

Self-perceived happiness and its relationship with emotional intelligence, spiritual experience, altruism, and PERMA profile in a sample of Colombian university students

Felicidad auto-percibida y su relación con la inteligencia emocional, la experiencia espiritual, el altruismo y el perfil PERMA en una muestra de estudiantes universitarios colombianos

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SUMMARY

Introduction: *Considering the increase in mental health problems in the young population, it is very important to focus attention on understanding the phenomenon of self-perceived happiness and the factors associated with it.* **Objective:** *To investigate self-perceived happiness in a sample of university students and their relationship with emotional intelligence, daily spiritual experience, altruistic values and behaviors and PERMA profile.* **Method:**

This was a quantitative, nonexperimental, correlative-scope, cross-sectional study with a sample of 165 students from three Colombian universities, with an average age of M 25.6 (DT 3.8). The Lima Happiness Scale, Emotional Intelligence Self-Assessment Test, Daily Spiritual Experience Scale, and Altruistic Values and Altruistic Behaviors Scale were used as instruments. Results: The results indicate certain deficiencies in the aspects of self-perceived happiness, PERMA profile, and emotional intelligence in the study sample, as well as a slight orientation toward altruistic values and infrequent altruistic behavior, and a low interest towards daily spiritual experience. Self-perceived happiness correlated positively with emotional intelligence, PERMA profile and altruistic values and behaviors. Correlation with daily spiritual

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experience was not identified. **Discussion and Conclusions:** *The importance of guiding the integral development of university students, especially in the socio-emotional aspects and soft skills, and promoting awareness and reflection on transcendental values in life beyond immediate and superficial consumption is raised.*

Keywords: *Self-perceived happiness, emotional intelligence, PERMA Profile, values and altruistic behavior, daily spiritual experience*

RESUMEN

Introducción: *Considerando el aumento de la problemática a nivel de salud mental en la población joven, es de gran relevancia orientar la atención a la comprensión del fenómeno de felicidad auto percibida y los factores asociados a esta. **Objetivo:** Evaluar la felicidad auto-percibida en una muestra de jóvenes universitarios y su relación con la inteligencia emocional, experiencia espiritual diaria, valores y comportamientos altruistas y perfil PERMA. **Método:** Estudio cuantitativo, no experimental, de alcance correlacional y de corte transversal. Participaron 165 estudiantes de tres universidades colombianas, con la edad promedio de M25,6 (DT3,8). Como instrumentos se utilizaron la Escala de Felicidad de Lima, la prueba de autoevaluación de inteligencia emocional, la Escala de Experiencia Espiritual Diaria y la Escala de valores y comportamientos altruistas. **Resultados:** Los resultados indican ciertas deficiencias en los aspectos de felicidad auto-percibida, el perfil PERMA y la inteligencia emocional en la muestra del estudio, al igual como poca orientación hacia valores altruistas y poca frecuencia del comportamiento altruista, además de un bajo interés hacia experiencia espiritual diaria. La Felicidad auto-percibida se correlacionó de forma positiva con inteligencia emocional, el perfil PERMA y los valores y comportamientos altruistas. No se identificó correlación con la experiencia espiritual diaria. **Discusión y conclusiones:** Se plantea la importancia de orientar el desarrollo integral de los estudiantes universitarios, sobre todo en los aspectos socioemocionales y habilidades blandas, fomentar la toma de consciencia y reflexión sobre valores transcendentales en la vida, más allá del consumo inmediatista y superficial.*

Palabras clave: *Felicidad auto-percibida, inteligencia emocional, perfil PERMA, valores y comportamiento altruista, experiencia espiritual diaria.*

INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, there have been several studies that indicate an increase in mental health problems in the generation of contemporary youth, such as depression, anxiety disorders, suicide attempts, eating disorders, and addictions, among others (1,2), a problem that affects both developed countries (3) and developing countries (4).

The 2021 World Mental Health Report indicates the presence of an alarming decline in mental well-being in younger generations worldwide (5). In this regard, Colombia is not exempt from these difficulties related to the mental health and subjective well-being of the young population (6) especially the worrying situation of the increase in the incidence of suicides in young people (7).

In this respect, the relevance of carrying out studies of self-perceived happiness in young people and associated factors arises. Happiness is a complex concept that can be understood as a social value and subjective phenomenon. In many societies, happiness is considered an important indicator of social well-being, where societies tend to value the creation of conditions that allow people to pursue and experience happiness, creating social and economic policies aimed at improving the quality of citizens' lives. In this regard, studies indicate that external factors such as socioeconomic status, community solidarity, and social capital, among others, predict happiness in young adults (8).

Over time, perceptions of what constitutes a happy life may change in society, considering material success, quality of life, mental health, or meaningful relationships as important for happiness. In this sense, the philosophy of life, expressed by predominant values in each society or characteristic of a particular generation, has an important influence on the perception and experience of happiness.

In this order of ideas, authors such Bauman (9) and Lipovetsky (10) proposed that contemporary society moves from consumer philosophy, with

predominantly superficial values of individualism, search for immediate satisfaction, little effort, and petite tolerance for frustration (11). They affirm that young contemporaries understand happiness as having fun; they seek to do things that produce immediate or short-term pleasure. The above is also related to the extensive use of virtual and social networks that provide superficial entertainment. A society based on uncontrolled consumption is also accompanied by a psychological development of well-being needs and the pursuit of pleasure to maintain consumption, also causing a continuous increase in addiction problems. The authors argue that happiness depends especially on the way of being, and, remarkably, contemporary youth assume a positive inner person project with good emotional mastery. This strong effort makes them owners of themselves, tolerant of frustration and resilient.

In the same line of thinking of (11) in positive psychology, there is the concept of PERMA, a model of happiness developed by Martin Seligman, which is an acronym for five key elements of maintaining happiness: Positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement. PERMA Model values relevant aspects related to the orientation that the person must experience and orient himself towards positive emotions, the commitment to significant aspects in his life, cultivation of positive relationships, orientation toward the search for meaning in his daily life and achievement of important personal achievements at an individual level (12).

