

**Social capital and subjective well-being among  
university students in a South African  
context**

**S. Basson**

**24291552**

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Supervisor: Professor Johan C. Potgieter

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## DECLARATION OF LANGUAGE EDITING



I, Mari Grobler, hereby declare that I have edited the research study with the title:

**Social capital and subjective well-being among university students in a South African context**

for **Sasha Basson** for the purpose of submission as a mini-dissertation.

Changes were suggested and implementation was left to the discretion of the author.

Yours sincerely

**Mari Grobler**

SATI membership no: 1002808

## Summary

### **Social capital and subjective well-being among university students in a South African context**

The importance of subjective well-being and determining the best ways to improve this construct, have recently received an increased amount of research attention. This is most probably due to the fact that increased levels of subjective well-being have been found to lead to several desirable outcomes, such as healthier living conditions, critical thinking skills, positive development, greater application of intellect and goal generation (Calvo, Zheng, Kumar, Olgiati, & Berkman, 2012; Mazzucchelli & Purcel, 2015). Diener and Chan (2013) define subjective well-being as an individual's positive perception of affective and cognitive experiences. A key aspect linked to increased subjective well-being is social capital. Social capital is broadly defined as any resource that can be created through persons' interactions with others (Grootaert, Narayan, Jones, & Woolcock, 2004). This construct has been found to have a positive impact on strengthening not only community unity, but also increasing individuals' quality of life (Field, 2008).

The objectives of this study were firstly, to determine the self-reported levels of social capital and the subjective well-being of a group of South African university students, and secondly, to determine the relationship between social capital and subjective well-being within this group of students.

The sample consisted of 141 undergraduate students from the North-West University's Potchefstroom campus. The participants completed three online questionnaires aimed at determining their self-reported level of subjective well-being and social capital. The Fordyce

Emotions Questionnaire (FEQ, Fordyce, 1977), the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS, Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) and the Integrated Questionnaire for the Measurement of Social Capital (SC-IQ, Grootaert et al., 2004) were used in the study.

The self-reported levels of social capital and subjective well-being of this group of students were determined by means of descriptive statistics. In order to determine the relationship between social capital and subjective well-being, correlational analysis was conducted. Both t-tests and Chi-Square analyses were performed to determine the relationship between social capital and subjective well-being due to the nature of the social capital measure used in this study producing both ordinal and nominal level data.

The results indicated that this group of South African students have high levels of self-reported life satisfaction and happiness when compared to international samples. Several domains of social capital show meaningful results. The findings of this study suggest that these students enjoy socialising with others, as is evident by their high group membership (*groups and networks*) as well as their need to get together with others for food or drinks (*social cohesion and inclusion*). A strong sense of community is also evident among this group, as they are willing to help within their community and they believe that others are also willing to assist when a problem arises (*social cohesion and inclusion*). This group of students also indicated that they believe they have the power to change and influence their environment (*empowerment and political action*). Trust; however, was found to be very low among the students.

Furthermore, the study found that there is a relationship between satisfaction with life and several domains of social capital, including *groups and networks, trust and solidarity, collective action and cooperation as well as empowerment and political action*. The students'

self-reported levels of happiness showed significant correlations with all domains of social capital.

The results of the study; therefore, indicate that a relationship exists between social capital and subjective well-being within this group of students. The strong association found between these two constructs could have significant practical implications in terms of interventions aimed at student groups, which can focus on increasing subjective well-being through building trust and social interactions. The understanding of this relationship can contribute towards the successful management of challenges around reconciliation and social integration currently faced by many South African universities.

As the majority of research endeavours focus on individuals' intersubjective experience of life, the influence culture has on the behaviours and perceptions of individuals is often ignored, which hampers a deeper understanding of the interrelations of cultures (Eom & Kim, 2015). Future research should therefore, focus on understanding cross-cultural differences of the relationship between social capital and subjective well-being. An additional consideration for future research should be to focus on the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection to allow for a more detailed understanding of the possible causal relationship that might exist between these two constructs.

### **Keywords**

Social capital, subjective well-being, happiness, life satisfaction, university students



## Opsomming

### **Sosiale Kapitaal en Subjektiewe Welstand van Universiteitstudente in 'n Suid-Afrikaanse Konteks**

Die belangrikheid van subjektiewe welstand en die bepaling van die beste maniere om dit te verbeter, het onlangs toenemende belangstelling in navorsing ontvang. Dit is heel waarskynlik te danke aan die feit dat daar gevind is dat verhoogde vlakke van subjektiewe welstand kan lei tot 'n hele paar gewenste uitkomst soos gesonder lewensomstandighede, kritiese denkvaardighede, positiewe ontwikkeling, groter toepassing van intellek en generasie van doelwitte (Calvo, Zheng, Kumar, Olgiati, & Berkman, 2012; Mazzucchelli & Purcel, 2015). Diener en Chan (2013) definieer subjektiewe welstand as 'n individu se positiewe persepsie van affektiewe en kognitiewe ervarings. 'n Belangrike aspek wat verband hou met verhoogde subjektiewe welstand is sosiale kapitaal. Grootaert, Narayan, Jones, en Woolcock (2004) definieer sosiale kapitaal breedweg as enige hulpbron wat geskep kan word deur middel van persone se interaksie met ander. Daar is bevind dat hierdie konstruk 'n positiewe impak op die bevordering van nie net eenheid binne 'n gemeenskap het nie, maar ook op die verbetering van lewensgehalte van individue (Field, 2008).

Die doelwitte van hierdie studie was eerstens om die self-gerapporteerde vlakke van sosiale kapitaal en subjektiewe welstand van 'n groep Suid-Afrikaanse universiteitstudente te bepaal, en tweedens om die verband tussen sosiale kapitaal en subjektiewe welstand binne hierdie groep studente te bepaal.

Die steekproef het 141 voorgraadse studente van die Potchefstroom-kampus van die Noordwes-Universiteit ingesluit. Die deelnemers het drie vraelyste aanlyn voltooi wat gerig

is op die bepaling van hulle self-gerapporteerde vlakke van subjektiewe welstand en sosiale kapitaal. Die Fordyce Emosies Vraelys (FEQ, Fordyce, 1977), die Lewenstevredenheidskaal (SWLS, Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) en die Geïntegreerde Vraelys vir die Meting van Sosiale Kapitaal (SC-IQ, Grootaert et al., 2004) is in die studie gebruik.

