

Social Flourishing and Well-Being in Korea: Insights from Cross-National Surveys

*International conference on Measuring Well-being “Beyond GDP” in Asia,
South-East Asia, and Korea*

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Measuring Well-Being beyond GDP

- The Limitations of GDP as a Well-being Indicator: Well-being is inherently multidimensional, encompassing both objective and subjective components, including aspects such as meaning, purpose, virtue, and self-realization.
- Numerous efforts have been made to broaden the scope of assessment beyond material growth as a well-being indicator.
 - The academic journal “*Social Indicators Research*” was already established in the 1970s.
 - Various indexes and measures have been developed in this context.
 - Human Development Index, Better Life Index, Genuine Progress Indicator, Gross National Happiness, Gross Domestic Happiness, etc.
 - In South Korea, the concept of *Social Quality* was explored and studied around 2010s.

Authentic Happiness Theory	Well-Being Theory
Topic: happiness	Topic: well-being
Measure: life satisfaction	Measures: positive emotion, engagement, meaning, positive relationships, and accomplishment
Goal: increase life satisfaction	Goal: increase flourishing by increasing positive emotion, engagement, meaning, positive relationships, and accomplishment

Seligman (2011: 12)

Flourishing

- One of the most important and popular concepts of well-being
- The concept of Flourishing, developed in interdisciplinary contexts, refers to “to the experience of life going well. It is a combination of feeling good and functioning effectively. Flourishing is synonymous with a high level of mental wellbeing, and it epitomizes mental health” (Huppert and So 2013)
 - In this context, the concept of well-being is essentially synonymous with flourishing because flourishing aims to encapsulate and reflect the genuine essence of well-being.

Human Flourishing

- The Flourishing Program at Harvard IQSS specifies five dimensions of HF: 1) happiness and life satisfaction, 2) mental and physical health, 3) meaning and purpose, 4) character and virtue, and 5) close social relationships
 - “Secure Flourish” measure is added as the sixth domain, which is 6) Financial and Material Stability
 - VanderWeele, T.J. (2017). On the promotion of human flourishing. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, U.S.A.*, 31:8148-8156.
- The idea of (human) flourishing has been adopted in social surveys (e.g., European Social Survey)

Flourishing Questions

Domain 1: Happiness and Life Satisfaction.

1. Overall, how satisfied are you with life as a whole these days?

0=Not Satisfied at All, 10=Completely Satisfied

2. In general, how happy or unhappy do you usually feel?

0=Extremely Unhappy, 10=Extremely Happy

Domain 2: Mental and Physical Health.

3. In general, how would you rate your physical health?

0=Poor, 10=Excellent

4. How would you rate your overall mental health?

0=Poor, 10=Excellent

Domain 3: Meaning and Purpose.

5. Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?

0=Not at All Worthwhile, 10=Completely Worthwhile

6. I understand my purpose in life.

0=Strongly Disagree, 10=Strongly Agree

Domain 4: Character and Virtue.

7. I always act to promote good in all circumstances, even in difficult and challenging situations.

0=Not True of Me, 10=Completely True of Me

8. I am always able to give up some happiness now for greater happiness later.

0=Not True of Me, 10=Completely True of Me

Domain 5: Close Social Relationships.

9. I am content with my friendships and relationships.

0=Strongly Disagree, 10=Strongly Agree

10. My relationships are as satisfying as I would want them to be.

0=Strongly Disagree, 10=Strongly Agree

Domain 6: Financial and Material Stability.

11. How often do you worry about being able to meet normal monthly living expenses?

0=Worry All of the Time, 10=Do Not Ever Worry

12. How often do you worry about safety, food, or housing?

0=Worry All of the Time, 10=Do Not Ever Worry

***Social* Flourishing**

- Human Flourishing encompasses a wide array of factors that contribute to a fulfilling life and an individual's sense of social connectedness. However, it predominantly focuses on individual-level outcomes.
 - “we ask with rigor how many people in a nation, in a city, or in a corporation are flourishing...” (Seligman 2011: 28)
- To gain a deeper understanding of the broader societal contexts and the social forces that influence the fundamental conditions of individuals' lives, it is imperative to look to the conditions at the macro-level.
- An individual's capacity to lead a truly meaningful and satisfying life is intricately linked to their positive engagement within their social environment and their sense of connection with others. Furthermore, individuals need both a feeling of security and certainty as well as the freedom to pursue their goals and interact with other people.

Social Flourishing

- The concept of *Social Flourishing* is developed by incorporating and synthesizing the key insights from sociological studies.
- Since the aim of individuals' lives extends beyond mere hedonic happiness or satisfaction to encompass a flourishing life in the eudaimonic sense, we can similarly posit that the goal of society transcends mere material affluence, economic growth, or stability to aspire to become a society with meaning, virtue, purpose, wisdom, and hopefulness.
- The working definition of social flourishing would mirror our ideal of a “good society.”
- In this study, I present a tentative definition of social flourishing: it is the state and conditions of society in which individuals' core motives are optimally fulfilled.
 - These core needs encompass belonging, understanding, control, self-enhancement, and trust in others (Fiske 2010).
 - In a flourishing society, individuals can experience positive relationships, find deeper meaning, witness the stability of a society governed by common-sense and wisdom, celebrate diversity and inclusion, and maintain a hopeful outlook toward the future.

Social Flourishing

- What SF does NOT focus on...
 - widely used ‘objective’ measures, such as health, education, crime, sanitation, poverty, and so on
 - Nevertheless, it encompasses economic prosperity/security and inclusiveness (no social barriers/discrimination)
- Instead, SF focuses on...
 - The *shared, subjective, social* reality – it can be very different from what the “objective” indices tell us
 - The condition of the basic fabric of society, based upon which individuals, communities, groups, and society as a whole can thrive and prosper

Social Flourishing

- The constituting elements of SF:
 - Sharedness
 - Openness
 - Inclusiveness
 - Social wisdom
 - Social hope
 - Economic prosperity/security

Empirical Analysis

- Survey data
 - 1,000 adult respondents each from South Korea, Indonesia, and the Philippines (Total N=3,000)
 - Data collection: July, 2023
 - Online survey using sex, age, and region as quotas
- Supported by Korea National Research Foundation

Components of SF

- Sharedness
 - There are fundamental values and beliefs commonly shared among people in our society
 - Within our society, there is a shared sense of identity among its members
 - related concepts: social cohesion, shared reality, (civil) religion
- Openness
 - Generally, people can expect free and open interaction with others in our society.
 - Generally, people can expect positive and respectful interaction with others in our society.
 - related concepts: social trust, interaction ritual chain, radius of trust, social capital