Considering the importance of these characteristics for achieving happiness, the present study is oriented to investigate the PERMA profile and its relationship with happiness in a sample of young Colombian university students. On the other hand, considering contemporary society's criticisms of individualistic and consumerist values, it is important to investigate university students' values and altruistic behavior (13). In this relation, the studies present contradictory results. Some, which even address cultural differences between countries, indicate that prosocial behavior is reliably related to greater satisfaction with life (14).

Other studies indicate that the type of culture-individualist vs. collectivist- plays a moderating effect on the relationship between altruism and

happiness, showing a stronger link between altruistic behavior and happiness in individualistic cultures (against collectivists) (15). Studies also indicate that the effect of prosocial behavior on well-being may differ greatly from person to person, and not all people are happier when they help others (16). Similarly, evidence indicates a very small and often short-term effect of prosocial behavior on well-being (17) and studies that do not identify a relationship between altruism and subjective well-being or happiness (18) which indicates the importance of deepening these studies.

Another important element to consider its possible relationship with happiness is spirituality, not as belonging to or practicing a specific religion, but as an existential attitude and orientation that implies a transcendental and profound vision and understanding of the world. Current studies indicate that young people of the Y and Z generations, between 18 and 39 years, see spirituality as more connected with oneself or nature than with religion or God, being also this aspect of minor importance in their well-being (19). Statistics also reveal significantly lower rates of religious identification among younger adults compared to older adults in many countries of the world, indicating that young people are increasingly oriented towards options for understanding spirituality other than traditional (20).

Finally, the issue of emotional intelligence has been relevant in current studies related to young age, since studies indicate that socio-emotional skills are significant for the prevention of mental health problems (21), chemical, and behavioral addictions (22), among others. Emotional intelligence has had a positive impact and relationship with well-being factors such as satisfaction with your own life and negatively with perceived stress, somatic complaints, and emotional symptoms (23,24). Recent work has shown that emotional intelligence meanly improves the way we interact by facilitating the creation of support networks in the different social environments in which young people are immersed (25).

It is essential to consider that happiness in contemporary youth is complex and multifaceted, influenced by various social, cultural, economic and technological factors. This age group often

faces intense social pressure to meet certain expectations in terms of academic achievement, professional success, physical appearance and social life, which can generate stress and anxiety, negatively affecting their emotional well-being (26,27). On the other hand, social networks have a significant impact on the perception of happiness of young people (28), where the constant comparison with others on social platforms generates feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem, causing pressure to maintain a perfect image online, which may be overwhelming (29,30).

In addition, economic insecurity and challenges, such as the lack of stable job opportunities and the increase in student debt, can contribute to financial stress among young people, affecting their ability to enjoy life and pursue their passions (31). Finally, it is necessary to consider that modern life, focused on technology and urbanization, can lead to a disconnection with nature, and lack of outdoor time and constant exposure to electronic devices can influence emotional well-being and happiness (32).

Therefore, the present study aims to investigate self-perceived happiness in a sample of university students and its relationship with emotional intelligence, daily spiritual experience, altruistic values and behaviors and PERMA profile (33). The study aims to contribute to a greater understanding of the phenomenon of happiness in young university students by promoting evidence-based strategies from university welfare to contribute to students' psychological well-being. Addressing the problem of happiness in contemporary youth requires comprehensive approaches that can include changes in education, mental health promotion, creating more inclusive social environments and promoting values beyond material success. In addition, it is essential to foster openness and support to talk about the emotional and mental challenges young people face.

METHOD

This is a quantitative, descriptive-correlational level, nonexperimental design, cross-sectional, and ex postfact research (34). It was conducted

at the University Institution of Envigado, Sergio Arboleda University, and Corporación Universitaria del Caribe, in three Colombian cities: Envigado, Santa Marta, and Sincelejo. The study involved 165 students, with an average age of M 25.6 (DT 3.8), of which 142 (86.1 %) were female, 22 (13.3 %) male, and 1 (0.6 %) non-binary; 88 participants (53.3%) only studied, and 77 (46.7%) studied and worked, being 100 % psychology students.

To evaluate happiness, the Lima Happiness Scale (35) consisted of 27 statements in Likert format of five options ranging from "totally agreed" to "totally disagree." Items are presented in the questionnaire randomly. The test evaluates four dimensions of happiness: positive sense of life, which is related to the perception of depression, failure, restlessness, pessimism, and existential emptiness, composed of eleven items, which account for 32.82 % of the total variance and show a high internal consistency ($\alpha=0.88$); satisfaction with life, which evaluates satisfaction with the achievements attained and the feeling of being in the right place in life or near reaching the personal ideal, composed of six items and explains 11.22 % of the total variance, with high reliability ($\alpha=0.79$); personal realization, which addresses self-sufficiency, autarky, emotional tranquility, and placidity, composed of six items and explains 10.7 % of the total variance, with high reliability ($\alpha=0.76$); and the joy of living, which focuses on the positive experiences of life and the general sense of well-being, composed of four items and explains 10.7 % of the total variance, with high reliability ($\alpha=0.72$) (35).

To estimate emotional intelligence, the Emotional Intelligence Self-Assessment Test was started, aimed at valuing the six dimensions of intelligence: Empathy, Self-Consciousness, Social Competence, Motivation, Self-Confidence, and Self-Control, which consists of 30 items and was developed and validated in Spain (36). This instrument used a Likert scale with response options ranging from 1 (rarely) to 5 (almost always). Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient is $\alpha=0.946$, indicating that it is an instrument with acceptable reliability that allows stable and consistent measurements. To assess the participants' spiritual experience, the Daily Spiritual Experience Scale, inspired by the original approach (37), was used and focuses on

evaluating the perception of the transcendent in everyday life without being bound by a specific religion. The version validated in the Spanish population (38), consists of two statements related to acceptance and disinterest. It uses a six-point Likert response format, where the value 1 represents “never or almost never,” and the value 6 indicates “many times a day.” The internal consistency of this scale is $\alpha = 0.51$. The scale consists of a single factor that includes these two items.

To appreciate the altruistic values, an adapted and validated version was used in Spanish university students (38) of the original scale designed (39) which aims to identify altruistic values that are intrinsic moral characteristics that guide a person’s altruistic behavior. This adaptation consists of two factors explaining 76.61 % of the variance: willingness to help others and individualism. The scale uses a Likert format for responses, in which participants might select from five options: 1 (nothing agreed), 2 (something agreed), 3 (entirely agreed), 4 (very agreed), and 5 (totally agreed). The internal consistency of this version is $\alpha = 0.50$.