Die resultate dui daarop dat hierdie groep Suid-Afrikaanse studente hoër vlakke van self-gerapporteerde lewenstevredenheid en geluk ervaar in vergelyking met internasionale steekproewe. Verskeie domeine van sosiale kapitaal wys betekenisvolle resultate. Die resultate van hierdie studie dui daarop dat hierdie studente kuier saam met ander geniet soos blyk deur hulle hoë groeplidmaatskap (*groepe en netwerke*) asook hulle behoefte om bymekaar te kom vir kos of drinkgoed (*sosiale samehorigheid en insluiting*). 'n Sterk gevoel van gemeenskap is ook duidelik onder hierdie groep, en hulle is bereid om te help in hulle gemeenskap en glo dat ander ook bereid sal wees om te help wanneer 'n probleem opduik (*sosiale samehorigheid en insluiting*). Hierdie groep studente het ook aangedui dat hulle glo hulle het die krag om hul omgewing te verander en beïnvloed (*bemagtiging en politieke aksie*). Vertroue is egter baie laag onder die studente bevind.

Daar is ook bevind dat daar 'n verband bestaan tussen lewenstevredenheid en 'n paar domeine van sosiale kapitaal, insluitend *groepe en netwerke, vertroue en solidariteit, bemagtiging en politieke aksie* asook *gesamentlike optrede en samewerking*. Die studente se self-gerapporteerde vlakke van geluk toon 'n beduidende korrelasie met alle domeine van sosiale kapitaal.

Die resultate van die studie dui daarop dat daar 'n verband tussen sosiale kapitaal en subjektiewe welsyn bestaan. Die sterk assosiasie wat tussen hierdie twee konstrunkte gevind

is, leen hom tot praktiese implikasies in terme van intervensies wat gerig is op studentegroepe, en gefokus is op die verhoging van subjektiewe welstand deur middel van die bou van sterk vertrouwe en sosiale interaksie. 'n Beter begrip van hierdie verhouding kan bydra tot die suksesvolle bestuur van uitdagings rondom versoening en sosiale integrasie wat tans talle Suid-Afrikaanse universiteite in die gesig gestaar.

Aangesien die meerderheid van navorsingspogings fokus op die intersubjektiewe ervaring van individue se lewens, word die invloed van kultuur op gedrag en persepsies van individue dikwels geïgnoreer; wat nie bevorderlik is vir die ontwikkeling van 'n dieper begrip van die interaksies tussen kulture nie (Eom & Kim, 2015). Toekomstige navorsing kan dus fokus op die verkenning van kruis-kulturele verskille ten opsigte van die verband tussen sosiale kapitaal en subjektiewe welsyn. 'n Bykomende oorweging vir toekomstige navorsing is die gebruik van beide kwantitatiewe en kwalitatiewe metodes van data-insameling om voorsiening te maak vir 'n meer gedetailleerde begrip van die moontlike oorsaaklike verhouding wat kan bestaan tussen hierdie twee konstrunkte.

### **Sleutelterme**

Sosiale kapitaal, subjektiewe welstand, geluk, lewenstevredenheid,  
universiteitstudiante

## Preface

### Article Format

This mini-dissertation follows the article format as described by General Regulations A.13.7 of the North-West University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a professional Master's degree.

### Intended Journal

The targeted journal for publication is the *Journal of Happiness Studies*. The manuscript and subsequent reference list has been formatted according to requirements set forth by the APA (American Psychological Association, 6th edition). In the case where journal specifications differ from the set APA guidelines, the appropriate amendments will be made for publication.

### Instructions to Authors

The *Journal of Happiness Studies* is a peer-reviewed journal dedicated to the scientific understanding of subjective well-being. Content includes investigation into both cognitive and affective components of subjective well-being. The journal addresses the measurement, explanation, conceptualisation, evaluation, imagination, prevalence and study of happiness and includes contributions from a wide variety of disciplines. The journal focuses on the practical investigation of subjective well-being as well as the theoretical consideration of what a good life is.

*Length of paper.* The average length of a submitted manuscript is 7,500 words. The article should be not shorter than 5,000 words and no longer than 10,000 words.

*Manuscript submission.* Any manuscript submitted implies that the work has not been published previously, and that it is not being considered for publication anywhere else. Additionally, the publication must be approved by all co-authors as well as by the responsible authorities at the specific institution where the work has been carried out.

*Title page.* The title page should include: the names(s) of the author(s), a concise and informative title, the affiliation(s) and address(es) of the authors and the contact information, including email addresses, telephone and fax numbers of the corresponding author.

*Abstract and keywords.* A concise abstract of between 150 and 250 words should be submitted. The abstract should not contain any unspecified references or undefined abbreviations. Between four and six keywords should be included for indexing purposes.

*Text formatting.* All manuscripts should be submitted in Word format and should use a plain, normal font. Italics should be used in incidences where emphasis is implied. Automatic page numbering should be used to number all pages.

*Headings and abbreviations.* No more than three levels of headings should be displayed. All abbreviations should be defined when first mentioned and should be used consistently thereafter.

### Letter of Consent

I, the co-author, hereby give consent that Sasha Basson may submit the manuscript for the purpose of a mini-dissertation. It may also be submitted to the *Journal of Happiness Studies* for publication.



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**Professor J. C. Potgieter**

**Co-author and Supervisor**

## **Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

Both subjective well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2008) and social capital (Field, 2008) have independently received increased research attention because of the substantial impact each of these constructs have on the lives of individuals. Calvo, Zheng, Kumar, Olgiati, and Berkman (2012) postulate that individuals with higher subjective well-being display increased health and longevity. Similarly, Green and Haines (2012) found that increased levels of social capital could lead to higher self-reported happiness and health. A search for recent literature however, confirms that the relationship between social capital and subjective well-being remains largely unexplored in South Africa, as research has to date predominately focused on Western populations (Rodriguez-Pose & Von Berlepsch, 2012). Understanding this relationship could contribute not only to our understanding of each of these constructs individually, but also of the effects these two aspects may have on each other. The main objectives of this study were therefore, to determine the self-reported levels of social capital and subjective well-being of a group of South African university students and secondly, to determine the relationship between social capital and subjective well-being within this group of students.

### **Subjective Well-being**

Understanding well-being has become an essential objective for researchers, especially those working within the field of positive psychology (Deci & Ryan, 2008). This is strongly supported by the rapid growth in well-being as the central focus in social science research in recent years (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Dodge, Daly, Huyton, & Sanders, 2012; Haq & Zia, 2013; Huppert, Baylis, & Keverne, 2005; Wissing, 2013).

Research on well-being has made the particular distinction between hedonic and eudaimonic traditions of well-being, as originally proposed by Aristotle (Gallagher, Lopez, & Preacher, 2009; Van Hoorn, 2007). The hedonic tradition relates to happiness and life satisfaction, while eudaimonic philosophy concerns the personal and psychological strengths of individuals (Dodge et al., 2012).

Within the hedonic perspective of well-being, subjective well-being has received increased research attention in recent years (Hooghe & Vanhoutte, 2010; Thorpe, Jayashree, & Hosie, 2010). Well-being is considered subjective when people evaluate their own degree of well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2008). In spite of the criticism against the subjectivity of such self-reported data, Thorpe et al. (2010) found that individuals could in fact convey important information on their underlying emotional states.