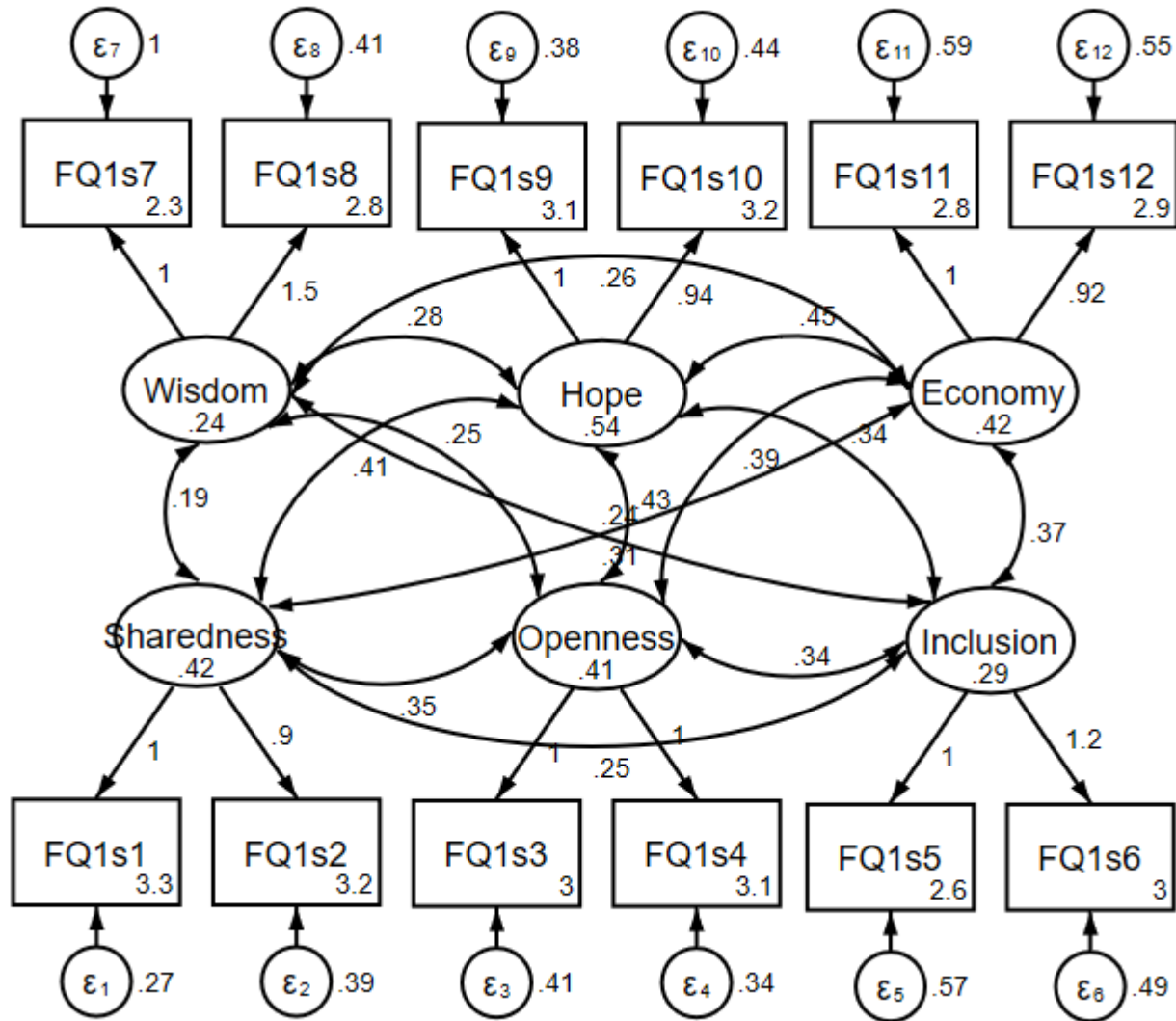
Components of SF

- Inclusiveness
 - All members in our society face no significant social obstacles or discrimination in pursuing their aspirations
 - Our society strives to provide opportunities and resources for marginalized and vulnerable individuals
 - related components: diversity, social cohesion, social capital, capability approach
- Social Wisdom
 - Our society is not socially or politically polarized
 - Our society has the wisdom not to be swayed by extreme arguments or biased ideas
 - related components: polarization, practical wisdom

Components of SF

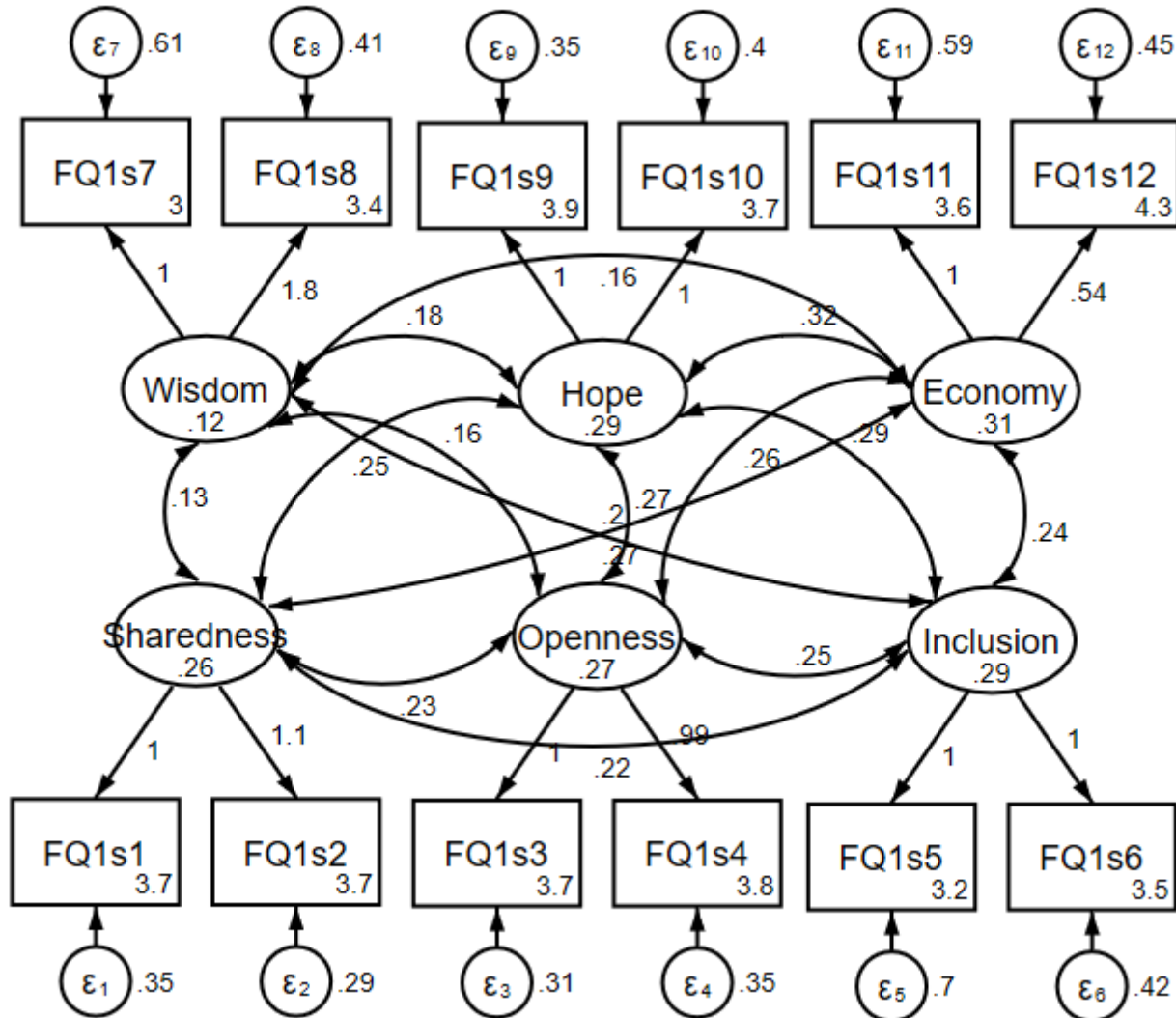
- Social Hope
 - There is a sense of hopefulness toward future in our society
 - Our society has the capacity and willingness to overcome the challenges we face.
 - related concepts: collective/political efficacy, sense of agency, civic hope
- Economic Prosperity and Security
 - The economy of our society is thriving
 - Most members of our society can expect to have a basic standard of living
 - related concepts: economic growth and security

