Confucian values. Kim and Park (2007) wrote that South Koreans are motived by the Confucian tradition of diligence, hard work, and other perceptions that provide the cultural foundation for Korean capitalism. In a society that values Confucian beliefs, for instance proper behavior, responsibility, and hard work, which are traditional values aimed at maintaining social order, have been transplanted to work places. In this way, Confucian values of hard work, responsibility, and proper behavior have been incorporated into the South Korean work force. Lee (1989) surveyed employees in South Korean companies and reported several moral work ethics: proper behavior, sincerity, and hard work. In South Korea, he concluded that, rather than the individual, emphasizing the whole according to Confucian values creates more burdens of responsibility, proper behavior, and hard work.

Competition is well established in South Korean education and markets. During the last five decades, the Korean higher education sector has experienced a tremendous expansion. According to data from the Ministry of Education in South Korea, the number of students enrolled in higher education institutions grew exponentially from 11,358 in 1950 to more than 3.5 million in 2002. Despite this success, Kim and Lee (2006) noted that competition among universities for better students and that among students for better universities may create wasteful zero-sum games. The education boom happened concurrently with the economic growth of the 1960s. Rankings among schools were established throughout all levels of education, including elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and universities, and the competition for better schools became fierce as more students enrolled. But while many parents

desire to send their children to high ranking institutions, only a few get to enroll those prestige schools, the competition for enrollment is tremendously damaging. In 2014, the National Statistical Office in South Korea reported that among youths in the 10-19 years old age group, 27.3 percent of students committed suicide which was the number one reason of death in the age group.

Table 6 reports the SPI effect by gender. SPI has negative effects of life satisfaction of both genders, but men receive more social pressure than women and the coefficients on both categories are statistically significant at the 0.01 level. This is mainly due to the structure of Korean society where males are more active in labor market than women. Seguino (1997) claimed that there is a persistent trend of gender inequality in South Korea and that males are more likely to be employed than females. The results in the table 6 is consistnet Han et al.'s (2013) study of the association between the social capital and happiness in South Korea. These authors found that males tend to have lower happiness levels by -.094 compared to women, but their finding was not statistically significant, possibly because their data was drawn from people who were already employed. In the work place, some observers believe that males get more societal expectations.

Table 6: SPI in Different Gender Groups

Depdendant Vairable: Life Satisfaction	Male	Female
SPI	-.7782*** (.1549)	-.5532*** (.1504)
Constant	8.2917	8.056
R^2	.041	.0218
N	592	608

Notes: *** p < 0.01; ** p< 0.05; * p<0.10; Calculations based upon WVS data for year 2010 for 1,200 individuals in South Korea. Standard errors in parentheses

Source: WVS 2010

Table 7 displays the effect of SPI for different age groups. People who are under the age of 29 report the greatest SPI effect with an 0.01 statistical significance level; following by people in the 50 and more age group and 30-49 age group, with an 0.01 statistical significance level. The effect of SPI is most severe for 50-and-older people, students and recent college graduates who are under 29 years old. Previous studies have shown that, reported life satisfaction was lowest among the working age group, generally 30-49, when the economy was booming in 1960s and 1970s. However, this table indicates that students experience relatively more stress than the mid-level working age group of 30-49 year olds. In Han and et al.'s (2013) study, age was negatively associated with subjective happiness (B =-0.014; p\0.001) but age squared was not associated with subjective happiness. Again, this may have been because the survey was taken in the workplace and the authors did not include students and recent college graduates. When students and young professionals are included, it turns out that they expeirence more social pressure than people who are generally in working age groups.

Kim and Lee (2006) claimed that the current Korean higher education system is broken as only few students have a pathway to success. The college entrance exam is a good example of the social pressure on the Korean younger generation. South Korean high school seniors are given only a one-time college entrance exam each a year. Students study very hard for this day,

but it is the reality that only a certain number of students are enrolled in the top ranking universities. Throughout this process, students feel extreme pressure from their family and school. As a result, students commit suicide on the exam day if their exam scores are not high enough to be enrolled in top ranking universities.