Subjective well-being, as portrayed in the already vast body of research on the topic, has typically been divided into an affective and a cognitive component (Padash, Dehnavi, & Botlani, 2012; Thorpe et al., 2010; Van Hoorn, 2007). The cognitive component is based on the life satisfaction of individuals, which involves the self-reported satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their lives (Diener, Inglehart, & Tay, 2013). This aspect has been found to play an important role in positive development and could lead to good adaptive skills and optimal physical and mental health (Park, 2004). The affective component involves one's level of happiness (Padash et al., 2012; Plagnol, 2010; Van Hoorn, 2007), which has traditionally been defined as the predominance of positive affect over negative affect in a person's life (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Evidence indicates that happy people have better general health and increased longevity (Diener & Chan, 2013). Martin Seligman, who summarised research related to the effects of increased happiness in his book *Authentic Happiness* (2011),



found that happy people also have better social relationships, are more optimistic about their circumstances, show increased creativity and are more effective in applying their intelligence.

These affective and cognitive components, in combination referred to as subjective well-being, (Diener & Chan, 2013) have been conceptualised as representing the hedonic perspective of well-being, and its importance is demonstrated in many studies (Padash et al., 2012). Elevated subjective well-being has numerous desirable results such as a healthier and longer life and positive development during adolescence (Calvo et al., 2012). It has been shown that people who are satisfied with life and are happy, also show increased levels of work performance, excel at solving problems, are more resistant to negative situations and have more significant social relationships (Park, 2004). Moreover, individuals with high subjective well-being have stronger relationships, a positive temperament and the tendency to not fixate on negative events (Boyce, 2009; Yilmaz & Arslan, 2013). Subjective well-being has been speculated to have played an important evolutionary role due to its numerous positive effects by increasing individuals' ability to adapt and survive, by increasing the motivation of individuals to engage in their environment and to build resources that enhance coping with negative events (De Neve, Diener, Tay, & Xuereb, 2013; Park, 2004). High subjective well-being is therefore, considered a desirable end state, as it relates to and is an indicator of high overall well-being (Immerfall & Therborn, 2009). The current study therefore, focused on individual well-being from a hedonic perspective, and more specifically, on individuals' levels of subjective well-being.

### **Social Capital**

Like subjective well-being, social capital has seen a noteworthy rise in importance and attention in the social sciences (Field, 2008). Researchers have found that social capital has a

positive impact on strengthening community unity as well as increasing individuals' quality of life (Hamdan, Yusso, & Marzukhi, 2014). Broadly defined as the resources that are created through peoples' relationships with both individuals and groups, social capital is seen as a multi-dimensional concept rather than a single entity (Gauntlett, 2011; Muniady, Mamun, Mohamad, Permarupan, & Zainol, 2015). Social capital also encompasses community relationships, which can influence the interactions of individuals, and include aspects ranging from economic health of the country to voting patterns (Durlauf & Fafchamps, 2015). Social capital is considered in this study as a combination of six domains, as conceptualised by Grootaert et al. (2004). These domains include *groups and networks*, *trust and solidarity*, *collective action and co-operation*, *information and communication*, *social cohesion and inclusion*, and *empowerment and political action*. Each of these domains are briefly outlined in the next paragraph.

*Groups and networks* is the facet most frequently associated with social capital. This reflects individuals' participation in social networks or organisations and the benefits individuals receive from and give to such groups. It further involves group structures, how leaders are selected and how involvement in these groups changes over time (Kirori, 2015). *Trust and solidarity* focuses on the mutual trust between individuals, the quality of their social relations towards each other, and how mutual trust can change over time. *Collective action and co-operation* refers to the joint achievement of individuals in their communities during times of crises and the completion of various projects while working in groups (Hamdan et al., 2014). *Information and communication* refers to the manner in which people within a community receive information and how this information is used in helping them increase their own well-being. *Social cohesion and inclusion* seeks to identify key differences among individuals within a community and how these differences may lead to conflict or the

resolution thereof. *Empowerment and political action* refers to individuals' feelings of personal usefulness and their ability to influence the environment around them on a community and political front.

Research has indicated that high levels of social capital in terms of increased communal support and security within communities can have a positive impact on the physical and mental health of individuals (Loch, De Souza, Mesas, Martinez-Gomes, & Rodríguez-Artalejo, 2015). Matsushima and Matsunaga (2015) found that trust and group membership in particular have a strong positive effect on happiness, and literature suggests that regions with higher trust often experience higher levels of happiness. Early indications in international research points to the fact that social capital can have a significant influence on well-being through the potential effects it may have on happiness, education, welfare and health (Green & Haines, 2012). The majority of such studies have however, been conducted within Western countries (Portela, Neira, & Del Mar Salinas-Jimenez, 2012; Rodriguez-Pose & Von Berlepsch, 2012).

### **The Relationship Between Social Capital and Subjective Well-being in the South African Context**

In the only prominent South African study that could be found, Cramm, Moller and Nieboer (2012) discovered a strong association between social capital and subjective well-being among individuals residing in an impoverished township in the Eastern Cape. Contrastingly, Pingle (2001) found social capital to be absent in Sub-Saharan Africa. Pringle (2001) concludes, somewhat controversially, that due to the absence of democracy, economic development and good governance in this area – social capital has never been able to develop fully. Research in South Africa, which investigates the prevalence and nature of social

capital, has seen an increase in more recent years. The focus however, has been limited to its association with processes of reconciliation and social development (Hagan, 2012). It is clear from existing research that the association between social capital and subjective well-being does not exist independently from socio-demographic and sociocultural factors (Bjornskov, 2006; Hooghe & Vanhoutte, 2010). Gender and education have been found to be among the most influential in determining subjective well-being (Thorpe et al., 2010).

### **Social Capital, Subjective Well-being and the Role of Gender**

The link between social capital and subjective well-being cannot be investigated in isolation. Clopton (2012) found that gender specifically, has a unique role in the development of social capital in that women tend to report higher levels of social capital than men. Research further suggests that women typically have smaller social networks than men, but that women generally place greater importance on these relationships (Green & Haines, 2012).

Ramia (2012) and Van Hoorn (2007) have also found that women generally report higher levels of subjective well-being than men. An international study by The Nielsen Company in 2008 (as cited in Thorpe et al., 2010) found that the happiness of men is typically determined by monetary factors, while for women happiness is determined by their relationships and friendships. These studies suggest that gender should be an important consideration when investigating the relationship between social capital and subjective well-being.

