

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IRAN'S NATIONAL FOOTBALL TEAM RESULTS AND CITIZENS' HAPPINESS

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ABSTRACT

The influence of success and failure in international sporting competitions on the psycho-social life of citizens has been under-researched. This one-group pre-post-test design aimed to investigate the influence of the results of Iran's national football team in the 2015 AFC Asian Cup on the happiness in Iranian citizens. The study was conducted in three stages: 1) before the start of the competitions; 2) after the qualifying rounds; and 3) after the team's knockout loss in the quarter-finals. A sample of 320 respondents was drawn by means of the multistage sampling method from the citizens of Yasouj in Iran (age range=18 to 50 years). The Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI) was used for collecting data. The results show that happiness significantly increased in the qualifying round, however, happiness plummeted after the team's loss against Iraq in the quarter-finals. The present study concludes that the results of national football teams in international competitions can affect the happiness of citizens.

Key words: Oxford Happiness Inventory; Football; AFC Asian Cup; Iran.

INTRODUCTION

Happiness is the main goal of life for most people and they want to be happy and satisfied with their lives (Baron & Branscombe, 2011). Broadly speaking; happiness is synonymous with subjective well-being (Diener *et al.*, 2000) and satisfaction with life (Veenhoven, 2007). Happiness has been defined in a number of ways (Veenhoven, 1984).

Firstly, several definitions depict it as an affective state of mind. Wessman and Ricks (1966) found happiness as an overall evaluation of the quality of the individual's own experience when conducting his/her vital affairs. Similarly, Fordyce (1972) has stated that happiness is a particular kind of emotion or mainly the evaluation made by the individual in accounting for his/her positive and negative feelings.

Secondly, happiness has been defined as a cognitive fact, which is the consequence of a deliberate evaluation process. McDowell and Newell (1987) described happiness as a personal assessment of the conditions of an individual which is compared to a standard reference or to the wishes of an individual. Shin and Johnson (1978) also revealed that happiness is a global assessment of a person's quality of life based on his/her selected standards. In this sense, some accounts rely on the active achievement of life goals, while others rather stress the absence of unfulfilled aspirations (Veenhoven, 1984). Happiness has also been represented as an attitudinal fact. Sumner (1996) identified happiness as a certain positive attitude towards life. Lieberman (1970) reports that even before the age of 18, an individual becomes geared to a

certain stable level of satisfaction, which is then maintained throughout life. Some of these definitions stress the consistency in an effective response, while others rather see it as a belief system.

Thirdly, several definitions observe happiness in a mixed way. For Chekola (1974), happiness includes realising a life-plan, the absence of serious dissatisfaction, like an attitude of being displeased with or disliking one's life. Diener (2000) also characterised happiness as a positive mental state that involves four basic components: *global life satisfaction* (feeling generally happy with life); *satisfaction with important life domains* (being satisfied with work, relationships and family); *positive feelings* (often experiencing positive emotions and moods); and *negative feelings* (experiencing negative feelings or emotions less often or, preferably, rarely). Fourthly, Veenhoven (2006) has distinguished between overall happiness and components of happiness and has assumed that the latter function as sub-units of the overall evaluation of life. He defined overall happiness as the degree to which an individual judges the overall quality of his/her life as a whole, favourably.

Happiness includes a variety of functions regardless of how it is defined. In general, individuals who are happy, have more job productivity (Borman *et al.*, 2001), higher quality of social relationships (Lyubomirsky *et al.*, 2005), healthier life (Xu & Roberts, 2010), more resistance to diseases (Cohen *et al.*, 2003), less prone to depression (Maruta *et al.*, 2000), longer life (Danner *et al.*, 2001; Diener & Chan, 2011), better ability to solve problems (Carr, 2004), higher self-esteem and a sense of personal control (Myers & Diener, 1995), and more optimistic about the future (Kassin *et al.*, 2011). Happiness has also been found to contribute to nation-building (Hong, 2011).

Based on the diverse functions of happiness in psychological and social backgrounds, it is imperative to build it up. As a result, many efforts have been made to improve happiness by recognising the factors that influence it. A range of factors has been reported in related literature. Diener *et al.* (1999), stressing personality characteristics, believe that happy individuals are extrovert, optimistic, with high self-esteem and an internal locus of control. Drawing on cross-cultural studies, Carr (2004) has pointed out that individuals, who live in countries with a stable democracy, devoid of political oppression and military conflict, are happier. He also believes that individuals in cultures where social equality is realised more, happiness is seen more often. Lykken (1999) found that happiness has a genetic foundation. Some researchers explain it as being based on relationship with others, for instance Myers (2000) believes that married individuals are happier than single people. For Argyle (2001), close supportive relationships between parents and children, among siblings and extended family members and confiding relationships with close friends strengthen happiness.