People who are 50 and more years old experience a high level of social pressure. According to the OECD Factbook 2013, while the average OECD suicide rate per 100,000 people aged 50 and more decreased to 20.9 in 2010, South Korea was ranked first, with 34.2 out of 100,000 people committing suicide. Kim et al. (2010) argued that as the average age of Korea has risen older due to the advance of medical technology, the number of people who are more than 50 has increased. The authors reported that the primary reason for suicide was low self-esteem. They claimed that people who are over 50 years old often do not work after their retirement, which causes extremely low self-esteem to individuals as they regard themselves as useless in the family and the society. Table 7 indicates that people who are over 50 years old experience high levels of societal pressure.

Table 7: SPI in Different Age Groups

Depdendant Vairable: Life Satisfaction	Up to 29	30-49	50 and more
SPI	-.8753***	-.4650***	-.7758***
	(.2747)	(.1605)	(.1996)
Constant	8.2521	8.9842	8.3850
R^2	.046	.0230	.0382
N	229	478	386

Notes: *** p < 0.01; ** p< 0.05; * p<0.10; Calculations based upon WVS data for year 2010 for 1,200 individuals in South Korea. Standard errors in parentheses
Source: WVS 2010

Table 8 shows the effect of SPI in different income groups. The low income column reported a negative SPI effect, but this result was not statistically significant. The SPI effect increased as income levels rise that high income people expeirenced the second highest SPI effect, followed by middle income people, while both are statistically significant in 0.01 level.

Table 8: SPI in Different Income Groups

Depdendant Vairable: Life Satisfaction	Low Income	Middle Income	High Income
SPI	-.2739	-.5752***	-1.5653***
	(.2306)	(.1254)	(.3044)
Constant	6.2794	8.1062	11.336
R^2	.0059	.0236	.2351
N	241	871	88

Notes: *** p < 0.01; ** p< 0.05; * p<0.10; Calculations based upon WVS data for year 2010 for 1,200 individuals in South Korea. Standard errors in parentheses
Source: WVS 2010

The results are consistent with the research of Hagerty and Veenhoven (2002), who found that while income increases the level of happiness in the short term, financial status does not promote an individual's subjective well-being in a long term. Easterlin et al. (2010) claimed that income growth does not cause subjective well-being to rise, either for higher or lower income persons. Although rising income means that people can have more goods, the favourable effect of this on life satisfaction is counterbalanced by the fact that people want more as they progress through the life cycle. This paradox is more prevalent among people with higher incomes and their level of happiness eventually decreaeses. The empirical section has shown that the different SPI effect across the age, gender, and income levels. Overall, the empirical results indicate that SPI effect is more powerful in males, people who are under 29 years old, and high income level people.

VII. CONCLUSION

Since the1960s, rapid economic growth in South Korea has enabled massive improvement in all aspects of living, including GDP per capita and educational attainment. However, according to Diener (2010), the surveys conducted by WVS in 1990 and 2010 show that Koreans have also experienced a reduction in life satisfaction. This raises the question to what extent societal expectations in combination with 'new' economic realities such as enhanced competition and responsibility, proper behavior, and hard work are driving these outcomes. The main results of the present study indicate that among the sample of South Korean individuals, the various factors that constitute social pressure are negatively associated with life satisfaction and subjective wellbeing. Consistent with previous researches, the effects of the SPI were stronger to males and high-income groups. Social Pressure was reported high in all age groups, especially in under 29 year old and 50 year older people. Also, the prominent working age groups, middle-aged people, experience high social pressure, mainly because financially supporting their families gives many burdens of responsibility and hard work, which affect life satisfaction. This study suggests that alleviating the four major factors contributing to less happiness- e.g., responsibility, hard work, proper behavior, and competition- can mitigate social pressure and increase the life satisfaction.