### **Social Capital and Subjective Well-being During Tertiary Education**

Kaasa and Parts (2008) found that age, particularly as it relates to individuals' education level, plays an important role in individuals' development of social capital. When considering

the context of tertiary education, studying at a university is a key life stage of emerging adulthood, typically encompassing two developmental phases (i.e. late adolescence and early adulthood), as proposed by Erikson (Ozben, 2013). Greater levels of social capital have been found to predict better adjustment during these developmental phases (Pettit, Erath, Lansford, Dodge, & Bates, 2011). Tertiary education occurs at a time when students face multiple challenges and in conjunction with academic challenges, numerous students have to adapt to multiple roles (student, friend, colleague, etc.) as well as successfully negotiate the transitional phase from adolescence into adulthood (Santos, Magramo, Oguan, & Paat, 2014).

Students in surroundings rich in social capital have been found to typically have higher expectations and aspirations, and they are also exposed to greater personal support, knowledge sharing, trust and a broader social environment (Neri & Ville, 2008). Tertiary educational institutes have therefore, been found to be one of the major contexts in which individuals are able to develop and reap the rewards of social capital.

Within the context of tertiary education, subjective well-being has also been found to have several constructive outcomes. Some studies have found a positive relationship between tertiary educational achievements and subjective well-being (Ramia, 2012). High subjective well-being has been linked to educational aspiration, academic engagement, elevated academic achievement and increased class attendance among university students (Ratelle, Simard, & Guay, 2012). Individuals with higher levels of subjective well-being are also more active, selfless, engaged and enjoy the company of others more than those with lower self-reported subjective well-being levels (Ratelle et al., 2012). In combination, the above-mentioned research suggest tertiary education to be the ideal context for the investigation of social capital and subjective well-being, as both constructs have been shown in isolation to be

important for successful adjustment and functioning at this stage in the lives of individuals.

Despite the individual contributions these constructs make to successful adjustment and functioning during tertiary education, there remains a prominent gap in understanding the way in which social capital relates to subjective well-being among university students within a South African context. The development of a proper understanding of the association between social capital and subjective well-being can provide the ideal opportunity to re-examine current policies and interventions geared towards increasing these two constructs among university students in a South African context. It could furthermore play a significant role in the process of reconciliation and social integration that the North-West University, and indeed many other South African universities, are currently undergoing.

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## Manuscript for Examination

### Manuscript Title, Authors and Addresses

Social capital and subjective well-being among university students in a South African context

Sasha Basson, Johan C. Potgieter

All correspondence to:

Johan C. Potgieter

Department of Psychology

School for Psychosocial Behavioural Sciences

North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus

Private Bag X6001

Potchefstroom

2520

South Africa

Email: [johan.potgieter@nwu.ac.za](mailto:johan.potgieter@nwu.ac.za)

### Abstract

This study aimed to determine the self-reported levels of subjective well-being and social capital of a group of university students, and to explore the relationship between these constructs. The sample consisted of 141 undergraduate students from the North-West University's Potchefstroom campus, South Africa. The participants completed three online questionnaires aimed at determining their self-reported levels of subjective well-being and social capital. The Fordyce Emotions Scale, the Satisfaction With Life Scale and the Integrated Questionnaire for the Measurement of Social Capital were used in the study.

Descriptive statistics were used to determine the self-reported levels of subjective well-being and social capital of the sample. As the social capital measure used in this study delivered both ordinal and nominal level data, both t-tests and Chi-Square tests were used to explore the relationship between these variables.

The results indicated that this group of South African students have higher levels of self-reported life satisfaction and happiness than was found in international samples. The data also confirmed international results, showing that higher levels of social capital are associated with increased levels of subjective well-being.

The increased understanding of the relationship between social capital and subjective well-being provides the ideal opportunity to re-examine current policies and interventions aimed at increasing both these constructs among university students in a South African context. In addition, it could play a significant role in the process of reconciliation and social integration that the North-West University, and many other South African Universities, are currently undergoing.

**Keywords**

Social capital, subjective well-being, happiness, life satisfaction, university students

## Introduction

Research on well-being, which can broadly be described as the optimal functioning of individuals, has seen a dramatic increase in the past decade (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Dodge, Daly, Huyton, & Sanders, 2012). A particular distinction has been made between hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives on well-being (Gallagher, Lopez, & Preacher, 2009). The hedonic perspective focuses on happiness and satisfaction with life, collectively referred to as subjective well-being, while the eudaimonic tradition places focus on the psychological factors of well-being, which involves the search for living a good life (McMahan & Estes, 2011). Since its inception with the work of Diener (1984), subjective well-being has become a topic of particular interest (Thorpe, Jayashree, & Hosie, 2010; Van Hoorn, 2007) and is the focal point in this article.

In spite of the subjective nature of this construct, and the criticism launched against the use of self-reporting measures of well-being, evidence have been found for the validity of such measures in capturing important information regarding the underlying emotional state of individuals (Thorpe et al., 2010). Increased levels of subjective well-being were recently linked to a number of positive outcomes, including improved health (Diener & Chan, 2013) and optimal personal and educational development (Calvo, Zheng, Kumar, Olgiati, & Berkman, 2012; De Wilde & Van Yperen, 2015; Park, 2004). As such, it has become of primary importance to understand the circumstances that can lead to the optimal development and maintenance of subjective well-being (Ramia, 2012; Van Hoorn, 2007).

In this endeavour, researchers have found that subjective well-being is influenced by a number of internal (e.g., personality, affect and health) and external (such as the social environment of individuals) factors (Diener & Chan, 2013). Counting among the main



determinates of high subjective well-being, social factors have been found to strongly drive an increase of this construct within different circumstances. Recently, a growing number of research studies have focused on investigating the relationship between social capital and subjective well-being.

Social capital can be defined as the relationships between individuals and the resources gained from these interactions (Ghamari, 2012; Grootaert, Naraya, Jones, & Woolcock, 2004; Putnam, 2000). Helliwell and Putnam (2004) found early evidence that social capital is one of the main drivers of subjective well-being. Rodriguez-Pose and Von Berlepsch (2014) have recently illustrated that within social capital, trust and social interaction have the greatest impact on happiness. The majority of studies investigating the relationship between social capital and subjective well-being have however, been conducted in developed countries (Sulemana, 2015), and literature indicates that the investigation into social capital and subjective well-being is lacking in South Africa (Cramm, Moller & Nieboer, 2012). These results call for a more context-specific investigation of the relationship between social capital and subjective well-being, since literature has illustrated that many factors have an influence on the development of these two constructs. Within a South African context, Cramm et al. (2012) recently found a strong relationship between social capital and subjective well-being among individuals living in an impoverished community in the Eastern Cape. This research substantiates international findings highlighting the association between social capital and subjective well-being (Portela, Neira, Del Mar Salinas-Jimenez, 2012; Rodriguez-Pose & Von Berlepsch, 2012). The association between social capital and subjective well-being does however, not exist independently from socio-demographic and sociocultural factors (Bjornskov, 2006; Hooghe & Vanhoutte, 2010). Gender plays, for instance, a unique role in determining the relationship between these two constructs. Women typically report being

happier than men (Van Hoorn, 2007) and generally also report higher levels of social capital (Clopton, 2012). Kaasa and Parts (2008) found that age, particularly as it relates to individuals' education level, plays an important role in individuals' development of social capital. Within a tertiary educational setting, students with higher subjective well-being perform better academically, have higher self-esteem and are more active socially (Park, 2004).