The Altruistic Behavior Scale was also used, which focuses on evaluating the frequency of altruistic behaviors that occurred in the last 12 months, both in relationships with family, friends and acquaintances, and in interactions with unknown people in general. This scale was initially proposed (40) and later adapted and validated in Spanish students (38). It consists of 15 statements, and the responses are rated in a range from 1 (which never occurred in the last year) to 6 (which happens more than once a week). The scale breaks down into five factors that account for 65.24 % of the total variance: basic needs, assertiveness, charity, kindness, giving something, helping others with household tasks, donating blood, and helping others find work. The scale shows a solid internal consistency, with a value of $\alpha = 0.76$. lid internal consistency, with a value of $\alpha = 0.76$.

To evaluate the components of well-being, the questionnaire called “PERMA Profile,” developed and validated (41) was started to measure the five fundamental components of well-being as proposed (12) positive emotions, commitment, positive relationships, meaning and achievements. In addition to evaluating these

five pillars of well-being, the questionnaire also considers three independent aspects: physical health, negative emotions, and the perception of loneliness. The questionnaire consists of 23 items, of which 15 focus on evaluating the five pillars of well-being, with three items dedicated to each component. In addition, an item is responsible for measuring general welfare. The questionnaire was adapted and validated specifically for use in the Colombian population (42). The validation results indicated a remarkably high internal consistency, with a coefficient of $\alpha = 0.95$, suggesting a solid reliability of the scale in this population.

Procedure and ethical aspects

A questionnaire was used in a virtual format to collect data and was shared by email with an invitation to participate. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and their rights as participants, and they agreed to participate voluntarily. The study considered all technical, administrative, and ethical regulations in accordance with resolution 8430 (43) of Colombia’s Ministry of Health and Law 1090 of 2006 (44).

Data analysis

The distribution analysis of variables indicated the non-normal distribution for all variables studied. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the means and standard deviation of the values of the study variables. The Mann-Whitney U statistics (two groups) and Kruskal-Wallis (more than two groups) were used for the intergroup analysis according to sociodemographic variables. Spearman statistics were used to correlate the results. The age variable was re-coded in the qualitative variable with age ranges: 1 (16-20), 2 (21-30), 3 (31-40) and 4 (41-53). SPSS software version 25 was used.

RESULTS

The score obtained in the happiness scale in the study sample was the middle range (Table 1), the lowest score obtained in the personal

achievement variable ($M 3.2 (SD 0.7)$), followed by Satisfaction with life ($M 3.5 (SD 0.7)$) and in the variables of Positive meaning of life ($M 3.9 (SD 0.8)$) and Joy of living ($M 3.9 (SD 0.7)$). The overall mean of the total happiness score in the sample was $M 3.6 (SD 0.6)$, corresponding to the total score of 97 points, which places it in the average happiness (leaning more towards low average), according to the rules of interpretation of the test (96-110 points: average happiness).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics construct of Self-perceived happiness

Self-perceived happiness	M (SD)*
The positive meaning of life	3.9 (0.8)
Satisfaction with life	3.5 (0.7)
Personal Realization	3.2 (0.7)
Joy of Living	3.9 (0.7)

*In the absence of sweeps of the test, scores are evaluated from the range of responses of the scale (1-5), with scores 1 to 2 low, 2 to 4 medium, and 4 to 5 high. Source: Own

Regarding the emotional intelligence of the study participants, the general sample level showed scores lower than 4 (Table 2), which indicates the need to improve their emotional intelligence skills. The aspects with the lowest score were Self-confidence ($M 3.5 (SD 0.6)$), Social competence ($M 3.5 (SD 0.7)$), and Self-control ($M 3.5 (SD 0.7)$), followed by Self-awareness ($M 3.7 (SD 0.6)$) and Empathy showed higher scores ($M 3.8 (SD 0.6)$).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics construct Emotional intelligence

Inteligencia Emocional	M (SD)*
Self-consciousness	3.7 (0.6)
Empathy	3.8 (0.6)
Social competence	3.5 (0.7)
Motivation	3.8 (0.7)
Self-confidence	3.5 (0.6)
Self-control	3.5 (0.7)

*The test uses interpretation from the response scale, with answers with scores lower than four considered susceptible to improvement because people with IE are above. Source: own

The score obtained in the study sample in the components of the PERMA profile (Table 3) was, at the high mean level, with lower scores in positive emotions ($M 6.8 (SD 1.7)$), followed by physical health ($M 7.2 (SD 2.2)$), commitment ($M 7.3 (SD 1.3)$), sense ($M 7.3 (SD 2.1)$), relations ($M 7.4 (SD 2)$) and achievement ($M 7.4 (SD 1.8)$). The mean low score was obtained in the solitude variable ($M 5 (SD 2.6)$).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics construct PERMA

Variables	M (SD)*
P (positive emotion)	6.8 (1.7)
E (engagement)	7.3 (1.3)
R (relationships)	7.4 (2.0)
M (meaning)	7.3 (2.1)
A (accomplishment)	7.4 (1.8)
Physical health	7.2 (2.2)
Loneliness	5.0 (2.6)

* The assessment of scores in the PERMA profile is made from a scale of 1 to 10, with values of 1 to 4 considered low, 4 to 6 medium-low, 6 to 8 medium-high and 8 to 10 high Source: own.

The study participants' scores on the altruistic values scale (Table 4) indicated low values in the Willingness to help others variable ($M 2.9 (DT 0.9)$) and mean values in the Individualism variable ($M 3.5 (DT 1.1)$).

In the altruistic behavior scale (Table 4), low scores were identified in the blood donation variables, helping others find a job ($M 1.8 (DT 0.7)$), Giving something and helping others in domestic tasks ($M 2.5 (DT 1.2)$), and Kindness ($M 2.9 (DT 1.2)$). The variables of Assertiveness and Charity ($M 3.6 (DT 1)$) and Basic Needs ($M 3.4 (DT 1.2)$) were located at the lower middle level.

The study participants' score on the scale of spiritual experience (acceptance and disinterest) (Table 5) was in the lower middle level ($M 3.4 (DT 1.1)$).