The dataset used for this study is limited by its self-report survey design. Many of the variables in the survey require individuals' discretion, which lacks a standard value for comparison. The components of the social pressure index of South Korea can be added in forthcoming literatures, and future investigations should explore in more detail the nature and composition of social pressure and its effects on life satisfaction and individual happiness.

In addition, measures of perception variables may be subject to various sources of measurement error, including culture and ideology. First, the correlations between those variables may have been overestimated, because responsibility, obedience, proper behavior, life satisfaction, and hard work were measured *via* self-reports by individuals. There are no certain criteria to measure the degree of obedience and proper behavior. However, given that there is evidence of discriminant validity between variables, self-report bias does not appear to be a serious problem with the present results. Second, since this study used a cross-sectional data set, it cannot confirm cause and effect. To offset this shortcoming, a longitudinal or experimental study is needed to test causality between these variables. Finally, the sample used for this study was collected using non probability sampling, and the findings are specific to these 1,200 respondents from 15 areas in South Korea.

Despite those limitations, the results point at a strong negative effect in the relationship between social pressure and subjective well-being among the respondents in this sample. The increasing demands of balancing employment and family responsibilities strain the health and welfare of many working groups of people. Moreover, preventing a low life satisfaction level is also closely linked to work productivity. The present study contributes to the literature by reexamining the effects of the social pressure on the level of happiness of individuals who live in a very competitive society where many believe hard work as a very important value.

The findings suggest that future research could further explore the methods of alleviating social pressure at work places, homes, and communities. Although much has been examined about individual happiness, scholars have paid the most attention to the relationship between economic factors and life satisfaction, while overlooking other socio-economic factors. Also, most research on happiness has been conducted in Western countries, while this study extends

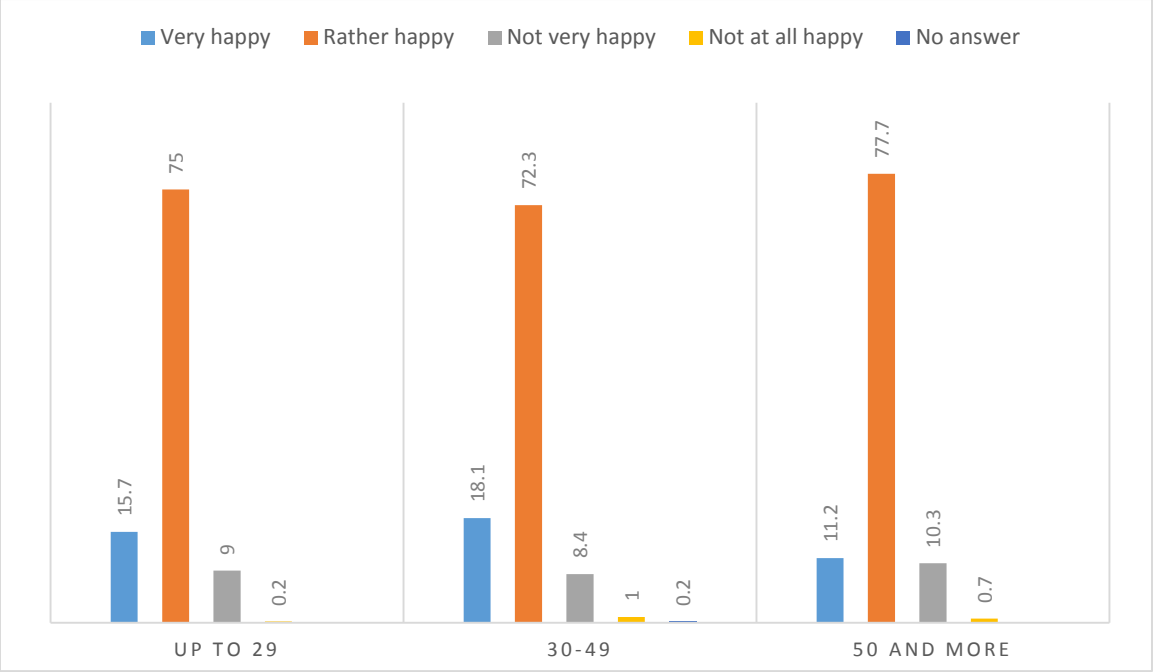
the research to Asia, specifically South Korea. As the economy in Asia has rapidly grown, the discrepancy between life and social environment has risen simultaneously. More research should be conducted in more Asian countries on the relationship between capitalism and life satisfaction in countries that have held traditional values. Nonetheless, the findings of the recent study add to an empirical base supporting further an understanding of the ways in which employment and educational policies can potentially ease some social pressure and enhance happiness and subjective-wellbeing.