KOREA



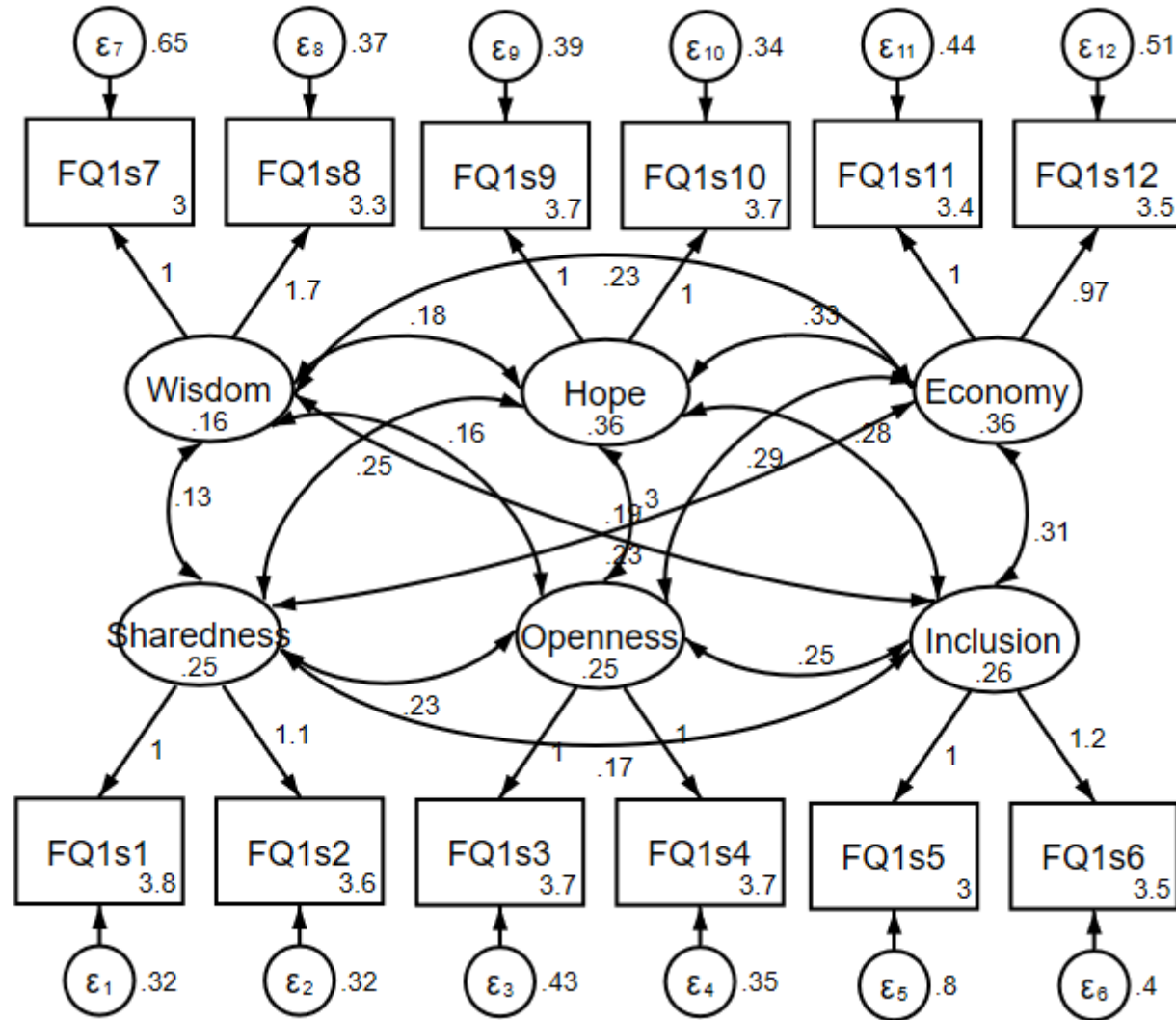
Fit statistic	Value	Description
Discrepancy		
chi2_ms (39)	133.819	model vs. saturated
p > chi2	0.000	
chi2_bs (66)	589.370	baseline vs. saturated
p > chi2	0.000	
Population error		
RMSEA	0.049	Root mean squared error of approximation
90% CI, lower bound	0.040	
upper bound	0.059	
pclose	0.532	Probability RMSEA <= 0.05
Baseline comparison		
CFI	0.819	Comparative fit index
TLI	0.693	Tucker-Lewis index
Size of residuals		
SRMR	0.050	Standardized root mean squared residual
CD	0.970	Coefficient of determination