According to Seligman (2002), individuals, who engage in religion and spirituality, are happier. This is because religion provides a belief system that allows individuals to make sense of their lives and be optimistic about the future. Other researchers report happiness as being based on environmental causes. Diener (2000) believes that individuals in richer countries are happier, however, the relationship between wealth and happiness at the individual level is changeable and wealthier persons are not necessarily happier. Ulrich *et al.* (1991) believe that happiness is observed more where plants, water and viewing the natural environment are concerned.

Cunningham (1979) points out a temperate climate, Campbell *et al.* (1976) the quality of a house, and Hills and Argyle (1998) refer to the influence of music. Sarafino (2002) found that physical condition is a factor contributing to happiness and believes that physical health and exercise promote happiness. Relying on the relationship between productivity and happiness, some believe that employed and educated persons have greater happiness (Diener *et al.*, 1999). With reference to leisure time, some have noted that rest, relaxation, good food and free activities bring more happiness (Argyle, 2001).

It seems that successes and failures of national athletes in international competitions might influence various aspects of psycho-social life. Integration of different ethnic groups and social classes (Muller *et al.*, 2008), strengthening moral values (Bockrath & Franke, 1995), reinforcing good feelings among people (Forrest & Simmons, 2003), increasing national pride (Denham, 2010), enhancing national identity (Ahmadi, 2007; Hong, 2011), developing good international relations (Ilmarinen *et al.*, 1984), and improving national integration (Lever, 1983) are some psycho-social functions of sport success or failure that have been studied scientifically.

Van Hilvoorde *et al.* (2010) found that the longer a national team remains successful in a tournament, the more people would be drawn into the celebration of national pride. This implies that national sporting performance and success could play an important role in this regard and could elevate the person's psychological characteristics. Although only a small number of studies have been conducted within this context, a study by Hallmann *et al.* (2012) involving 2006 German citizens, reported that 65.6% of the respondents felt happy after the success of German athletes in major events, like the world championship or Olympic Games. In a study on European citizens (Belgium, Britain, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal and Spain), during the period 1974-2004, Kavetsos and Szymanski (2010) suggested that hosting the Olympic Games, FIFA World Cup and European Cup improved the happiness among the people of the host countries, however, the influence of national athletic success on people's happiness was not statistically significant. This is mainly because of some technical reasons and does not deny logical relationship between football and happiness.

In Iran, football (a game played by two teams of 11 players in which players try to score goals by kicking a round ball into a large net), is the most popular and extensively practised sport in the country, because of the large number of football clubs, countless footballers, considerable financial investments and vast media coverage. Therefore, it allows Iranians to pay special attention to the successes or failures of Iran's national football team. Although this topic has received no scientific scrutiny in Iran, evidence suggests that success and failure of Iran's national football team influences socio-psychological life of Iranians. For instance, Ahmadi (2007) reported a significant relationship between the results that Iran's national football team achieved in the 2006 FIFA World Cup and the national identity of Iranian citizens.

After three consecutive successful championships in the Asian Cup in 1968, 1972 and 1976, Iran's national football team failed to win a championship in the next tournaments, 1980-2011. However, Iran as a delegate of Asia, managed to qualify for the Football World Cup held in Argentina 1978, France 1998, Germany 2006 and Brazil 2014. Employing Carlos Queiroz, the well-known coach, who had coaching experience with Manchester United, Real Madrid and

the Portuguese national team, led to Iran's qualification for the 2014 World Cup in Brazil, with acceptable matches particularly against Argentina (runner-up of the tournaments). A short period between the World Cup (June 2014 in Brazil), and the AFC Asian Cup (January 2015 in Australia), invoked the belief that the Iranian national football team had an excellent chance to be successful after 40 years. This belief directed public attention toward football and the national team to such an extent that football again became a matter of national pride and public support.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

The association between national athletic success or failure and happiness experienced by citizens is often discussed in the media. However, this is the first study undertaken to measure the relationship empirically by employing a longitudinal survey during a major sport tournament. Therefore, the research question is whether the success or failure of the Iran national football team in the 2015 AFC Asian Cup would have a significant effect on the happiness experienced by the citizens.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The present study is a quasi-experimental design that was conducted by using one-group pre-post-test design (O X1 O X2 O). In this research, the treatments were the games played by the Iran national football team without researcher intervention. The pre-test was conducted before commencing the AFC Asian Cup (O) during 6, 7 and 8 January 2015, the post-test 1 was conducted after the qualifying round (X1 O) on 19, 20 and 21 January 2015, and the post-test 2 was conducted after the team was knocked out by Iraq in quarter-final (X2 O) on 23, 24 and 25 January 2015. The research design was a panel type and the study was carried out on the same group.