It is therefore, clear that an exploration of the way in which social capital relates to subjective well-being among university students within a South African context, could add significant value to the current knowledge base. This knowledge can translate to a proper understanding of how social capital can influence subjective well-being, and could additionally provide an ideal opportunity to re-examine current policies and interventions geared towards increasing social capital, and how it can ultimately contribute to the subjective well-being of university students. An increased understanding of the relationship between these variables could also play a potentially important role in aiding the reconciliation and social integration challenges faced by many South African universities.

### **Aim**

This study aimed to explore the relationship between social capital and subjective well-being among male and female university students in a South African context. The specific aims of this research were to:

1. determine the self-reported levels of social capital and subjective well-being of a group of university students; and

2. determine the relationship between social capital and subjective well-being within this group of students.

## **Method of Investigation**

### **Research Design and Procedure**

A cross-sectional survey design was implemented in this study. This quantitative, non-experimental research design is mainly descriptive in nature, and involves studying precise variables as they exist without any manipulation from the researchers (Belli, 2009).

For the purposes of data collection, this study made use of the existing internet-based infrastructure implemented for the international *SoCaWe* (*Social Capital and Well-being*) project. The participants were required to visit a website to complete three online questionnaires. The website offered an information page introducing the researchers associated with the study and explaining the main objectives as well as information regarding the anonymity and confidentiality of information gathered for the study. Informed consent was implied with voluntary completion of the online questionnaires.

Potential participants were provided with the web address for the *SoCaWe* project and could complete the online questionnaires in their own time. Once a participant completed the questionnaires, the data were automatically entered into an electronic database and were available for data analysis. Feedback on the results of the study was provided during information sessions on campus.

## Research Participants

After receiving permission to use the website constructed specifically for the *SoCaWe* project, prospective participants were made aware of the study through various communication channels. These channels included placing an invitation to participate in the survey on the North-West University's online student portal *Efundi*, distribution of pamphlets regarding the survey on the North-West University's Potchefstroom Campus, information sessions with the Student Representative Council, campus residences' House Committees and Academic Student Associations, who relayed the invitation to take part in the survey to students.

In order to qualify to participate in this study, students had to be enrolled for any undergraduate qualification at the North-West University's Potchefstroom campus. Additionally, students had to be able to read and understand English and have access to a computer with internet capabilities.

The participants were therefore, recruited by making use of convenience sampling, and data were obtained from 141 undergraduate students studying at the North-West University in Potchefstroom. The participants included both male (n=55) and female (n=86) students currently enrolled at the university, whose ages ranged between 18 to 30 years with an average age of 20 years.

With regard to the demographic distribution of the sample, 4% of the participants were black, 88% white and 5% were coloured. The sample consisted of students registered for different courses at the North-West University's Potchefstroom Campus. All the students were registered for a full time bachelor's degree, with the majority of the sample studying in

the Faculty of Engineering (29%) and the Faculty of Law (16%). Other undergraduate courses that students were enrolled for included courses offered in the Faculties of Health Sciences, Arts, Educational Sciences, Economic and Management Sciences and Natural Sciences. The vast majority of the sample were South African residents (95%), with a greater portion indicating that they are not living with their parents (68%), but either living in a flat (42%) or making use of student accommodation (58%).

### Measuring Instruments

Data were gathered by using three questionnaires measuring happiness, life satisfaction and social capital.

The *Fordyce Emotions Questionnaire* (FEQ, Fordyce, 1977) measures participants' current level of happiness. This measure was included as it has been a common tool used in happiness research for over 30 years (O'Toole, Ogier-Price, & Hucks, 2010). This self-report measure consists of two items. The first question concerns participants' general level of happiness rated on a 10-point Likert scale, with response options ranging from 0 (indicating extreme unhappiness) to 10 (indicating extreme happiness). The second item requires that participants rate the percentage of time that they feel happy, unhappy and neutral, with the sum of these percentages amounting to 100%. The FEQ demonstrates high construct validity as it directly measures happiness (Fordyce, 1977). Evidence for its convergent validity was found through significant correlations between the FEQ and the *Satisfaction With Life Scale* (.61-.72) (McKibban & Nelson, 2001). Fordyce (1977) reported the scale's test-retest reliability to vary between .86 and .62 over numerous time periods ranging from two weeks to as long as four months (Fordyce, 1977). McKibban and Nelson (2001) more recently found similar results, indicating strong test-retest reliability for the FEQ for a two-day period (.98)

and for a four-month period (.67), attesting to its internal consistency. A Cronbach's coefficient alpha of .85 was found for the FEQ in this study.

The *Satisfaction With Life Scale* (SWLS, Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) measures the global life satisfaction of participants. The scale was included as it provides an overall score of the participants' current level of life satisfaction and because together with the FEQ, an indication of the participants' overall subjective well-being could be provided. The scale is a self-report instrument and consists of five items through which participants rate their agreement or disagreement with statements regarding their own life satisfaction on a 7-point Likert scale. The Likert scale ranges from 1 (indicating strong disagreement) to 7 (indicating strong agreement with item content). Various international studies have illustrated the internal consistency of the SWLS and found Cronbach's coefficient alphas ranging between .82 and .87 (Ozben, 2013; Van Beuningen, 2012; Vera-Villaruel, Urzúa, Pavez, Celis-Atenas, & Silva, 2012). Several studies have also confirmed the reliability of the SWLS in various South African contexts with Cronbach's coefficient alphas ranging between .77 and .92 (Maluka & Grieve, 2008; Westaway, Martiz, & Golele, 2003). A Cronbach's alpha of .85 was found for this study.

The *Integrated Questionnaire for the Measurement of Social Capital* (SC-IQ, Grootaert et al., 2004) measures the six domains of social capital, conceptualised by Grootaert et al., (2004) as trust and solidarity, groups and networks, information and communication, collective action and co-operation, empowerment and political action, and social cohesion and inclusion. The scale is a self-report measure consisting of 27 items. Many of the items on the scale require a simple answer (e.g., How many friends do you have these days?) while others request participants to identify the best choice on a scale – the instrument thus

producing both nominal and ordinal level data. The scale is therefore, descriptive in nature, and data concerning the validity for the measure as a whole are not available (Chhabra, 2012). This measure was developed by the World Bank (Grootaert et al., 2004) and has been successfully used as a legitimate measure of social capital in numerous studies (Babaei, Ahmad, & Gill, 2012; Cheung & Phillimore, 2013; Foxton & Jones, 2011).