INDONESIA

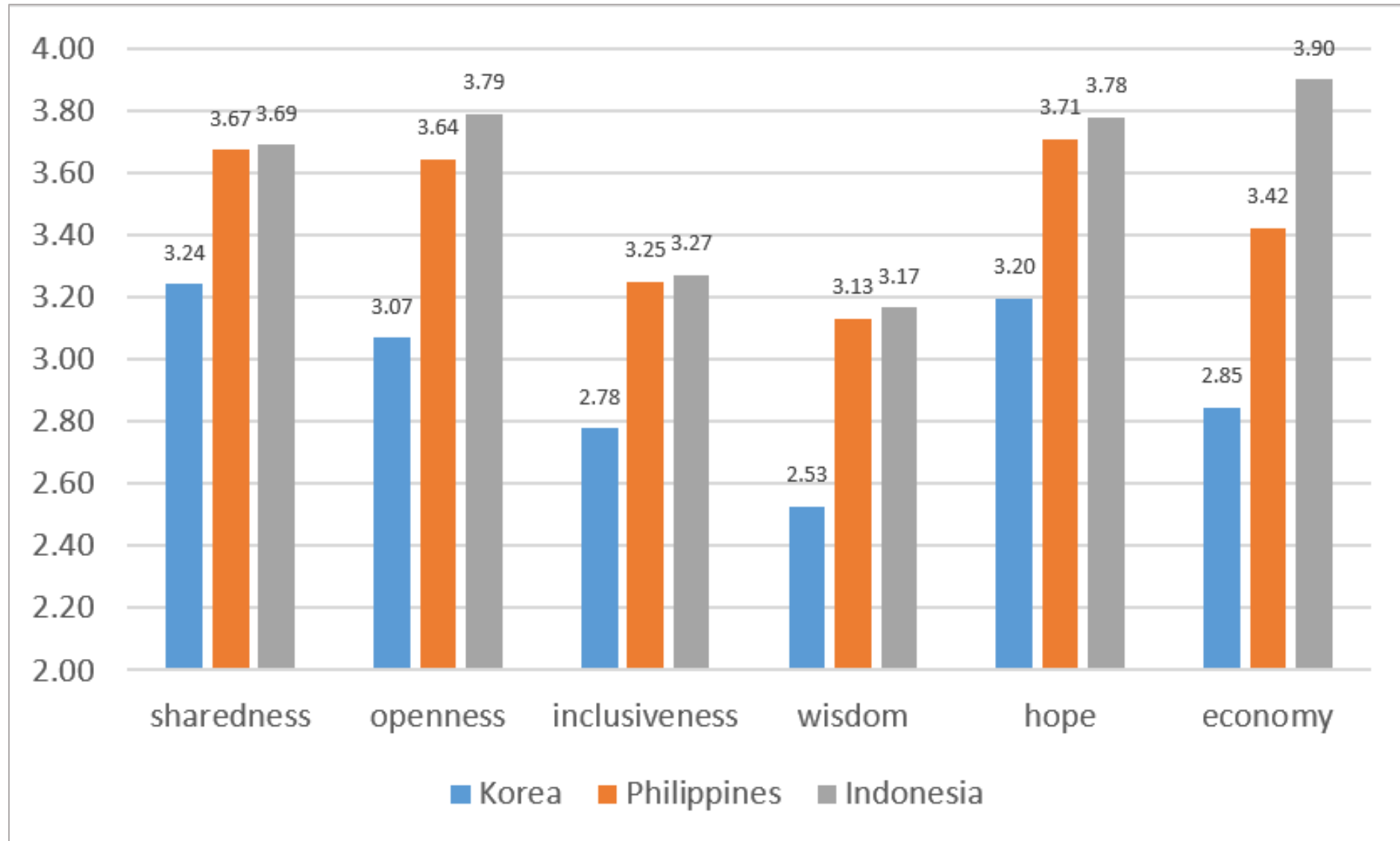


Fit statistic	Value	Description
Discrepancy		
chi2_ms (39)	144.747	model vs. saturated
p > chi2	0.000	
chi2_bs (66)	492.583	baseline vs. saturated
p > chi2	0.000	
Population error		
RMSEA	0.052	Root mean squared error of approximation
90% CI, lower bound	0.043	
upper bound	0.061	
pclose	0.338	Probability RMSEA <= 0.05
Baseline comparison		
CFI	0.752	Comparative fit index
TLI	0.580	Tucker-Lewis index
Size of residuals		
SRMR	0.060	Standardized root mean squared residual
CD	0.927	Coefficient of determination

THE PHILIPPINES



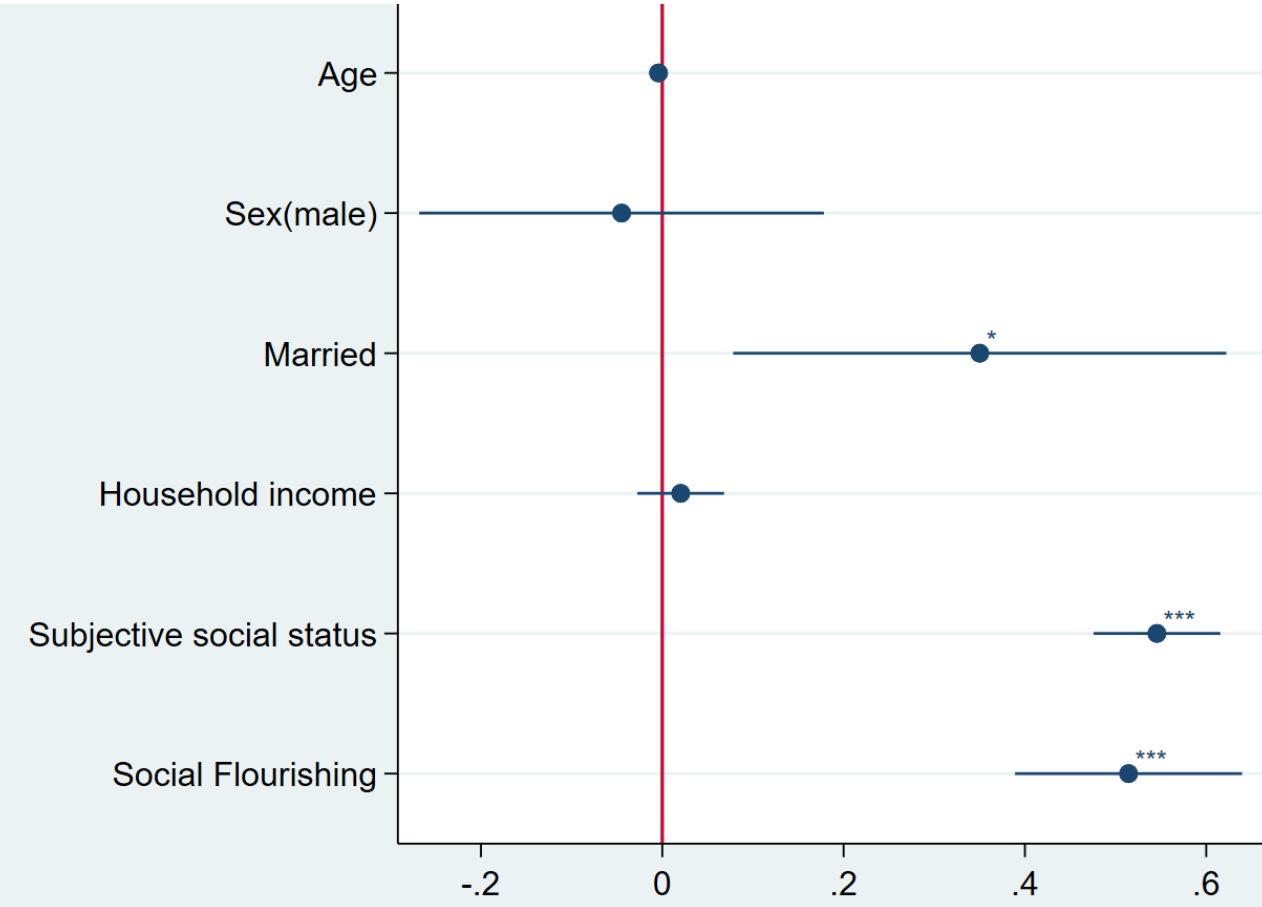
Fit statistic	Value	Description
Discrepancy		
chi2_ms (39)	109.673	model vs. saturated
p > chi2	0.000	
chi2_bs (66)	505.925	baseline vs. saturated
p > chi2	0.000	
Population error		
RMSEA	0.043	Root mean squared error of approximation
90% CI, lower bound	0.033	
upper bound	0.052	
pclose	0.898	Probability RMSEA <= 0.05
Baseline comparison		
CFI	0.839	Comparative fit index
TLI	0.728	Tucker-Lewis index
Size of residuals		
SRMR	0.041	Standardized root mean squared residual
CD	0.949	Coefficient of determination



