

# Narratives of Happiness in South Korea

Ashline Hermiz

University of Michigan School of Social Work

## Country Profile

South Korea is a democratic country located in East Asia. The country ranks high in personal safety, healthcare quality, education, and technology. A once poor country, South Korea rose to economic prominence in the 1960s. Despite the country's small size and mountainous terrain it strengthened itself and its global presence through technology and manufacturing industries. South Korea has many positive attributes, but many Koreans express dissatisfaction with long work hours, low wages, and overall unhappiness.

*CultureGrams Online Edition.* (2017). Retrieved from ProQuest: [https://online.culturegrams.com/world/world\\_country.php?cid=149&cn=South\\_Korea](https://online.culturegrams.com/world/world_country.php?cid=149&cn=South_Korea)

## Overview of Project

This was an independent research project. The research was qualitative methodology using case study approach. The data was gathered by interviews with participants. The subject of the research were definitions of happiness and more specifically how South Korean university students and recent postgraduates define happiness. The research process included IRB application, literature review, question by question specification, pilot testing, interviews, data analysis and interpretation, and write-up.



## Outcomes

- The results from the study are still in the process of being analyzed. I continue to work on completing a research report and possibly submitting work for publication.
- From a personal perspective, I found the process of designing a qualitative research study to be very informative. I was able to gauge my own interest level in research. I learned that research is an area I want to continue to pursue in my career regardless of whether or not I pursue a PhD. It is a skillset that I hope to continue to advance upon as a social worker.

## Skills Developed

- How to apply/submit applications to an Institutional Review Board (e.g UMs)
- Improved research interview skills
- Gained recruitment techniques for locating participants
- Experienced and used qualitative research methodologies

## Advice

- If you are interested in research, but hesitant about the feasibility, I encourage you to try. Whether or not your project was successful, there is so much to be learned and gained from the process of doing the work.
- Prior to departure learn about your host country. I would even recommend trying to meet with international students or attending cultural events/lectures on campus to better understand the perspectives of people from that region.
- Utilize other resources on campus to help fill gaps in your knowledge base. There are lectures on research methodology, global studies, psychology, etc. happening on campus all the time.

## Lessons Learned

- Conducting research is an incredibly fruitful experience, but is also very challenging.
- Designing a study from start to finish requires time, effort, and creativity.
- Each new piece of literature provides a breadth of knowledge, which takes your research in another direction. It shapes your hypotheses and adds richness, however, you have to be disciplined when making your final decisions. It is necessary to set dates to finalize portions of the research in order for you to prepare for the next phase. This was not an easy task for me personally because I kept wanting to change my question list or order of my questions based on new literature I came across.
- It is important to be cognizant that you cannot answer every question in one study. This study can provide insight in one area and be the basis for future studies.

## Reflection

The global independent study granted me the opportunity to conduct research. For those in the clinical MSW program there are limited courses in research and it may be difficult to engage in research projects due to time constraints. As someone with very limited knowledge of how to conduct research, the OGA scholarship allowed me to partner with a faculty instructor and learn how to create, implement, and analyze a qualitative research project. The process of being able to participate in research at every level was incredible valuable for me. It allowed me to gain insight on aspects of research I enjoyed and areas I struggled with. Overall, it strengthened my desire to engage with research projects in the future.

## Classroom Connections

- SW648: This course was designed for students with global field placements. We covered ethical dilemmas of working globally, culture adjustments, and resources for safety and mental health well-being while abroad.
- SW528: This independent study course was taken with my faculty instructor Dr. Gant in Sp/Su 2017. We met biweekly prior to departure to discuss literature review, recruitment strategies, IRB, and other relevant information. We are continuing to meet during the Fall 2017 to assist with the data analysis and write up.

## Classroom Connections

- In the research interviews, I can only listen to the participant responses or provide clarification. I do not respond in a two-directional conversation manner. Similarly, when working with clients it is about listening to their experiences and validating their feelings, not about responding with my point of view.
- As a clinical social work, I am going to be more mindful about the approach I utilize in regards to questions because of the knowledge gained through the global research project. It is not solely the questions that you are asking, but the order of questions, how you ask the questions, when/how to probe, that impacts how a participant or a patient would respond.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to Acknowledge Dr. Larry Gant for working in partnership with me for the purpose of this project. Additionally, I want to thank the individuals who participated in the study and took time out of their own busy schedules to engage in this research study. Lastly, I must thank the Office of Global Activities for funding this project.