Subjects

The population for the study consisted of 18 to 50 year-old individuals in Yasouj, the centre of Kohgiluyeh and Boyerahmad Provinces in the southwest of Iran, which is of strategic importance because of supplying at least a quarter of the oil exports of the country. At the 2011 census, its population was 10 8505 of which 55 337 individuals were in the 18 to 50 age group (Statistical Centre of Iran, 2011).

Based on previous research (Ahmadi, 2007), as well as a pilot study, using Cochran's (1977) sampling formula and determining $p=0.7$, $q=0.3$, $t=1.96$ and $d=0.05$, 320 citizens were selected as a sample size by using the random multistage sampling method from 14 areas. The data was collected by means of face-to-face interviews with competent individuals who were following the Iran national football games and were willing to participate in the research. They were told that they would be interviewed several times. Given that the study was panelled and it was necessary to gather information in Post-test 1 and Post-test 2 as soon as possible, (maximum within 72 hours), access to 30 cases in Post-test 1 and 38 cases in Post-test 2 was not possible. Therefore, the sample size reduced to 282 participants.

Measurement tool

The questionnaire that was used in this research was the Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI) that was developed by Argyle *et al.* (1989). The OHI is a 29-item instrument designed to measure subjective well-being. The response to the items were based on a 4-point Likert Scale (strongly disagree=0 to strongly agree=3), and the range of scores were from 0 to 87. The respondents chose 1 of 4 sentences that were constructed to reflect levels of happiness ranging from the lowest to extreme levels of happiness (0=*I do not feel happy*; 1=*I feel fairly happy*; 2=*I am very happy*; 3=*I am incredibly happy*).

The OHI has been employed in diverse countries around the world (Francis *et al.*, 1998; Stewart *et al.*, 2010). Noorbala and Alipoor (1999) measured the psychometric properties of the OHI in Iran and extracted 5 factors, including satisfaction with life (11 items), positive mood (8 items), mental health (6 items), efficacy (4 items) and self-esteem (2 items) that were able to explain 57.1% of the variance. They showed that, the OHI was an appropriate scale for measuring the degree of happiness among Iranian people. In this study, the reliability coefficient was checked by using Cronbach's Alpha in which, the values for the total scale and each subscales are reported (Table 1). The reliability coefficients are acceptable at all of the stages.

Table 1. CHRONBACH'S ALPHA COEFFICIENTS FOR OHI AND SUBSCALES

| Variables | Pre-test | Post-test 1 | Post-test 2 |
|-------------------------------|----------|-------------|-------------|
| OHI | 0.95 | 0.96 | 0.96 |
| <i>Satisfaction with life</i> | 0.89 | 0.91 | 0.90 |
| <i>Positive mood</i> | 0.85 | 0.84 | 0.85 |
| <i>Mental health</i> | 0.78 | 0.84 | 0.82 |
| <i>Efficacy</i> | 0.78 | 0.81 | 0.80 |
| <i>Self-esteem</i> | 0.80 | 0.79 | 0.79 |

Analysis of data

The one-way repeated measure ANOVA was applied for the comparison of the mean happiness scores for the Pre-, Post (1)- and Post (2)-tests within the age groups and level of education. To establish where the differences were, multiple comparisons via the paired t-test was applied. In addition, the independent samples t-test was used to compare the mean happiness based on gender and marital status.

RESULTS

Descriptive results of the demographic characteristics are shown in Table 2. The majority of the respondents were male, single, academic and in the age group of 18 to 29 years old.