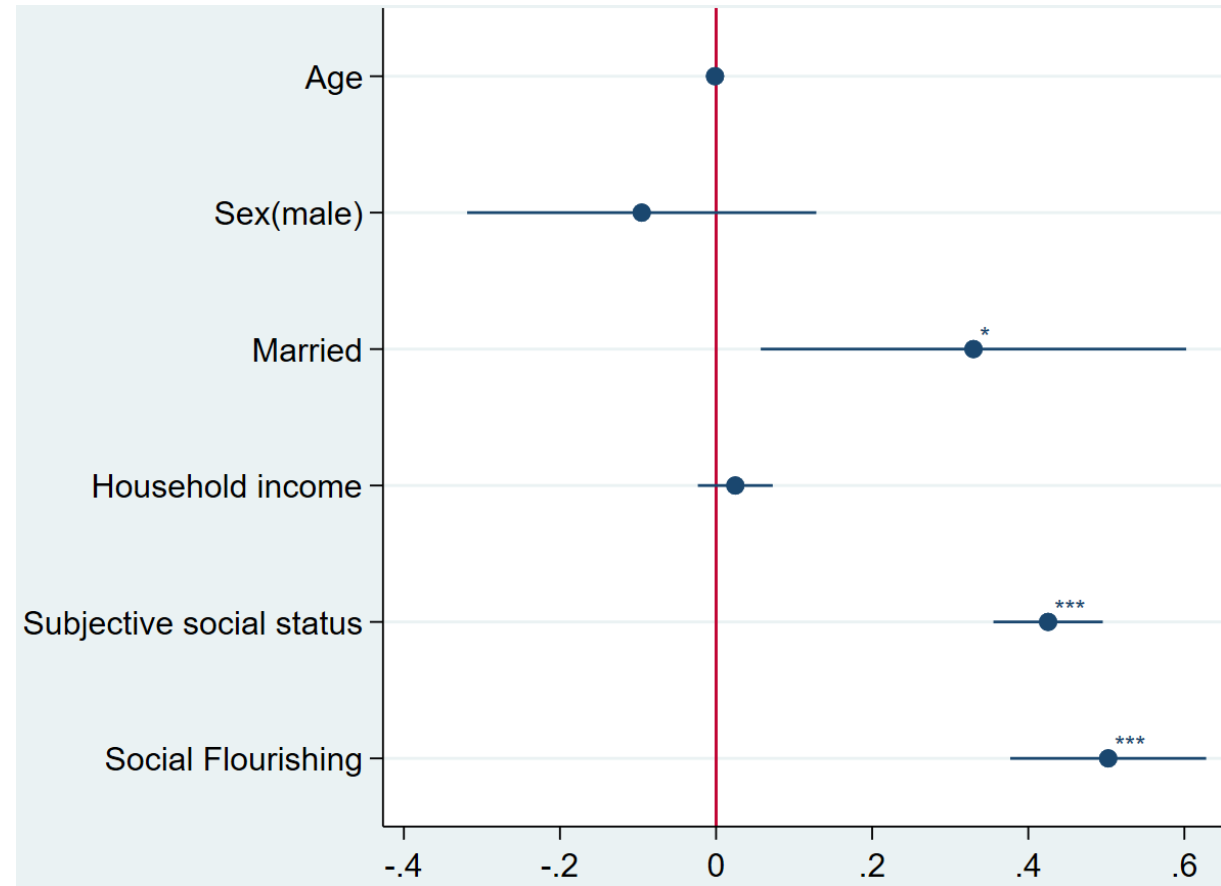
In terms of GDPPC, poverty rate, health(care), crime rate, educational attainment, human development, housing, urban development, and so on, South Korea scores significantly higher than the other two countries. In terms of Social Flourishing, however, the picture is wildly different.