### **Data Analysis**

Data were analysed by means of SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software Version 22 (SPSS Incorporated, 2011). The Cronbach's coefficient alpha was determined for the main measuring instruments used to measure subjective well-being in this study in order to determine the internal consistency of these measures.

Descriptive statistics were calculated to determine the participants' demographic profile as well as the self-reported levels of social capital and subjective well-being of the participants. These analyses were also conducted separately for the two gender groups to allow for comparison.

Both t-tests and chi-square statistics were used to determine the relationship between social capital and subjective well-being due to the nature of the social capital measure delivering both ordinal and nominal level data. T-tests were used to analyse the ordinal data, while the chi-square test was used to analyse the nominal data. Effect sizes (Cohen's *d*) were used to determine the practical significance of the differences in means observed. In terms of the interpretation of the effect size, the following guidelines were used:  $d=.20$  for a small effect,  $d=.50$  for a medium effect and  $d=.80$  for a large effect (Steyn, 2000). Cramer's *V* was used as a measure of the strength of a relationship between two nominal variables where the

following guidelines were followed:  $\eta^2 = .10$  for a small effect,  $\eta^2 = .30$  for a medium effect and  $\eta^2 = .50$  for a large effect (Steyn, 2000).

### **Ethical Considerations**

This study was conducted in agreement with the Code of Ethical Conduct of the South African Professional Board of Psychology. Ethical approval was obtained from the Health Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of the North-West University, Potchefstroom campus (NWU-00159-14-A1). The participants were invited to visit the website to voluntarily complete the online survey. A short description of the purpose of the study was presented to the participants immediately upon accessing the online page, allowing them to make an informed decision regarding participation in the study. This information page outlined the general aims of the study, introduced the researchers involved, how data collection worked, the time needed to complete the survey as well as all matters related to confidentiality, anonymity, privacy and potential uses of the data.

The participants therefore, had the time and opportunity to make an informed decision about taking part in the study. Participation was completely voluntary, and informed consent was implied when the participants decided to continue with the survey. The participants also had the opportunity to browse through the website and questionnaire at their own leisure, and discontinue their participation at any stage without having to provide any reasons for doing so.

The study did not make use of a clinical population and although students remain a vulnerable group to investigate, this study aimed to explore the functioning and experiences of the general student population. If any of the participants experienced emotional reactions



due to taking part in the survey, contact details of the local research team were given to them who then referred them to existing university structures such as the Institution for Psychotherapy and Well-being if deemed necessary.

Risks involving the loss of anonymity were minimised by making use of participant numbers, and no personal identifying information was gathered. The study posed no physical or financial threat to any of the participants. The participants had the choice of receiving feedback through information sessions conducted by the Student Representative Council as well as having access to the results by revisiting the website.

All of the data collected during the course of the study were stored in a secure location to guarantee privacy and confidentiality. The principal investigator regulates access to the information.

## **Results**

### **Descriptive Statistics Regarding the Participants' Self-reported Levels of Subjective Well-being and Social Capital**

In addressing the first objective of this study, the self-reported levels of social capital and subjective well-being among the group of students are reported in Table 1. Subjective well-being is conceptualised as the combination of the level of happiness of persons (i.e. the predominance of positive affect over negative affect) and their level of life satisfaction (Kirmani, Sharma, Anas, & Sanam, 2015). Table 1 indicates the mean scores for both of these variables for the total sample as well as the male and female subgroups. The mean life satisfaction score for the male students was 26.55 while for the female students a slightly lower mean score of 25.05 was found. The summed aggregate mean score of 25.66 for the

total sample is indicative of a “high score” (25-29), according to the guidelines for the SWLS as proposed by Diener (2006).

Table 1 also outlines the self-reported levels of happiness for this group of participants. A mean score of 7.48 was found for the male students, while the female students reported a slightly lower level of happiness ( $M=7.21$ ). The group as a whole obtained a mean score of 7.32. According to the guidelines set by Fordyce (1988), happiness scores between 4 and 9 are considered high, and scores between 0 and 3 are considered low. These results indicate that the students in this sample feel fairly good and somewhat cheerful in their day-to-day lives. Additionally, with regard to the frequency of happiness among the participants, it was found that the male students on average feel happy 53.38% of the time, neutral 27.43% of the time and unhappy 19.19% of the time. The female students indicated a lower average amount of time that they feel happy (49.6%), while feeling neutral 31% of the time and unhappy 18.64% of the time. Despite the higher scores obtained by the males on indices of both life satisfaction and happiness, these differences are not significant, and with only a small effect in practice. An effect size of only .25 was found when comparing the two gender groups' satisfaction with life, while an even smaller effect size of .15 was found for the difference in happiness between the two genders. As such, further reporting and analysis focusing on the group as a whole and not on specific genders are necessary.

In order to obtain an indication of the participants' levels of subjective well-being, which is considered in literature to be a combination of their happiness and life satisfaction, the level of correlation between these two variables was determined. In Table 2, a strong correlation can be seen to exist between happiness and satisfaction with life with a correlation

coefficient of .57. Furthermore, Table 2 shows a strong correlation ( $r=.48$ ) between satisfaction with life and the amount of time students in this group feel happy.

The following section presents summary statistics of each of the domains of social capital as measured with the SC-IQ due to the descriptive nature of the social capital measure. Social capital can be seen as the collective value individuals obtain from social interactions (Grootaert et al., 2004), which can be divided into six distinct domains – each of which will be described individually below.

*Groups and networks.* This dimension looks specifically at participation in various social groups, and the value individuals gain from and contribute to these networks. The questions within this dimension also aim to assess the diversity of the groups and networks individuals belong to. The majority of participants (73%) indicated that they are members of at least one group, with the three most important groups being university residence clubs (19.9%), sports clubs (17.7%) and church groups (15.6%). The majority of the participants indicated that the members within the groups they belong to share the same religion (60.3%) and educational background (51.1%). However, the participants indicated that other group members do differ in income levels (63.1%) as well as the political party they support (60.3%). Most often (65.2%) these groups indicated to interact with groups outside of the town or city within which members reside.

When considering the participants' social networks, the majority of participants indicated that they have between four and ten close friends (57.4%), while a very small percentage (1.4%) indicated that they have no close friends. A total of 51.8% indicated that they have one or two people to whom they feel close enough to borrow a small amount of money from.

*Trust and solidarity.* This dimension focuses on the level of specific trust among individuals, but also the general trust among neighbours, strangers and key service providers (such as those in the health, educational and agricultural sectors). The majority of participants do not believe that people can be trusted (72.3%). A total of 47.5% of the participants felt that one has to be constantly alert, otherwise someone is likely to take advantage of you. Only 30.5% indicated that this is not the case, while the remaining 22% neither agree nor disagree with this statement. Trust in government officials was generally low, with 57.4% of the participants feeling that local government officials cannot be trusted, and a higher percentage (78%) feeling the same way about central government officials. When looking at the participants' evaluation of their own level of solidarity with, commitment to, as well as their contribution within their community, the vast majority of the sample reported that they would be willing to contribute their time (87.9%) or money (75.2%) to a community project, even if it would not benefit them directly. Additionally, 61% of the participants agree that people within their social groups would be willing to help if it is needed.