Table 2. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS

| Characteristics | N | | Frequency | % |
|-----------------|-----|---------------------|-----------|------|
| Gender | 282 | <i>Male</i> | 170 | 60.3 |
| | | <i>Female</i> | 112 | 39.7 |
| Marital status | 282 | <i>Married</i> | 106 | 37.6 |
| | | <i>Single</i> | 176 | 62.4 |
| Education | 282 | <i>Less Diploma</i> | 42 | 14.9 |
| | | <i>Diploma</i> | 48 | 17.0 |
| | | <i>Academic</i> | 192 | 68.1 |
| Age | 282 | <i>18-29</i> | 231 | 81.9 |
| | | <i>30-39</i> | 32 | 11.3 |
| | | <i>40-50</i> | 19 | 6.7 |

A summary of the scores for OHI and subscales, during the Pre-, Post-test 1 and Post-test 2, are presented in Table 3. The mean score of the OHI and its subscales increased in Post-test 1 and then decreased in Post-test 2.

Table 3. SCORES FOR OHI AND SUBSCALES OF TESTING SESSIONS

| Test | Variables | N | Min | Max | Mean±SD |
|-------------|-------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----------|
| Pre-test | OHI | 282 | 0 | 89 | 53.8±17.5 |
| | <i>Satisfaction with life</i> | 282 | 0 | 33 | 20.1±6.6 |
| | <i>Positive mood</i> | 282 | 0 | 24 | 13.9±5.0 |
| | <i>Mental health</i> | 282 | 0 | 18 | 9.9±3.7 |
| | <i>Efficacy</i> | 282 | 0 | 12 | 6.4±2.8 |
| | <i>Self-esteem</i> | 282 | 0 | 6 | 3.4±1.6 |
| Post-test 1 | OHI | 282 | 0 | 93 | 60.3±17.8 |
| | <i>Satisfaction with life</i> | 282 | 0 | 33 | 21.3±6.7 |
| | <i>Positive mood</i> | 282 | 0 | 24 | 15.6±4.8 |
| | <i>Mental health</i> | 282 | 0 | 18 | 11.8±3.7 |
| | <i>Efficacy</i> | 282 | 0 | 12 | 7.9±2.7 |
| | <i>Self-esteem</i> | 282 | 0 | 6 | 3.7±1.5 |
| Post-test 2 | OHI | 282 | 0 | 93 | 48.4±19.1 |
| | <i>Satisfaction with life</i> | 282 | 0 | 33 | 17.1±7.1 |
| | <i>Positive mood</i> | 282 | 0 | 24 | 12.7±5.1 |
| | <i>Mental health</i> | 282 | 0 | 18 | 9.4±3.9 |
| | <i>Efficacy</i> | 282 | 0 | 12 | 6.1±2.8 |
| | <i>Self-esteem</i> | 282 | 0 | 6 | 2.1±1.5 |

As shown in Table 4, One-Way repeated measure ANOVA was applied to compare the mean happiness of the different stages of testing. A statistically significant F-value showed that there were differences in the mean scores for happiness.

Table 4. ONE-WAY REPEATED MEASURE ANOVA FOR OHI AND SUBSCALES

| Variables | N | Mean±SD | | | F | p-Value |
|-------------------------------|-----|-----------|-------------|-------------|------|---------|
| | | Pre-test | Post-test 1 | Post-test 2 | | |
| OHI | 282 | 53.8±17.5 | 60.3±17.8 | 48.4±19.1 | 43.1 | 0.00 |
| <i>Satisfaction with life</i> | 282 | 20.1±6.6 | 21.3±6.7 | 17.1±7.1 | 41.2 | 0.00 |
| <i>Positive mood</i> | 282 | 13.9±5.0 | 15.6±4.8 | 12.7±5.1 | 32.1 | 0.00 |
| <i>Mental health</i> | 282 | 9.9±3.7 | 11.8±3.7 | 9.4±3.9 | 46.4 | 0.00 |
| <i>Efficacy</i> | 282 | 6.4±2.8 | 7.9±2.7 | 6.1±2.8 | 43.4 | 0.00 |
| <i>Self-esteem</i> | 282 | 3.4±1.6 | 3.7±1.5 | 2.1±1.5 | 15.1 | 0.00 |

In order to isolate where the differences were, a series of multiple comparisons via the paired t-test were performed and the results are shown in Table 5. The increasing mean happiness and its subscales at the Post-test 1 was compared to the Pre-test and the decreasing mean happiness and its subscales in the Post-test 2 was compared to those of Post-test 1 and the Pre-test. With the exception of the case of the mean efficacy of the Post-test 2 to the Pre-test, the remaining comparisons were statistically significant. (NS=Not significant)