KOREA

Life Satisfaction

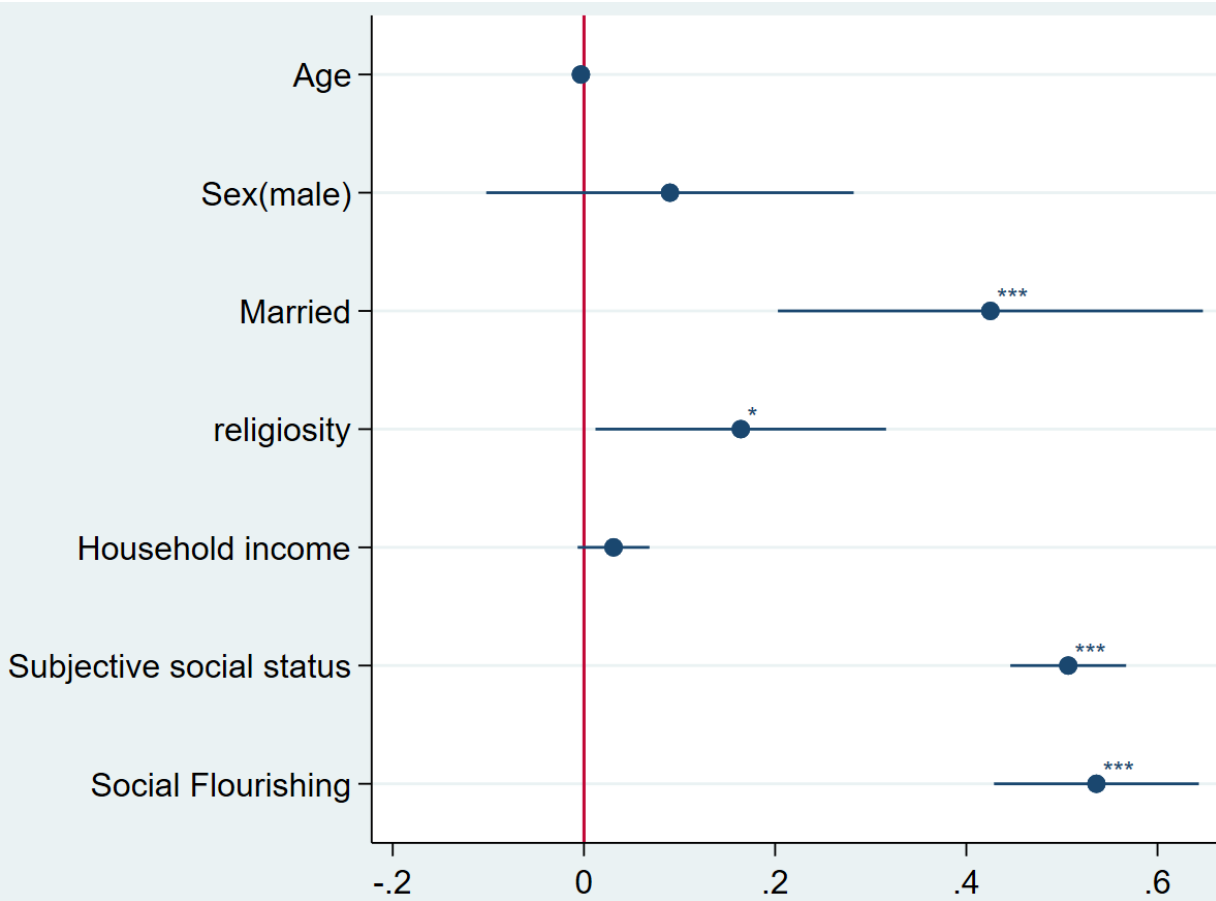


Happiness

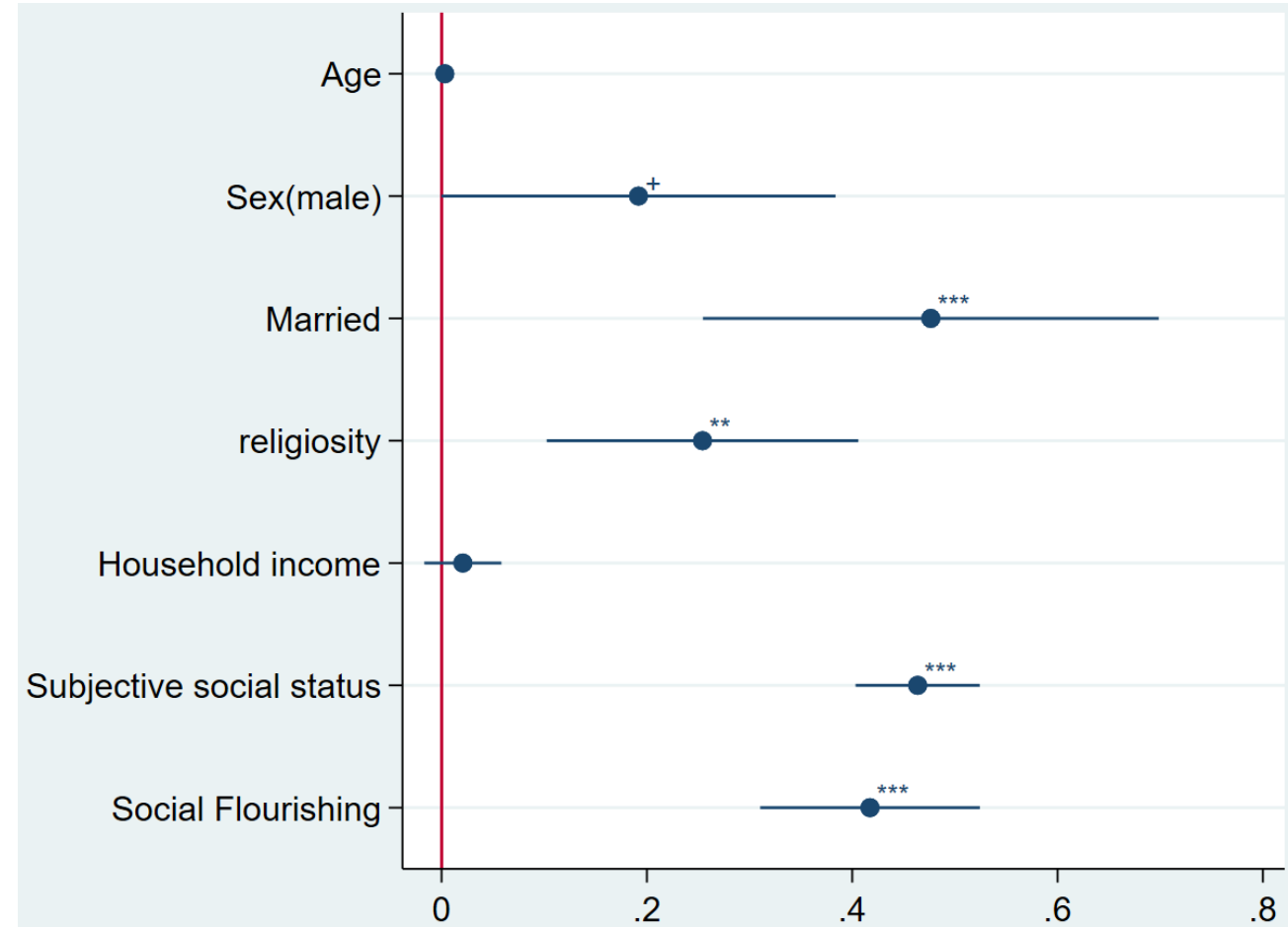


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Life Satisfaction

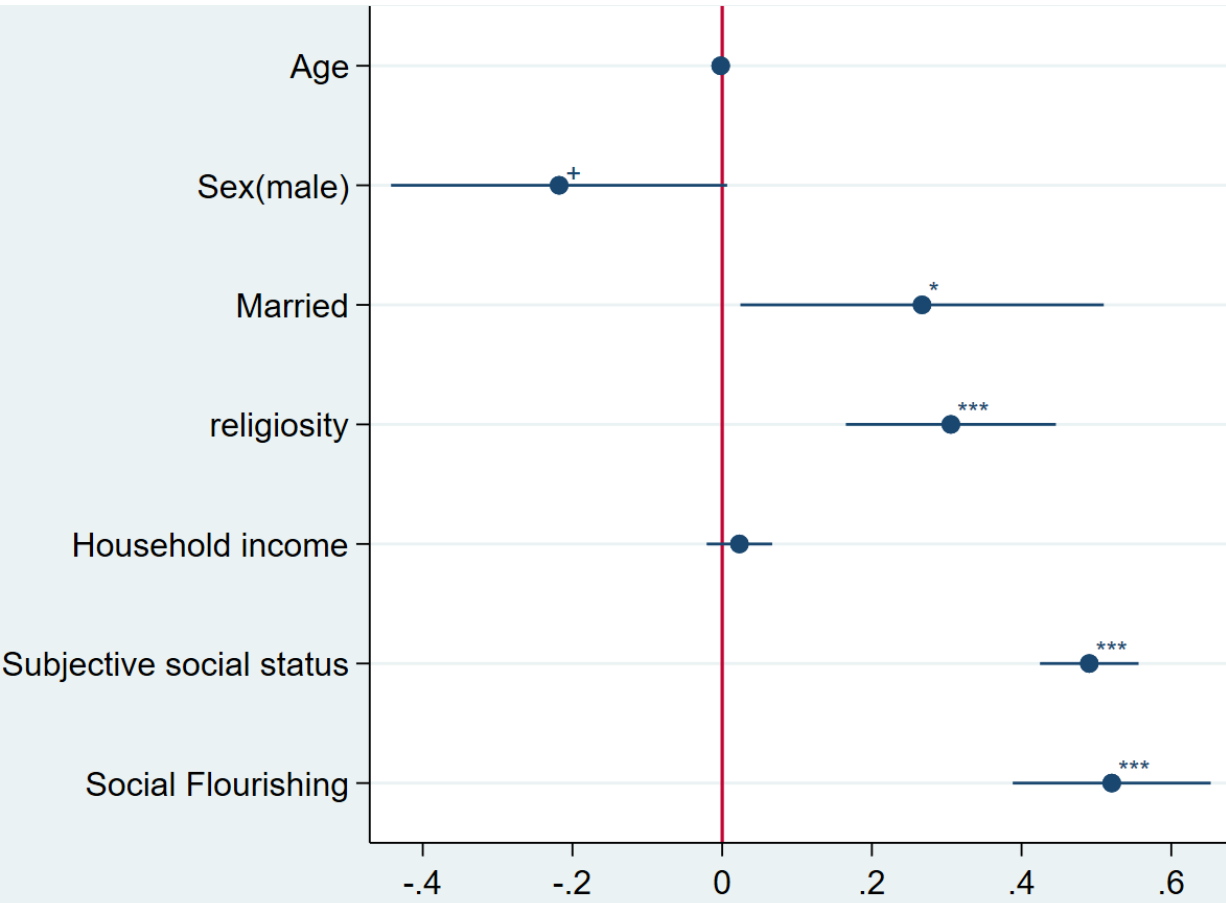


Happiness

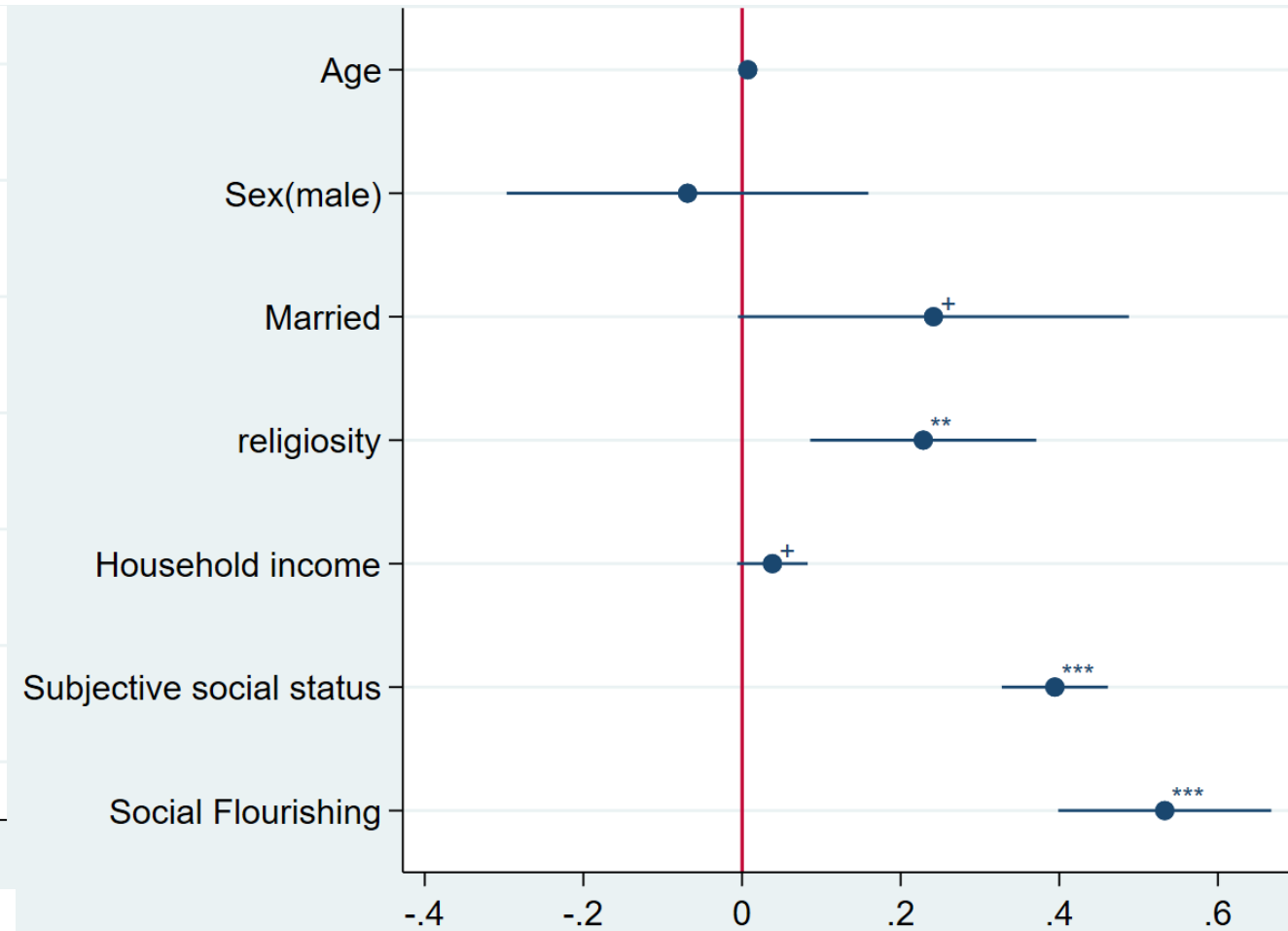


THE PHILIPPINES

Life Satisfaction



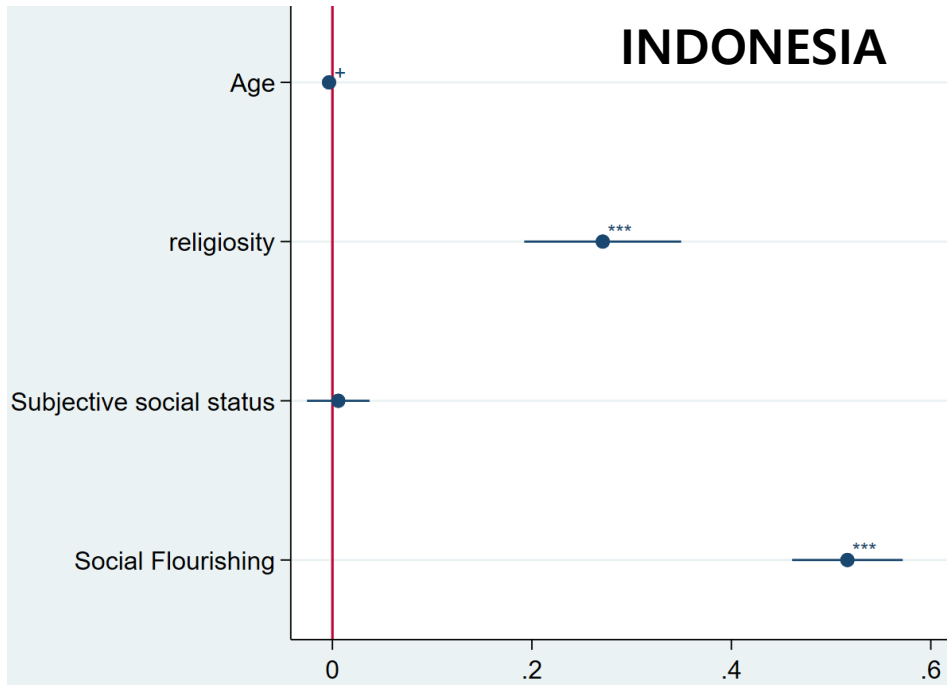
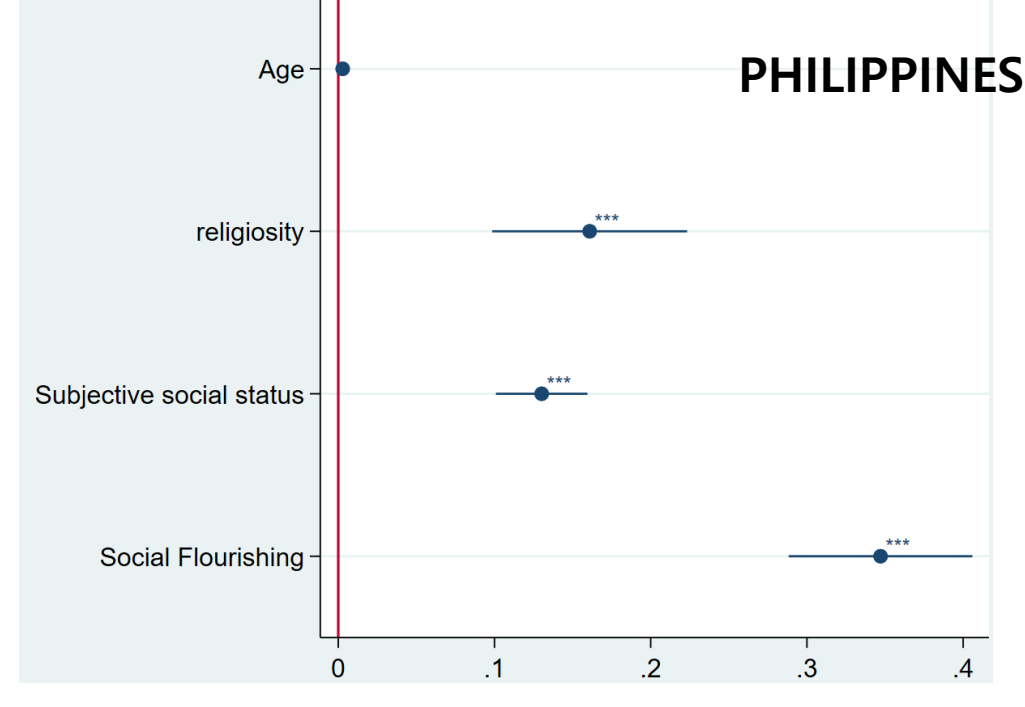
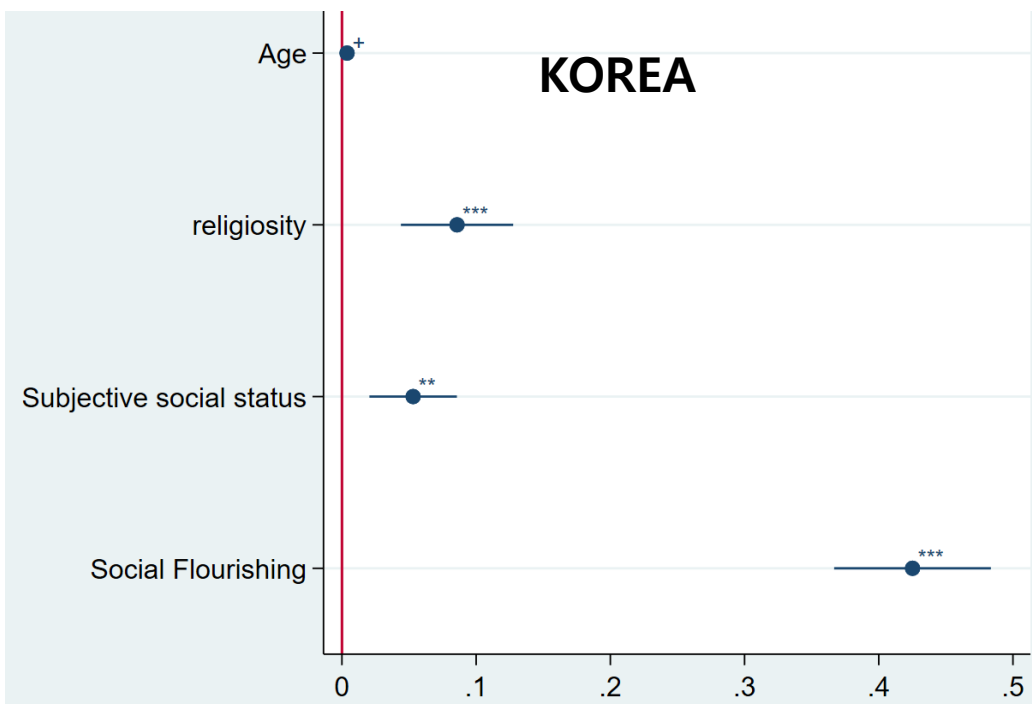
Happiness



Social flourishing and meaning of life

The Multidimensional Existential Meaning Scale (George and Park 2016)

- (1) My life makes sense
- (2) There is nothing special about my existence
- (3) I have aims in my life that are worth striving for
- (4) Even a thousand years from now, it would still matter whether i existed or not
- (5) I have certain life goals that compel me to keep going
- (6) I have overarching goals that guide me in my life