The comparison of scores obtained in the study variables according to the sociodemographic gender variable showed a significant statistical difference in the happiness variables Positive Sense of Life ($p=0.047$), Personal Realization

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of the variable Values and altruistic behavior

Variables	M (SD)*
AV1: Willingness to help others	2.9 (0.9)
AV: Individualism	3.5 (1.1)
AB2: Basic needs	3.4 (1.2)
AB: Assertiveness and charity	3.6 (1.0)
AB: Kindness	2.9 (1.2)
AB: Give something and help others in household chores	2.5 (1.2)
AB: Donate blood and help others to find a job	1.8 (0.7)

*The altruistic values scale scores are evaluated using a range of responses from 1 to 5, with scores of 1 to 3 low, 3 to 4 medium, and 4 to 5 high. The altruistic behaviors scale part of the score scale from 1 to 6, scoring 1 to 3 low, 3 to 5 medium, and 5 to 6 high.

1Altruistic values. 2Altruistic behavior. Source: own

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of the variable Daily spiritual experience

Variable	M (SD)*
Daily spiritual experience	3.4 (1.1)

* The scale assessment is made according to the response range of 1 to 6, with scores of 1 to 3 low level, 3 to 5 medium, and 5 to 6 high. Source: own

($p=0.041$), and Joy of Living ($p=0.049$) in favor of the male gender (Table 6).

In the PERMA profile, a statistically significant difference was identified in favor of men in the variables Positive emotions ($p=0.048$), Achievement ($p=0.045$), and Physical health ($p=0.037$). Regarding the variables Commitment ($p=0.038$) and Solitude ($p=0.032$), the scores were higher for women (Table 6).

Regarding altruistic values, a significant difference was identified in the willingness to help others ($p=0.039$) in favor of women and in the altruistic behavior variable of giving something and helping others in domestic tasks ($p=0.047$) in favor of the female gender (Table 6).

The comparison of study variables according to age groups (Table 7) showed a statistically significant difference in the happiness variables: positive sense of life ($p=0.001$), satisfaction with life ($p=0.047$), personal accomplishment ($p=0.037$), and joy of life ($p=0.049$), indicating a trend towards higher scores with increasing age.

Regarding the emotional intelligence variables (Table 7), a statistically significant difference was observed in self-consciousness ($p=0.045$), self-confidence ($p=0.049$), self-control ($p=0.042$), and motivation ($p=0.011$), with higher scores in the age groups of 30 years in advance.

In relation to the PERMA profile (Table 7), the statistically significant difference was identified in the positive emotion variable ($p=0.002$), involvement ($p=0.033$), relationships ($p=0.042$), sense ($p=0.023$), achievement ($p=0.002$), indicating the trend towards higher scores age over 30. In the variable of physical health ($p=0.032$), higher scores were obtained in the group of 31 to 40 years, followed by 41-50 years, the group of 16 to 20 years in third place, and finally, the group of 21 to 30 years.

The variable of spiritual experience (acceptance and disinterest) (Table 7) showed a significant difference between age groups ($p=0.001$), indicating increased scores as participants aged.

Regarding values and altruistic behavior (Table 7), only the variables of donating blood and helping others find a job showed a significant difference ($p=0.001$), indicating the lowest score in the 16 to 20 years group, with the rest having similar scores.

The comparison of the study variables according to the participants' occupation (they only study and work) (Table 8) indicated a significant statistical difference in the positive sense of life ($p=0.005$) and Joy of living ($p=0.013$) for participants who study and work.

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Table 6. Comparison of study variables by gender

Variables	Female Me (IR) N (142)	Male Me (IR) N (22)	U of Mann- Whitney	P
Self-perceived happiness				
The positive meaning of life	4.0(1.2)	4.3(1.3)	1418.000	0.047*
Satisfaction with life	3.5(1.0)	3.5(1.0)	1509.000	0.798
Personal Realization	3.1(1.0)	3.5(1.1)	1494.000	0.042*
Joy of Living	40 (0.8)	43 (0.8)	1201.000	0.049*
Emotional Intelligence				
Self-consciousness	3.7(1.0)	3.8(1.0)	1460.000	0.620
Empathy	3.8(0.8)	3.8(0.9)	1523.000	0.850
Social competence	3.4(0.8)	3.6(1.3)	1467.500	0.647
Motivation	3.8(0.8)	3.8(1.0)	1443.500	0.566
Self-confidence	3.6(0.8)	3.7(0.9)	1366.500	0.342
Self-control	3.4(1.0)	3.6(1.2)	1428.500	0.518
Values and Altruistic Behavior				
Willingness to help others	3.2(1.5)	2.7 (1.0)	1389.500	0.039*
Individualism	3.5 (1.6)	3.5 (1.5)	1317.500	0.233
Basic needs	3.3 (2.0)	3.3(2.0)	1488.500	0.722
Assertiveness and charity	3.7(1.3)	3.5 (2.1)	1492.500	0.737
Kindness	2.8(1.7)	3.1(2.1)	1427.000	0.513
Give something and help others with household chores	2.3 (1.7)	1.8(1.3)	1279.500	0.047*
Donate blood and help others find a job	2 (1.5)	1.7 (1.5)	1560.000	0.992
PERMA Profile				
P (positive emotion)	7.0(2.3)	7.6(2.7)	1421.000	0.048*
E (engagement)	7.6(2.0)	7.0(2.7)	1348.000	0.038*
R (relationships)	7.8(3.0)	8.1(2.8)	1474.500	0.672
M (meaning)	7.7 (3.0)	8.0(3.5)	1550.500	0.956
A (accomplishment)	7.6(2.7)	8.1 (3.0)	1483.000	0.045*
Physical health	7.5(3.3)	8.0 (3.0)	1453.500	0.037*
Loneliness	5.0(4.0)	3.0 (2.0)	1364.500	0.032*
Daily spiritual experience	3.2 (2)	3.5 (2.1)	1545.500	0.936

* p< 0.05. Source: own

For Emotional Intelligence, significant differences in the variables of Self-consciousness (p=0.012), Social competence (p=0.036), and Motivation (p=0.034) in favor of the study and work group were identified (Table 8).

