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## World Happiness Report 2024

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# Chapter 1

## Happiness and Age: Summary

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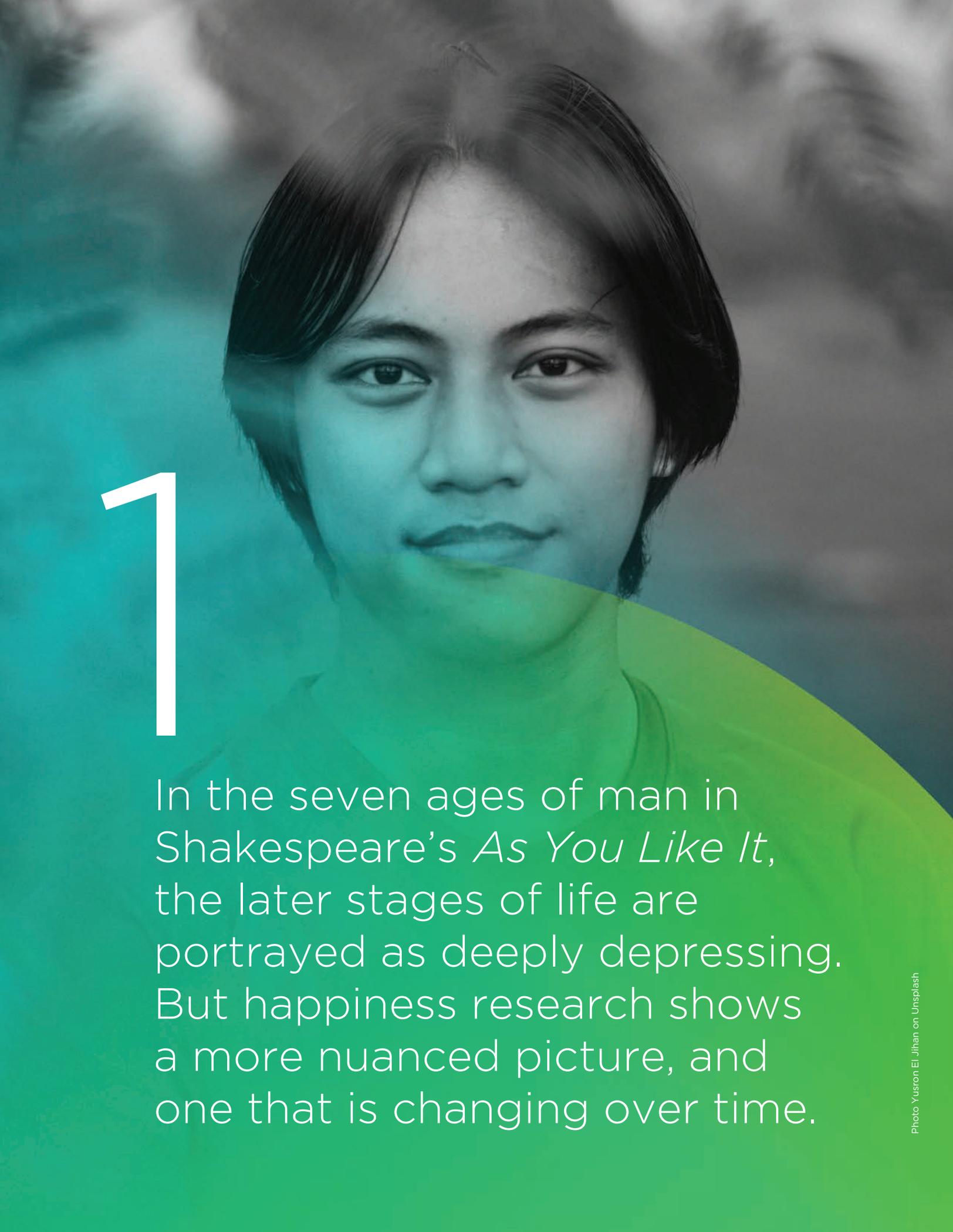
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In the seven ages of man in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, the later stages of life are portrayed as deeply depressing. But happiness research shows a more nuanced picture, and one that is changing over time.

In this issue of the *World Happiness Report* we focus on the happiness of people at different stages of life. In the seven ages of man in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, the later stages of life are portrayed as deeply depressing. But happiness research shows a more nuanced picture, and one that is changing over time.

In the West, the received wisdom was that the young are the happiest and that happiness thereafter declines until middle age, followed by substantial recovery. But since 2006-10, as we shall see, happiness among the young (aged 15-24) has fallen sharply in North America – to a point where the young are less happy than the old. Youth happiness has also fallen (but less sharply) in Western Europe.

By contrast, happiness at every age has risen sharply in Central and Eastern Europe, so that young people are now equally happy in both parts of Europe. In the former Soviet Union and East Asia too there have been large increases in happiness at every age, while in South Asia and the Middle East and North Africa happiness has fallen at every age.

It is of course an issue to what extent these changes reflect generational changes that can be expected to persist as each generation gets older. In pioneering work, Chapter 2 disentangles the effect of which cohort you are in from that of age. At the global level, it reveals a lower level of happiness among people born since 1980.

One thing is the average level of happiness, another is its dispersion. Since 2006-10, the inequality of happiness has increased in every region except Europe – another worrying trend. As usual, all these trends are discussed in Chapter 2, together with the country rankings.

The position of the young is discussed in finer detail in Chapter 3. This draws on a wide range of data sources and also includes data for young people aged 10-15. The rest of the report focuses on the old. As Chapter 4 stresses, the greatest plague in old age is dementia. Fortunately, new and accumulating research demonstrates that higher well-being is a protective factor against future dementia. In addition, there are significant

environmental and behavioral strategies that improve the lives of those living with dementia. Finally, Chapter 5 focuses on India, the first such chapter in the *World Happiness Report*. It stresses that in India, the world's most populous country, with a rapidly growing elder share, happiness rises into old age, more so for men than women.