The South Korean government has already initiated a series of strategies to deal with the falling level of happiness in the labor market. The Ministry of Employment and Labor has jointly started a work-life balance campaign with *Naver*, the largest web portal site in Korea, to encourage flexitime, maternity leave, and job-sharing. Helping office workers balance their work and life by providing teleworking opportunities and labor incentives has also been included in the work-life campaign. The government has also implemented a *young adult internship program,* which provides opportunities for young people to gain experience working in the public sector and in private sector companies. The Park Geun-hye administration's newest policy initiative in this area is providing loans with a low interest rate for startup companies. Such efforts to improve the work-life balance will not only increase productivity in work places, but it also will boost life satisfaction in South Korea.

Finally, my analysis of how social pressure influences life satisfaction cannot serve as a panacea for individual happiness. In this spirit, the findings of this research can be used to inform policy formation and prioritization so that policy makers can promote a society with higher subjective wellbeing. Policies that aim to create more encourage more balanced work and life style that can be conducive to a society that people desire to live in and be proud of.

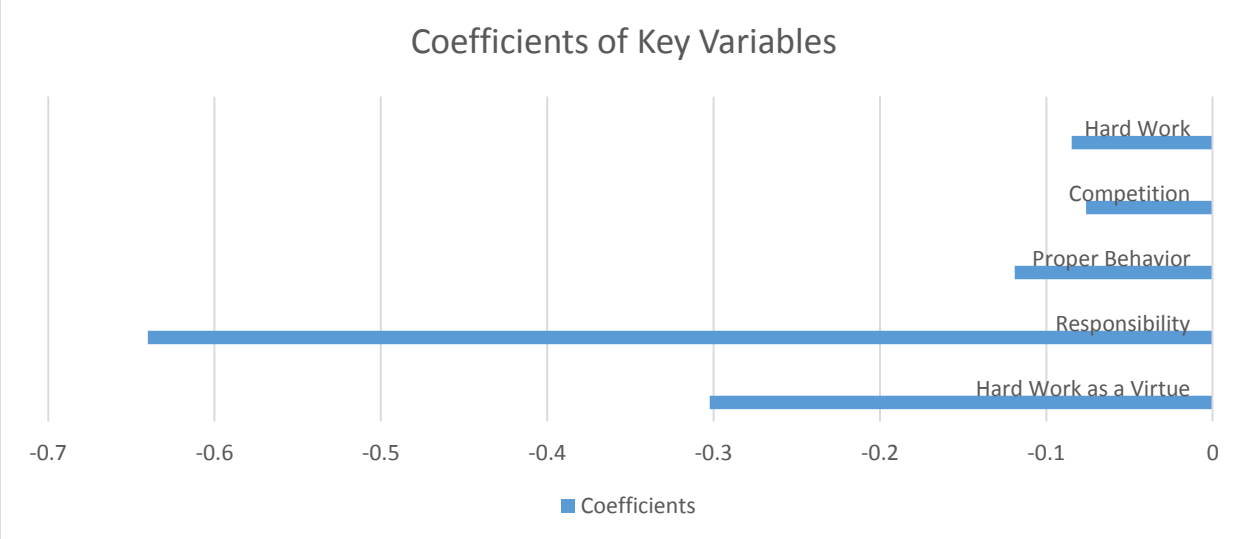
VIII. APPENDIX–FIGURES AND SUPPLEMENTARY TABLES