In the PERMA profile, a significant difference was found in favor of the group that studies and works in the variables of positive emotions (p=0.002), commitment (p=0.024), sense (p=0.012), achievement (p=0.006), and physical health (p=0.006). In the Loneliness variable, a significant difference was also obtained (p=0.018), but in favor of the group that only studies (Table 8).

Correlations between Happiness and Emotional Intelligence (Table 9) showed the presence of positive correlations between all EI components and the self-perceived happiness sub-variables in the study participants. As for the Positive Sense of Life, the strongest correlation was established with self-consciousness (r=0.478; p=0.001), followed by motivation (r=0.631; p=0.001) and self-control (r=0.428; p=0.001), presenting social competence as the lowest correlation (r=0.262; p=0.001).

The variable of Satisfaction with life presented a higher correlation with motivation (r=0.628; p=0.001), followed by self-control (r=0.444;

Table 7. Comparison of study variables by age

Variables	16-20 years	21-30 years	31-40 years	41-53 years	Kruskal-Wallis	P
	Me (IR) N (64)	Me (IR) N (84)	Me (IR) N (12)	Me (IR) N (5)		
Self-perceived happiness						
The positive meaning of life	3.7(1.2)	4.1(1.0)	4.7(0.7)	4.9(1.1)	21.712	0.001**
Satisfaction with life	3.5(1.0)	3.5(1.0)	4.2(1.5)	4.0(0.8)	7.513	0.047*
Personal Realization	3.2(1.2)	3.3(1.1)	3.8(1.5)	3.7(1.3)	5.887	0.037*
Joy of Living	3.8(0.7)	4.0 (0.7)	4.1(1.2)	4.3(2.0)	2.890	0.049*
Emotional Intelligence						
Self-consciousness	3.7(0.8)	3.7(0.9)	4.4(1.4)	4.3(1.0)	5.330	0.045*
Empathy	3.8(0.8)	3.8(0.8)	4.0(0.6)	3.6(1.0)	0.880	0.830
Social competence	3.4(1.0)	3.4(1.0)	3.1(1.0)	3.8(1.1)	0.578	0.901
Motivation	3.6(0.8)	3.8(0.8)	4.2(0.9)	4.2(1.0)	11.153	0.011*
Self-confidence	3.6(0.8)	3.6(0.8)	4.0(1.1)	4.0 (1.2)	7.087	0.049*
Self-control	3.4(1.0)	3.6(0.8)	4.0 (1.0)	4.0 (0.9)	8.186	0.042*
Altruistic Values and Behavior						
Willingness to help others	3.0 (1.5)	3.2 (1.4)	3.7(1.8)	4.0(1.5)	6.852	0.047*
Individualism	3.5 (1.5)	3.5 (1.9)	3.5(2.8)	3.0(1.3)	0.841	0.840
Basic needs	3.5(2.0)	3.3(1.7)	3.0 (1.8)	3.0(1.8)	0.322	0.956
Assertiveness and charity	3.7(1.7)	3.5(1.4)	3.6(1.1)	3.2(1.4)	0.119	0.990
Kindness	2.6(1.7)	3.0(2.0)	2.6(2.2)	3.0(1.8)	0.641	0.887
Give something and help others with						
Household chores	2.3(1.9)	2.3(1.2)	2.0(1.0)	2.3(1.8)	1.510	0.680
Donate blood and help others find a job	1.5(1.0)	2.2 (1.0)	2.5(1.0)	2.3 (0.3)	22.776	0.001**
PERMA Profile						
P (positive emotion)	6.3(2.5)	7.3(2.0)	8.0(2.4)	8.0(0.7)	15.254	0.002**
E (engagement)	7.0(2.0)	7.6(1.5)	8.2(1.6)	8.3(0.8)	8.758	0.033*
R (relationships)	7.5(2.0)	8.3(2.3)	8.6(3.0)	8.0 (2.0)	5.440	0.042*
M (meaning)	7.0(3.0)	8.0(2.6)	9.5(2.0)	9.0(2.8)	9.531	0.023*
A (accomplishment)	7.0(3.3)	7.6(1.6)	9.0(2.3)	9.0(1.2)	14.745	0.002**
Physical health	6.6(3.7)	4.1(2.6)	9.6(4.0)	9.0(1.0)	8.781	0.032*
Loneliness	5.0(2.0)	4.0(1.5)	5.5(1.5)	7.0(2.0)	6.401	0.094
Daily spiritual experience	3.0(1.5)	3.5 (1.0)	4.3(2.2)	4.5(1.0)	17.783	0.001**

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$. Source: own

$p=0.001$), self-consciousness ($r=0.412$; $p=0.001$), and self-confidence ($r=0.406$; $p=0.001$). Empathy ($r=0.375$; $p=0.001$) and social competence ($r=0.322$; $p=0.001$) had lower correlations.

The Personal Realization variable presented the highest correlation with Motivation ($r=0.544$; $p=0.001$), followed by self-consciousness ($r=0.462$; $p=0.001$) and self-control ($r=0.429$; $p=0.001$). Empathy ($r=0.274$; $p=0.001$) and social competence ($r=0.276$; $p=0.001$) showed low correlations with this variable.

The Joy of Living variable presented a higher correlation with motivation ($r=0.633$; $p=0.001$), followed by self-consciousness ($r=0.557$; $p=0.001$) and self-control ($r=0.461$; $p=0.001$).

Self-confidence ($r=0.386$; $p=0.001$), empathy ($r=0.360$; $p=0.001$) and social competence ($r=0.311$; $p=0.001$) had lower correlations.

Both constructs' variables were found to correlate with self-perceived Happiness and the PERMA Profile (Table 10).

The Positive Sense of Life variable showed a greater correlation with meaning ($r=0.763$; $p=0.001$), followed by positive emotions ($r=0.721$; $p=0.001$), relationships ($r=0.626$; $p=0.001$), and physical health ($r=0.507$; $p=0.001$). The lowest correlation ($r=0.339$; $p=0.001$) and loneliness indicated median and negative correlation with this variable ($r=-0.396$; $p=0.001$).