- (7) I know what my life is about
- (8) I can make sense of the things that happen in my life
- (9) I have goals in life that are very important to me
- (10) I understand my life
- (11) Whether my life ever existed matters even in the grand scheme of the universe
- (12) My direction in life is motivating to me
- (13) I am certain that my life is of importance
- (14) looking at my life as a whole, things seem clear to me
- (15) even considering how big the universe is, i can say that my life matters



Conclusion and Discussion

- Social Flourishing as a new concept in well-being studies
- **Elevating Well-Being on a Broader Scale:** Social Flourishing represents a novel approach to assessing well-being at a macro-level. (It can be also used at the meso-level as well.) It offers both a theoretical framework and a practical empirical measure.
- **Parallel to Human Flourishing:** Social Flourishing aligns with the concept of Human Flourishing, providing a complementary perspective on well-being, not just for individuals but for entire communities or societies

Conclusion and Discussion

- **Next steps**
- Enhancing construct validity
 - Survey data indicates the potential need for refinement to create a more robust and reliable measurement of Social Flourishing, ensuring it accurately captures the complex dimensions of societal well-being.
- Exploring other essential domains
 - There may exist additional components that are crucial for understanding and measuring Social Flourishing comprehensively, necessitating further exploration and inclusion.
- Building a stronger theoretical foundation
 - To refine the concept of Social Flourishing, it's imperative to engage in more in-depth theoretical discussions, reinforcing its conceptual underpinnings for practical application.

Thank you very much!

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