*Collective action and co-operation.* This dimension investigates the willingness of individuals within a group to work together in response to a problem. It therefore, serves as a gauge of the extent of collective action within a community as well as the willingness of community members to work together and co-operate. The majority of participants (66%) indicated that they have participated in communal activities in the past 12 months, with 63.1% indicating that they have participated in at least one activity during this time. A total of 46.8% of the participants believe that community members will co-operate to try and solve a serious problem within the community, should such a problem arise.

*Information and communication.* This dimension looks at how individuals access information. The results obtained from this dimension simply aim to look at the main sources of information individuals make use of as well as their typical means of communication. The three main sources of information about what the government is doing includes relatives, friends and neighbours (44.7%), local newspapers (22.7%) and national newspapers (18.4%). Moreover, this dimension investigates how regularly individuals receive communication. Most of the participants (92.2%) indicated that they have made or received at least one phone call within the last three days.

*Social cohesion and inclusion.* This dimension seeks to determine the extent of differences existing within social groups. The majority of participants (61%) agreed that their city or town is not characterised by significant differences between the people who live there and 44.7% felt that the differences that do exist have not caused problems. The differences indicated by the rest as having caused problems are differences in educational levels (26.2%) and differences in financial wealth (22.7%).

This dimension also investigates everyday social interactions with friends. Not surprisingly, almost all of the participants (94.3%) within this student population indicated that they get together with other people regularly to have drinks or food. These friendship groups were typically similar in other ethnic or linguistic backgrounds (50.4%) while they differed in economic status (69.5%) and religious orientation (63.1%). Personal safety was of general concern, as the participants indicated not feeling safe in their own homes, with only 48.9% indicating that they feel very safe or moderately safe.

*Empowerment and political action.* The particular focus of this dimension is the extent to which individuals feel they are able to make decisions that can influence their

environment. This dimension aims to measure the perceived ability of individuals to affect everyday activities that may change their lives. The majority of participants (80.9%) indicated that they consider themselves to have the power to change the course of their lives. Encouragingly, the majority (63.8%) also did vote in the preceding national elections.

### **Association Between Social Capital and Subjective Well-being**

The second objective of this study was to determine the relationship between social capital and subjective well-being among the group of students. The association between the two components of subjective well-being, namely happiness and satisfaction with life, and the main domains of social capital was determined through both Spearman's rank order correlations for the ordinal data and chi-square statistics with Cramer's V for the nominal data due to the nature of the questionnaire delivering both ordinal and nominal level data.

Table 3.1 outlines the results obtained from the Spearman's rank order correlations between subjective well-being and social capital. The first column indicates the correlation between the various aspects of social capital and happiness. The second column outlines the correlation between the various aspects of social capital and satisfaction with life. Items from all six domains of social capital showed significant associations with at least one of the components of subjective well-being. Satisfaction with life also showed associations with a number of items from the *groups and networks, trust and solidarity, collective action and cooperation as well as empowerment and political action* domains. Happiness was associated with various items from all of the domains of social capital.

In order to determine the relationship between the nominal data of the SC-IQ and subjective well-being, satisfaction with life and happiness were categorised as high or low

and chi-square tests were performed with the results appearing in Table 3.2. Similarly, table 3.2 outlines first the relationship between the various aspects of social capital and happiness. The second column highlights the relationship between the various aspects of social capital and satisfaction with life. From the table it is clear that statistically significant relationships ( $p < .05$ ) were found to exist between only two domains of social capital and life satisfaction. In support of the results reported above for ordinal level data, the participants' life satisfaction showed a significant association with the *groups and networks* domain of social capital and specifically with the number of times the participants got together with organised group members sharing the same religious background. Interestingly, a positive relationship was also shown to exist between the participants' life satisfaction and getting together socially with people of different religious groups for food or drinks in a social environment. This may indicate that similar religious affiliations may be more important when socialising in organised groups and organisations, but less so when socialising with friends. Possible explanations for the patterns observed will however, receive more explicit attention in the section that follows.

### Discussion

The study aimed to determine the relationship between social capital and subjective well-being within a South African student population. To achieve this, the first objective was to describe the students' self-reported levels of subjective well-being and social capital.

With regard to the overall happiness and satisfaction with life scores, the results show that this group of students obtained high scores in comparison to results found in previous studies. In spite of the recent turmoil experienced by South African universities, this group of students reported experiencing life as enjoyable and they believe that major life domains,

such as friendship and family life, are going well. The results regarding the students' life satisfaction proved to be much higher than what has been reported in recent South African literature. Jackson, Van de Vijver and Fouché (2014) found a satisfaction with life mean score of 3.65 among white South African students. These high scores, as well as the strong correlation observed between the happiness and life satisfaction components, also reflect positively on the level of subjective well-being experienced by this group of students. These results seem to indicate that this group of South African students is on average happier and more satisfied with their lives than international and local samples tested recently. These results are in line with research conducted by Clark (2014) from Ipsos, a leading market research company in South Africa, who found that South Africa is among the top five happiest countries (also including Latin America, North America, the Middle East, Asia Pacific as well as Europe). It therefore, seems that despite the low trust and high crime rates and the challenges that recently characterised the South African tertiary education sector, this group of students was able to maintain their level of happiness and a high degree of life satisfaction.

These results seem to hold true for both the male and female subgroups in this sample, as both groups are on average happier than neutral or unhappy, and relatively satisfied with their lives. Although not significantly so, the male students in this sample were generally both slightly happier and more satisfied with their lives than their female counterparts. This finding seems to be in line with Jackson et al. (2014) who found among students of an institution of higher learning in South Africa a mean life satisfaction score of 3.37 for female students and 3.47 for male students. These results do however, seem to contradict the trend in international studies (Ramia, 2012; Van Hoorn, 2007) where women tend to typically report higher levels of both happiness and life satisfaction when compared to men.



The researchers deemed it appropriate to analyse the remaining data for the group as a whole due to the absence of differences of statistical significance between gender groups regarding happiness or life satisfaction, and the fact that differences observed only had a small effect in practice.

When focusing on the most prominent domains of social capital revealed by the SC-IQ, the results indicated that the majority of students within this sample were members of at least one group. This finding supports the research conducted by Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, and Hayek (2006) who are of the opinion that faculty staff, friends, family and peers are one of the most important aspects influencing both the personal and academic functioning of college students. The importance of strong social ties was confirmed with the participants indicating that they typically have between four and ten friends, and have at least one friend who they could borrow money from. This is in line with a research study performed by Manago and Vaughn (2015) who indicated that feeling socially connected to others has the most essential effect on individuals' happiness and well-being, and may partly explain the high level of subjective well-being observed within this group. Group member diversity was indicated as a source of concern for some of the participants, as differences in levels of education and wealth were reported to have caused problems. South Africa is known to be characterised by significant inequality in terms of wealth and education that can often lead to individuals blaming their situation on others who are wealthier or better educated (Keeton, 2014).