SELF-PERCEIVED HAPPINESS AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Table 8. Comparison of study variables by occupation

Variables	Just study Me (IR) N (88)	Study & Work Me (IR) N (77)	U of Mann- Whitney	P
Self-perceived happiness				
The positive meaning of life	3.9(1.0)	4.3(1.1)	8.048	0.005**
Satisfaction with life	3.5(0.8)	3.6(1.1)	2.320	0.128
Personal Realization	3.3(1.1)	3.3(1.2)	0.988	0.320
Joy of Living	3.7(0.8)	4.0 (0.8)	6.191	0.013*
Emotional intelligence				
Self-consciousness	3.7(0.8)	4.0(0.8)	6.349	0.012*
Empathy	3.8(0.8)	3.8(0.8)	0.003	0.959
Social competence	3.3(1.0)	3.6(1.0)	3.374	0.036*
Motivation	3.6(0.6)	4.0(1.0)	4.510	0.034*
Self-confidence	3.6(0.8)	3.6(1.0)	1.844	0.174
Self-control	3.4(0.8)	3.6(1.0)	2.557	0.110
Altruistic values and behaviors				
Willingness to help others	2.8 (1.5)	3.0 (1.0)	0.253	0.615
Individualism	3.5 (2.0)	3.5 (2.0)	1.388	0.239
Basic needs	3.2(2.0)	3.8(2.2)	3.591	0.042*
Assertiveness and charity	3.2(1.5)	3.7(1.5)	4.489	0.022*
Kindness	2.6 (1.7)	3.0 (1.5)	1.175	0.278
Give something and help others with household chores	2.3(1.6)	2.3(1.7)	0.546	0.460
Donate blood and help others find a job	1.5(1.0)	2.0(1.0)	28.161	0.001*
PERMA profile				
P (positive emotion)	6.3(2.3)	7.7(1.7)	9.856	0.002**
E (engagement)	7.3(2.0)	8.0(1.8)	5.081	0.024*
R (relationships)	7.7(3.3)	8.0(2.7)	1.335	0.248
M (meaning)	7.0 (3.3)	8.3(2.8)	6.298	0.012*
A (accomplishment)	7.3(3.0)	8.0(2.0)	6.328	0.012*
Physical health	6.6(2.7)	8.3(2.0)	7.663	0.006**
Loneliness	5.0 (2.0)	4.0(2.0)	5.597	0.018*
Daily spiritual experience	3.0 (1.5)	3.5 (1.3)	0.132	0.716

*p< 0.05; **p<0.01. Source: own.

Table 9. Correlation between self-perceived happiness and emotional intelligence

	Self-cons- ciousness	Empathy	Social competence	Motivation	Self- confidence	Self-control
The positive meaning of life	r=0.478** (p=0.001)	r=0.367** (p=0.001)	r=0.262** (p=0.001)	r=0.631** (p=0.001)	r=0.377** (p=0.001)	r=0.428** (p=0.001)
Satisfaction with life	r=0.412** (p=0.001)	r=0.375** (p=0.001)	r=0.322** (p=0.001)	r=0.628** (p=0.001)	r=0.406** (p=0.001)	r=0.444** (p=0.001)
Personal Realization	r=0.462** (p=0.001)	r=0.274** (p=0.001)	r=0.276** (p=0.001)	r=0.544** (p=0.001)	r=0.377** (p=0.001)	r=0.429** (p=0.001)
Joy of Living	r=0.557** (p=0.001)	r=0.360** (p=0.001)	r=0.311** (p=0.001)	r=0.633** (p=0.001)	r=0.386** (p=0.001)	r=0.461** (p=0.001)

**p<0.01. Source: own.

Life satisfaction presented the highest correlation with sense (r=0.667; p=0.0001),

followed by achievement (r=0.654; p=0.001), positive emotions (r=0.638; p=0.001), and

Table 10. Correlation between self-perceived happiness and PERMA Profile

	P (positive emotion)	E (Engagement)	R (relationship)	M (meaning)	A (accomplishment)	Physical health	Loneliness
The positive meaning of life	r=0.721** (p=0.001)	r=0.339** (p=0.001)	r=0.626** (p=0.001)	r=0.763** (p=0.001)	r=0.667** (p=0.001)	r=0.507** (p=0.001)	r=-0.396** (p=0.001)
Satisfaction with life	r=0.638** (p=0.0001)	r=0.316** (p=0.001)	r=0.633** (p=0.0001)	r=0.667** (p=0.001)	r=0.654** (p=0.001)	r=0.492** (p=0.001)	r=-0.325** (p=0.001)
Personal Realization	r=0.645** (p=0.001)	r=0.294** (p=0.001)	r=0.539** (p=0.001)	r=0.625** (p=0.001)	r=0.597** (p=0.001)	r=0.476** (p=0.001)	r=-0.309** (p=0.001)
Joy of Living	r=0.658** (p=0.001)	r=0.237** (p=0.001)	r=0.511** (p=0.001)	r=0.677** (p=0.001)	r=0.570** (p=0.001)	r=0.461** (p=0.001)	r=-0.313** (p=0.001)

** p<0.01. Source: own.

relationships (r=0.633; p=0.001). Physical health (r=0.492; p=0.001) and involvement (r=0.316; p=0.001) showed lower correlations, and loneliness, likewise, presented a median and negative correlation (r=-0.325; p=0.001).

Personal Realization obtained a greater correlation with positive emotions (r=0.645/ p=0.001), followed by sense (r=0.625; p=0.001), achievement (r=0.597; p=0.001), and relationships (r=0.539; p=0.001), being physical health (r=0.476; p=0.001) and commitment (r=0.294; p=0.001) with lower correlations. Loneliness showed a median and negative correlation (r=-0.309; p=0.001).

The Joy of Living variable presented the highest correlation with sense (r=0.677; p=0.001), followed by positive emotions (r=0.658; p=0.001), achievement (r=0.570; p=0.001), and relationships (r=0.511; p=0.001). Physical health (r=0.461; p=0.001) and commitment (r=0.237; p=0.000) had lower correlations. Loneliness, likewise, presented the median and negative correlation (r=-0.313; p=0.001).