In what follows, we give summaries of each chapter, which will hopefully tempt readers to read further.

## Chapter 2 Happiness of the Younger, the Older, and Those In Between

### Overall rankings

- The top 10 countries have remained much the same since before COVID. Finland is still top, with Denmark now very close, and all five Nordic countries in the top 10. But in the next 10, there is more change, with the transition countries of Eastern Europe rising in happiness (especially Czechia, Lithuania and Slovenia). Partly for this reason the United States and Germany have fallen to 23 and 24 in the rankings.

### Happiness by age group

- In many but not all regions, the young are happier than the old. But in North America happiness has fallen so sharply for the young that they are now less happy than the old. By contrast, in the transition countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the young are much happier than the old. In Western Europe as a whole happiness is similar at all ages, while elsewhere it tends to decline over the life cycle (with an occasional upturn for the old).
- For these reasons, the ranking of countries by happiness is very different for the young and for the old. As between generations, after taking into account age and life circumstances, those born before 1965 have life evaluations about one-quarter of a point higher than those born after 1980.

### **Changes in happiness since 2006-2010: by age group**

- The countries of Central and Eastern Europe have had the largest increase in happiness – by similar amounts in all age groups. The gains in the former Soviet Union were half as large. In East Asia too there were large increases, especially among the old.
- By contrast, happiness fell in South Asia in all age groups. It also fell in North America, especially among the young. And it fell in the Middle East and North Africa in all age groups.
- In Central and Eastern Europe, the young are now as happy as in Western Europe, and among the old the gap between East and West is one half of what it was in 2006-10, though still large (one whole point on the scale of 0 to 10).

### **Inequality of happiness**

- Since 2006-10 there has been a large increase in the inequality of happiness in every region except Europe. And it has increased especially for the old. The biggest increase is in Sub-Saharan Africa.

### **Negative emotions**

- Negative emotions are more frequent now than in 2006-2010 everywhere except in East Asia and in Europe. In fact in Central and Eastern Europe, negative emotions are now less frequent in all age groups than they were in 2006-2010.
- In 2021-2023 negative emotions were in every region more prevalent for females than males. Almost everywhere the gender gap is larger at older ages.

### **Positive emotions**

- In all regions the frequency of positive emotions has changed since 2006-2010 in the same direction as life evaluations. But the age patterns differ. The frequency of positive emotions in every region is highest for those under 30, thereafter steadily declining with age in every region except North America, where positive emotions are least frequent for those in the middle age groups.

### **Benevolence by generation**

- The COVID crisis led to a worldwide increase in the proportion of people who have helped others in need. This increase in benevolence has been large for all generations, but especially so for those born since 1980, who are even more likely than earlier generations to help others in need.

### **Social support, loneliness and social interactions**

- In almost every global region comparably measured feelings of social support are more than twice as prevalent as loneliness. Both social support and loneliness affect happiness, with social support usually having the larger effect. Social interactions of all kinds also add to happiness, in addition to their effects flowing through increases in social support and reductions in loneliness.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Child and Adolescent Well-being: Global Trends, Challenges and Opportunities**

- In most countries life satisfaction drops gradually from childhood through adolescence and into adulthood. Globally, young people aged 15-24 still report higher life satisfaction than older adults. But this gap is narrowing in Western Europe and recently reversed in North America due to falling life satisfaction among the young. Conversely, in Sub-Saharan Africa life satisfaction has increased among the young.
- Overall, globally, young people aged 15-24 experienced improved life-satisfaction between 2006 and 2019, and stable life satisfaction since then. But the picture varied by region. Youth wellbeing fell in North America, Western Europe, Middle East and North Africa, and South Asia. In the rest of the world it rose.
- Turning to younger ages (10-15), evidence is limited. In high income countries, life satisfaction has declined since 2019, especially for girls. For East Asian countries, life satisfaction increased in 2019. Before 2019, the evidence on trends is mixed.

- Girls report lower life satisfaction than boys by around the age of 12. This gap widens at ages 13 and 15, and the pandemic has amplified the difference. These points apply only to high-income countries since data on these young ages is rarely gathered elsewhere. For ages 15-24, global data shows no global gender differences from 2006 until 2013. But from 2014, females began reporting higher life satisfaction than males, although the gap has narrowed after the pandemic. This global gender gap masks regional differences, and is more pronounced in lower-income countries. There are no gender differences in high-income countries.

## Chapter 4

### Supporting the Well-being of an Aging Global Population: Associations between Well-being and Dementia

- As the global population of older adults increases, the number of worldwide dementia cases is also expected to increase. Dementia is associated with reduced quality of life and well-being, and thus dementia prevention is critical to maintaining the well-being of an aging global population.
- Higher levels of prior well-being have been robustly associated with lower risk for future dementia, suggesting that increasing well-being may be a promising non-pharmacological approach to dementia prevention. Among individuals living with dementia, there are environmental changes and well-being enhancing activities which have been shown to improve well-being.

## Chapter 5

### Differences in Life Satisfaction among Older Adults in India

- Older age is associated with higher life satisfaction in India, refuting some claims that the positive association between age and life satisfaction only exists in high-income nations. However, older women in India report lower life satisfaction than older men.
- Older adults with secondary or higher education and those of higher social castes report higher life satisfaction than counterparts without formal education and those from scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.
- Satisfaction with living arrangements, perceived discrimination, and self-rated health emerged as the top three predictors of life satisfaction.

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