Table 5. MULTIPLE COMPARISONS USING T-TEST FOR PAIRED SAMPLES

| Variables | Mean | | | Differences | | |
|------------------------|----------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-----|-------|
| | Pre-test | Post-test 1 | Post-test 2 | t-Value | df | Sign. |
| Happiness | 53.8 | 60.3 | – | -5.2 | 281 | 0.000 |
| | – | 60.3 | 48.4 | 9.1 | 281 | 0.000 |
| | 53.8 | – | 48.4 | 3.7 | 281 | 0.000 |
| Satisfaction with life | 20.1 | 21.3 | – | -2.6 | 281 | 0.009 |
| | – | 21.3 | 17.1 | 9.1 | 281 | 0.000 |
| | 20.1 | – | 17.1 | 5.7 | 281 | 0.000 |
| Positive mood | 13.9 | 15.6 | – | 3.1 | 281 | 0.002 |
| | – | 15.6 | 12.7 | 5.6 | 281 | 0.000 |
| | 13.9 | – | 12.7 | 2.1 | 281 | 0.034 |
| Mental health | 9.9 | 11.7 | – | 7.2 | 281 | 0.000 |
| | – | 11.7 | 9.5 | 2.8 | 281 | 0.000 |
| | 9.9 | – | 9.5 | 1.6 | 281 | NS |
| Efficacy | 6.4 | 7.8 | – | -6.9 | 281 | 0.000 |
| | – | 7.8 | 6.1 | 8.6 | 281 | 0.000 |
| | 6.4 | – | 6.1 | 1.5 | 281 | NS |
| Self-esteem | 3.4 | 3.7 | – | 2.4 | 281 | 0.018 |
| | – | 3.7 | 3.1 | 5.4 | 281 | 0.000 |
| | 3.4 | – | 3.1 | 2.5 | 281 | 0.014 |

To clarify the influence of football results on happiness and recognition of the role of the confounding variables, mean happiness in terms of the demographic variables, were examined in all 3 stages and the results are reflected in Table 6.

The results indicate that mean happiness was statistically different in terms of the education level at Post-test 2. This could be the consequence of educated people having a higher ability to manage their emotions and people, while those with a lower education not having enough ability to control them. As a result, the decline in the happiness at Post-test 2 is more significant among people with a lower education.

Table 6. COMPARISON OF HAPPINESS WITHIN DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

| Demographic variables | | Mean Happiness | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| | | Pre-test | Post-test 1 | Post-test 2 |
| Gender | Male | 57.8 | 59.5 | 49.4 |
| | Female | 47.5 | 61.4 | 46.9 |
| | | t=5.10; p=0.000 | t=0.89; p=0.375 | t=1.10; p=0.289 |
| Marital status | Married | 52.4 | 58.7 | 46.2 |
| | Single | 54.6 | 61.2 | 49.7 |
| | | t=1.10; p=0.309 | t=1.10; p=0.258 | t=1.50; p=0.135 |
| Education | Less than diploma | 50.4 | 55.3 | 34.4 |
| | Diploma | 50.0 | 62.8 | 44.9 |
| | Academic | 55.4 | 60.7 | 52.3 |
| | | F=2.80; p=0.061 | F=2.20; p=0.108 | F=18.10; p=0.000 |
| Age | 18-29 | 54.7 | 59.6 | 48.8 |
| | 30-39 | 48.4 | 60.5 | 48.1 |
| | 40-50 | 51.3 | 69.0 | 43.7 |
| | | F=0.98; p=0.371 | F=2.80; p=0.314 | F=0.30; p=0.740 |

DISCUSSION

This study was carried out with the aim of exploring the influence of Iran national football team's successes and failures in the 2015 AFC Asian Cup on the happiness of citizens. The word 'happiness' has a number of different uses, such as feeling, mood, behaviour, attitude and life (Chekola, 2007). However, the focus is on the OHI with five subscales including satisfaction with life, positive mood, mental health, efficacy and self-esteem. The research findings show that the happiness of the citizens increased significantly after the qualifying round in which Iran national football team achieved three successes against the Arabian teams (Qatar, Bahrain and UAE). Yet happiness decreased considerably after losing against Iraq in the quarter-final and deprived them of reaching the semi-final.

The research finding is theoretically consistent with the outlook of Evans and Kelley (2002) and Van Hilvoorde *et al.* (2010), who believe that national athletes in international competitions could have an influence on the national pride and happiness of the people. The results were empirically well matched with the results of Hallmann *et al.* (2012) who reported that the German citizens felt happy after the success of German athletes in international competitions.