The correlation between self-perceived happiness, daily spiritual experience, and altruistic values and behaviors (Table 11) indicated a low and positive correlation between the altruistic value of willingness to help others

Table 11. Correlation between self-perceived happiness, daily spiritual experience and altruistic values and behaviors	willingness to help others	individualism	basic needs	assertiveness and charity	kindness	give something and help others with household chores	donate blood and help others to find a job	Daily Spiritual Experience
The positive meaning of life	r=0.182* (p=0.019)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Satisfaction with life	r=0.175* (p=0.001)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Personal Realization	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Joy of Living	r=0.245** (p=0.002)	x	x	x	x	r=0.517** (p=0.0001)	r=0.291** (p=0.0001)	x

* p<0.05; **p<0.01. Source: own.

and the variables of Positive meaning of life ($r=0.182$; $p=0.019$), Satisfaction with life ($r=0.175$; $p=0.001$), and Joy of life ($r=0.245$; $p=0.002$).

The Joy of Living variable also presents a median correlation with the altruistic behavior of giving something and helping others with household tasks ($r=0.517$; $p=0.001$) and a low and positive correlation with the altruistic behavior of donating blood and assisting others in finding a job ($r=0.291$; $p=0.001$).

DISCUSSION

The study's results showed low self-perceived happiness, indicating that the sample is somewhat dissatisfied with this aspect. This is the most problematic point related to the issue of personal fulfillment and satisfaction with life. In this aspect, it is relevant to highlight that the perception of happiness is very complex and related to multiple factors, from physical health to social representations imposed by society, to understand more precisely the situation of low self-perceived happiness in the study sample (45). For example, studies indicate that economic factors significantly affect this perception (46). In this regard, the decline in the quality of economic life in the post-pandemic period and possible concerns about their uncertain professional future in a developing country could affect these young people's perception of their satisfaction with life and happiness. Some studies indicate that the poorest countries have lower happiness rates in the adolescent and young population and a growing phenomenon of declining happiness rates in the younger population compared to the more adult generation (47). On the other hand, some studies indicate that the years of the pandemic affected negatively the perception of well-being and happiness in young people (48).

In relation to gender differences, men showed significantly higher scores in the variables of positive meaning of life, personal fulfillment, and joy of life. These studies indicate that gender is not associated with the perception of happiness (49). However, some studies confirm the findings of this study, indicating that women seem less happy than men on average (50). This difference in the

perception of one's happiness could be related to different aspects, both at the socioeconomic level, of physical health, frequency of affections at the emotional level (being women more affected), as well as related to how they perceive life and process information (51). For example, studies suggest the presence of gender differences in their relationship with life experiences and happiness, with women getting more happiness and satisfaction with life from more meaningful experiences. In contrast, men get it from pleasurable experiences (52).

Regarding age, a significant increase in scores was observed in all the constituent variables of happiness with an increase in age. This finding confirms the hypothesis that age acts as a vital factor in psychological maturation and changes of perspective in life. It allows one to become more aware of transcendental values and overcome a superficial orientation, which also allows a greater perception of one's own happiness (53).

The participants' occupation was also positively associated with some aspects of happiness, being the group that studies and works which showed significantly higher scores in the positive sense of life and joy of living (54). This finding could be related to the positive effect of employment for a student since it allows, in addition to having economic independence and security, to know the labor market and better visualize their future as a professional (55).

As for emotional intelligence, as in the case of happiness, certain deficiencies were identified in the study sample, indicating the need for improvement in emotional intelligence skills, which are the most affected aspects of self-confidence, social competence, and self-control. These results suggest the need to formulate care and prevention strategies for mental health in university students who seem to arrive at university with deficiencies in socio-emotional skills. This aspect has already been highlighted by many authors who indicate that in traditional education, which still predominates in Colombia (56), a greater emphasis is placed on the development of cognitive skills, leaving aside soft skills (57), among which is, in this case, emotional intelligence. The gender variable is not significantly related to emotional intelligence, indicating that these deficiencies are in the female

and male gender (58). There was a significant increase in the variables of self-consciousness, self-confidence, self-control, and motivation from the age of 30 onwards. This finding suggests, as some authors indicate, that the age and experience of life allow for improved emotional intelligence, especially self-consciousness, and self-confidence (59).

The occupation of the participants also presented a positive relationship with aspects of self-awareness, social competence, and motivation, indicating significantly higher scores in the group that studies and works, highlighting, likewise, that work probably helps students foster their social competence and motivation to learn to be able to apply it in practice, as well as taking greater self-consciousness about their life (60).

As for the PERMA profile, at the general level of the sample, the average score was identified, presenting, in this case, lower scores in positive emotions, physical health, commitment, and sense. Concerning this finding, we observe certain difficulties in some aspects of the study participants' well-being, such as happiness. In this respect, it is important to consider that student status, considering, moreover, that almost half of the sample combines study with work, represents a situation of stress and anguish due to the obligation to fulfill multiple responsibilities (61). For example, psychological distress is associated with the PERMA well-being variables, especially positive emotions, commitment, and meaning of life, which were also most affected in the present study.

On the positive side, we can highlight the mean low score in the solitude variable, which indicates that the study participants do not present significant difficulties in this aspect. Significantly higher values were identified in the variables of positive emotions, achievement and physical health in the group of men (62). These differences could be related to a greater tendency of the female gender to present mood fluctuations due to hormonal causes (63), greater attention and concern towards their physical health, which, as a consequence could produce a lower well-being in this aspect (64), and possibly a greater demand or self-criticism in front of themselves, which could lead them to feel less satisfied with their achievements (65).

On the other hand, the female gender presented higher scores in the commitment variable, indicating that women tend to become more aware of different aspects of their lives, get more deeply involved in activities and relationships, and focus more on the present. Likewise, women reported greater loneliness, showing difficulties in this aspect, whether or not they had a partner or family, they felt more often alone compared to men, a fact that has also been highlighted in other studies (66).

A trend was identified to be a significant increase in scores from 30 years on in the variables of positive emotions, commitment, relationships, meaning, and achievement. In this respect, as in the case of self-perceived happiness, it is observed that, at an older age, specifically from the age of 30 onwards, there is an improvement in almost all the components of well-being and the attitude towards life, showing a greater sense of life, perception, and orientation to the achievement of significant objectives, a greater commitment and more authentic relationships (67).

The participants' occupations also correlated with the PERMA profile, indicating that those who study and work support higher scores in positive emotions, commitment, sense, achievement, and physical health.