Figure 1: Level of Happiness By Age



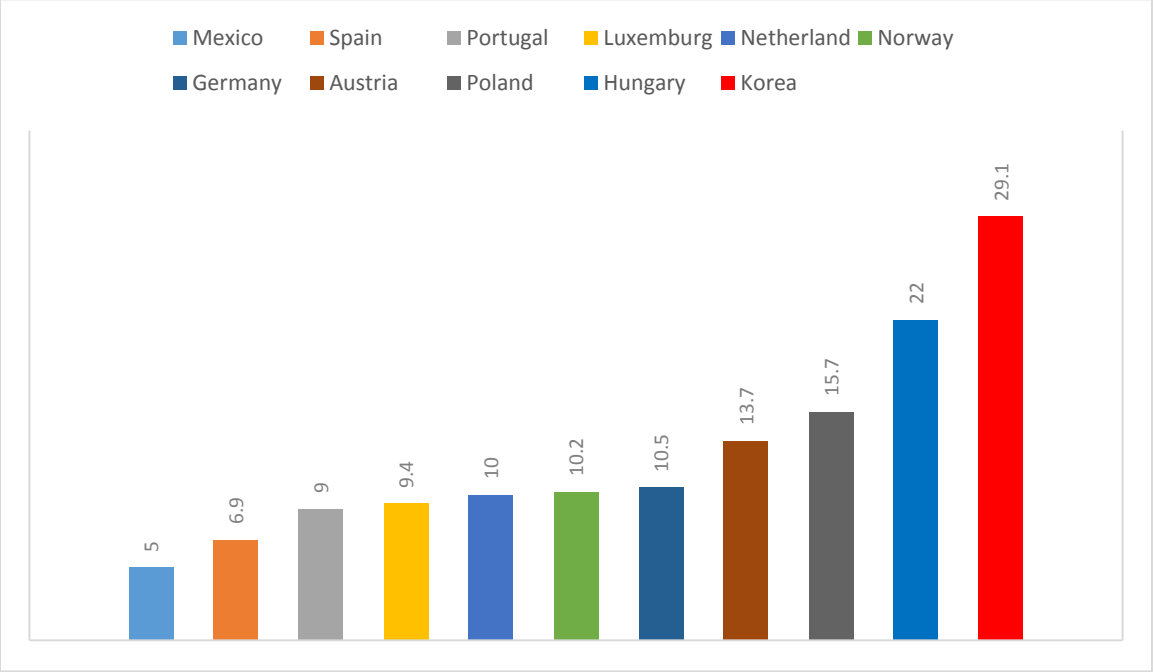
Source: WVS, 2010

Figure 2: Coefficients of Key Variables



Source: WVS 2010

Figure 3: Suicide Rates in OECD Countries in 2013



Source: OECD Health Status, 2015

Table 9: Correlation Matrix

	V23	V8	V13	V14	V18	V21	V74	V77	V79	V99	V100
LS	1.00										
Work	-0.04	1.00									
Hard work as a virtue	-0.06	0.01	1.00								
Responsibility	-0.10	0.15	0.12	1.00							
Perseverance	-0.02	0.06	-0.07	0.04	1.00						
Obedience	-0.01	-0.11	-0.03	-0.11	-0.14	1.00					
Good of Society	-0.10	0.07	0.01	0.02	0.01	-0.02	1.00				
Proper Behavior	-0.08	0.00	0.08	0.06	-0.02	-0.00	0.31	1.00			
Custom	-0.03	-0.07	0.10	0.01	-0.05	0.06	0.34	0.33	1.00		
Competition	-0.09	0.12	0.03	0.09	0.02	-0.02	0.04	0.05	0.00	1.00	
Hard work	-0.13	0.10	0.03	0.05	-0.04	0.01	0.12	0.06	0.06	0.43	1.00

Source: WVS, 2010

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