Although the research finding is compatible with the results of Kavetsos and Szysmanski (2010), who stated that hosting international sport competitions increased the happiness of the people of the host countries. Some results are not consistent with Kavetsos and Szysmanski (2010), who reported no significant relationship between national athletic success and the happiness of citizens.

There are several reasons for this dissimilarity in the research of Kavetsos and Szysmanski (2010): (1) the statistical analysis of the data covers 12 dissimilar countries as one entity without considering each country separately; (2) they point out that data collection was conducted by the Euro Barometer Survey Service twice each year [spring and autumn], and the period of data gathering was not necessarily immediately after the success or failure in sporting competitions; (3) happiness was measured by one general question, namely "On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the life you lead?", thus there could not be precise and distinctive scale scoring; (4) the data, which was included from a country, were based on responses in varying years, for instance for Germany the data prior to 1992 existed for West Germany or the available data for Greece started from 1981 and for Spain and Portugal from 1985; (5) they suggested that as the results stem from a sample of European nations in which football is the dominant sport and in other regions of the world where football is not a prominent sport, one might anticipate dissimilar outcomes.

The significant increase of happiness among Iranian citizens after the success of the Iran national football team in the qualifying round and significant reduction of the happiness after losing against Iraq in the quarter-final, are basically representing the conflict between the Iranians and the Arabs, which has a historical origin. In addition, this conflict has also been viewed in other countries, for example Germany–England (Barrett, 2000), and Brazil–Argentina. Three victories in the group stage against Arabian teams (Qatar, Bahrain and UAE), were in public demand by Iranian citizens and it brought them more happiness. However, failure against Iraq, another Arabian team, triggered memories of the eight-year war experience with Iran and the Iranians found their misery to be mostly stemmed from that country. Consequently, it caused the happiness of the Iranians to plummet, as a wave of sorrow overtook them completely. Perhaps, if such a failure had happened against the Australian or East Asian teams, such outcomes would never have surfaced among the Iranian citizens.

There is no significant relationship between the demographic variables of age, marital status, and education level with citizens' happiness in Post-test 1 and Post-test 2. This suggests that the significant increase and decrease of happiness are essentially because of the results of the Iran national football team. Considering two points seems to be necessary here. Firstly, although the effect of some demographic variables, such as gender, marital status, education and age are controlled there are some other variables in micro level similar to occurrence of positive or negative events in the personal life that can affect the relationship between football games and citizens' happiness. However, the researcher was not able to measure them. Secondly, no specific and important event occurred by the Pre-, Post-test 1 and Post-test 2 at the micro level in Iran. Thus, the study results have not been influenced by any additional variable.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Happiness is an important psycho-social requirement in diverse societies that is considered by states in particular because of its various functions (Carr, 2004). A significant effect of national athletic success on happiness suggests that different countries can answer positively to this fundamental need as a key life goal (Baron & Branscombe, 2011), that can contribute to the building of a nation (Hong, 2011) by providing success of national athletic teams in international sport competitions. Therefore, countries should invest in sport.

CONCLUSION

Most previous research on happiness and sport have concentrated on the happiness of the athletes (Medvec *et al.*, 1995; Downward & Rasciute, 2011), and on medical studies of individuals during sport events (Kirkup & Merrick, 2003; Wilbert-Lampen *et al.*, 2008) on a micro level. However, the present study has tried to focus on this on a large-scale. Consistent with other studies, the influence of sport on national integration (Lever, 1983), international relations (Ilmarinen *et al.*, 1984), strengthening moral values (Bockrath & Franke, 1995), good feelings among people (Forrest & Simmons, 2003), national identity (Ahmadi, 2007), integration of different ethnic groups and social classes (Muller *et al.*, 2008), and national pride (Denham, 2010) has been reported. The present study confirmed the significant effect of sport on happiness and has shown that successes and failures in sport could influence psycho-social life of citizens on a large scale. However, some limitations need to be considered.

Firstly, this study concentrated on short-term effects of national athletic success or failure, however, the long-term effects are also important and should be investigated. Secondly, as the data was collected in a very short period (up to 72 hours after a football match), and having cold weather conditions during the tournament in Iran, unavoidably the sample size was not very large. Thirdly, although the majority of the respondents in the age group of 18 to 29 years is acceptable concerning the population composition of Iran as a young country, it should be regarded in the countries with a different age composition. Fourthly, although the effect of demographic variables on the relationship between success or failure of sport matches and happiness was examined, it was not possible to measure some personal incidents, such as disease, divorce, etc., among respondents during data collection, which could influence the increase or decrease of their happiness.

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