Regarding altruistic values, the study participants at the general level of the sample presented a very low willingness to help others and a marked tendency towards an individualistic stance in life. This finding is in line with what was proposed by other authors, who indicate that today, there is a certain predominance of individualistic philosophy based on the value of the freedom and autonomy of the individual, which is important in itself by perishing does not favor the spread of altruistic values (68). As for altruistic behavior, that is, the actual performance of altruistic actions in their lives, the study participants at the general level of the sample also presented very little frequency of such actions (69). What was found in this study is quite worrying, considering that Colombia is classified as a country with a holistic (collectivist) culture (70). Some studies highlight that people in countries with collectivist cultures are more oriented to value this type of attitude,

as indicated (71), highlighting a good level of altruism in Chinese university students.

Gender analysis showed that women showed a greater willingness to help others and a greater frequency of altruistic actions in the variables of giving something and helping others in domestic tasks. In this regard, other studies have also highlighted that women have a greater tendency towards altruistic behavior (72).

Age was not associated with altruistic values, indicating that the deficient trend found at the general level of the sample was maintained at different ages. However, altruistic behavior showed a lower frequency in the group of participants aged 16 to 20 years, indicating that participants of this younger age have less tendency to help others, donate blood, or other altruistic help to others. This data is very relevant and informative, indicating the need to carry out awareness campaigns in this regard, promoting awareness and social responsibility of young people (73).

Another significant finding of the present study indicates a low level of daily spiritual experience (in its variables of acceptance and disinterest) in the participants. Also, it should be noted that the gender variable was unrelated to spiritual experience, indicating that these deficiencies observed at the general sample level are in men and women.

This finding is in line with other authors who express concern about a notable decrease in humanist and transcendental orientation in the population of young people who no longer practice religion but are not interested in any other kind of knowledge or practice that allows them to think and understand the world in spiritual terms (74). The theme of spirituality in the contemporary has attracted the attention of researchers, especially in "post-secular" societies, as, for example, a study in the population of Danes that indicates a high presence of spiritual needs such as inner peace, generativity, existential senses, being the less present religious needs (75).

Whereas studies confirm that spiritual well-being acts as a protective factor for people's mental health, especially in a young age (76), it is of great relevance to employ, from educational spaces, psycho-educational strategies oriented

towards the interior life of children and young people, fostering interest towards mediating elements that help the expression of ideas or feelings more abstract and transcendent (77).

Regarding the age variable, it was observed that as the age of the participants increased, the interest of the people in daily spiritual experience significantly expanded (78). In relation to this subject, studies indicate that age not only increases people's orientation towards religious or spiritual subjects, but also this interest can help improve the quality of life and prevent mental health problems as people get older (57).

As for the correlations between self-perceived happiness and emotional intelligence, the results of the present study revealed a positive relationship between these two constructs, confirming data found in other studies indicating that emotional intelligence skills significantly improve well-being and subjective happiness in people of different ages (79). These data contribute to the deepening of the topic highlighted by several authors who claim that it is emotional intelligence, and not so much cognitive intelligence, that contributes to subjective emotional well-being and happiness (80).

Likewise, the association between self-perceived happiness and PERMA Profile was identified as this finding by other studies, which highlight the positive contribution of several subscales of PERMA, specifically positive emotions and meaning of life to happiness (81). The variable of loneliness presents a negative correlation with all the variables of happiness, confirming what is indicated by other studies that present loneliness as a risk factor for subjective well-being and perception of one's happiness (82).

As for altruistic values, the positive correlation between willingness to help others and the positive meaning of life, satisfaction with life, and joy of living was identified. Likewise, altruistic behaviors such as giving something and helping others with household tasks, donating blood, and helping others find jobs establish a positive correlation with the joy of living. Other studies also refer to the important contribution that altruism makes to the feeling of well-being and happiness of people (83). The probability that generosity is linked to the experience of happiness

in humans since there is evidence of a linkage at the level of neuronal activity that associates altruistic decisions with happiness (84).

Another important aspect to consider in this finding is that it contradicts what was stated by Weiss-Sidi and Riemer (15), who argue that the relationship between altruism and happiness is present in individualistic cultures but not collectivists; Colombia is considered a country with a holistic (collectivist) culture (70). To deepen the understanding of the contribution of altruistic values and behaviors to happiness, it is necessary to expand the samples to different cultures and populations. In addition, it is necessary to approach this link from the qualitative point of view, understanding the meanings people give to their altruistic actions since studies indicate that happiness is transitory. Still, the meaning is lasting because it evaluates and reinforces social belonging, suggesting that in holistic or collective cultures, altruistic actions also produce well-being driven by the meaning of the common good, a more sustainable alternative for individuals, communities, and the planet (85).

Finally, it is very important to note that the results did not indicate the presence of a correlation between happiness and daily spiritual experience in the sample of the present study. This finding contradicts what has been stated in other studies that highlight the important contribution that spirituality makes to the feeling of well-being and happiness of people (86) indicate that forgiveness and gratitude relate positively and significantly to happiness (87). For his part, he notes that happiness has both transcendent and immanent aspects and that when these are expressed through the lens of religious devotion and spirituality, they can be translated into the sense of realization of the person.

In the case of the sample of the present study, and considering that the participants at the general level presented quite low scores in the variable of daily spiritual experience, it can be assumed that self-perceived happiness was not related to daily spiritual experience because, probably, spirituality for study participants does not represent importance at the subjective level, since they do not perceive it as an important aspect for their well-being and fulfillment in life.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study provides important findings on university students' subjective happiness and well-being. The results indicate the need to carry out mental health care strategies oriented to work on the themes of spirituality, philosophy of life and vital values, generosity, solidarity, awareness of their existential goals and life projects, engagement, and cultivation of significant relationships. In addition, the need to promote emotional intelligence skills in university students was evident, and this problem probably continues from basic education.

As for the limitations of the present study, it is possible to consider the need to expand the sampling, seeking an equivalence in the representation of men and women, including students with other gender orientations equally. It is also important to complement quantitative measurements with qualitative reports, delving into the subjective meanings associated with the theme of altruism and spirituality and their contribution to the perception of happiness in contemporary youth.

Conflict of interest

The authors of this study declare that they do not have any conflict of interest of a labor, contractual, or personal nature that could cause an unintended bias in the investigative process.

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