This could partly explain the results indicating that trust among this group of students is low as it coincides with research done by Mmotlane, Struwig and Roberts (2010) who, in their investigation of social attitudes among South Africans, concluded that South Africa as a

whole can be classified as a low-trust society. In line with this, most of the participants reported not feeling safe in their homes. This is to be expected given the increased crime statistics for 2015 released by the South African Police Service in South Africa (Gould, 2016).

In spite of these challenges, the participants seem to seek a sense of community and were able to maintain the belief that members of their community will work together to solve problems. Additionally, the participants reported a willingness to contribute to society by offering their time and money to community projects, and they also believe that members of their communities would come together when a problem arises. These results are in line with the hypothesis formulated by Hampton and Wellman (2003) that social interaction and community participation offer support, assistance and social control among its members as well as increasing subjective well-being by being able to provide support to others. This finding is further supported by the fact that this group of students reported to often get together with others for food or drinks. This high level of social interaction could also partly explain the high levels of subjective well-being among this group of students. The nature of this relationship receives more explicit attention later on.

Within the context of local government elections to follow later in 2016, and central government elections to follow in 2019, it was also encouraging to see that the participants take the potential impact they could have on the future of this country seriously as is evident from the high percentage of the students who voted in the previous national elections.

When shifting focus to the relationship between social capital and subjective well-being, the results indicate that all the domains of social capital show associations of varying

significance with these participants' self-reported levels of both happiness and satisfaction with life.

Happiness was associated with items from all of the domains of social capital. A significant association exists between happiness and the social capital domain of *groups and networks* when looking at the amount of groups and close friends the participants reported being part of and having. This is in line with results found by Portela et al. (2012) who indicated that the more close and trustworthy friends persons have, the happier they believe themselves to be. When considering the social capital domain of *trust and solidarity*, the results indicate a positive relationship with happiness – especially regarding the number of people in their community who are willing to help and the high level of trust among members of the same ethnic or linguistic groups. Thus, the more the participants reported trusting others of the same ethnicity, the happier they also reported themselves to be. This finding is supported by research conducted by Dinesen and Sonderskov (2015) who illustrated that ethnic diversity within groups negatively affects trust.

Furthermore, happiness shows a positive association with *collective action and cooperation* as is demonstrated by the number of times people have gotten together to participate in communal activities.

The results also suggest a relationship between happiness and *information and communication*, specifically when making and receiving phone calls. This leads to the inference that frequent communication with others is associated with increased levels of happiness. This finding is again supported by research conducted by Helliwell and Huang (2013) who found that communication with friends and family can have a positive correlation with subjective well-being.

Happiness also showed a strong association with the social capital domain, *social cohesion and inclusion*, as is evident when looking at this group's self-reported social interactions with others by getting together for food or drinks. This finding is supported by results found by Rodriguez-Pose and Von Berlepsch (2014) who indicated that socialising with others is one of the main drives for happiness. These results illustrate that socialising with others has a great effect on happiness, and the more interaction occurs between friends, they happier they feel.

Happiness also showed a positive association with *empowerment and political action*, as was revealed by the participants' self-indication that they are happy and having the power to change their own lives. This is in line with results found by Ghamari (2012) who indicated that individuals' thoughts regarding their own levels of self-worth and control are able to either positively or negatively influence their level of happiness.

When reflecting on the results regarding the association between the participants' life satisfaction and social capital, a significant association is identified between satisfaction with life and the social capital domain *groups and networks*, as was revealed through correlations with items asking, for instance; the number of people the participants could borrow money from, the number of groups participants belong to as well as the number of close friends they have. Furthermore, a relationship was shown to exist between satisfaction with life and *trust and solidarity*, as is evident by the number of people in the community the participants feel would be willing to help when a problem arises. The stronger the sense of community and trust among community members, the more satisfied the participants are with their own lives. This finding is supported by the positive correlation between participants' life satisfaction and the social capital domain *collective action and co-operation*, as represented by, for

instance, the number of times people have gotten together to participate in communal activities as well as shared religion between group members. This finding is in line with a study done by Civitci (2015) who found that increased participation in extracurricular activities (such as socialising with others and engaging in group activities) leads to increased life satisfaction among college students. Moreover, this supports the conclusion of research conducted by Lim and Putnam (2010) regarding the positive relation religion has with satisfaction with life.

Furthermore, satisfaction with life also revealed a positive association with *empowerment and political action*, revealed by looking at participants' self-indication that they are happy and having the power to change their own lives.

In general, all of the domains of social capital; therefore, show associations of varying significance with either the components of subjective well-being or the social capital domains *groups and networks, trust and solidarity, collective action and cooperation as well as empowerment and political action* and correlate positively with both happiness and life satisfaction. From these results it can be concluded that among the students participating in the study a relatively strong relationship seems to exist between social capital and subjective well-being. This conclusion is in accordance with results found by Han, Heaseung and Lee (2012); Helliwell and Putnam (2004); Tokuda, Fujii and Inoguchi (2010) and Yip et al. (2007) who found the existence of a relationship between social capital and subjective well-being among general populations.

## Conclusion

The study aimed to determine firstly, a group of students' self-reported levels of subjective well-being and social capital and secondly, to determine whether a relationship exists between their self-reported levels of these two constructs. With regard to the first objective, it was found that this group of students reported much higher scores on both happiness and satisfaction with life when compared to international samples. The participants' high scores in certain domains of social capital (such as community participation, group membership and socialising with others) could potentially have contributed in this regard by positively influencing their subjective well-being. Regarding the second objective, this study indicated correlations of varying significance between many of the domains of social capital and subjective well-being. Social capital could therefore play an important part in maintaining high levels of subjective well-being among students, and the potential causal relationship between these constructs warrant further investigation. Furthermore, social capital can lead to cohesive group membership, help to build trust, create equality among community members as well as improve social integration of students among their new peers.

The results of this study can be considered significant as these findings provide strong support for the existence of a significant relationship between social capital and subjective well-being in the student population. These results can aid in implementing interventions among students aimed towards increasing their subjective well-being and can lead to positive benefits such as healthier living conditions, positive development and increased critical thinking skills. In addition, higher levels of subjective well-being can lead to better social

relationships among students, increased creativity and efficiency in applying their intelligence as well as increased optimism of their current circumstances.

Furthermore, these results can play a crucial role in the reconciliation and social integration that South African universities are currently involved in. This could be achieved by building on the domains of social capital that have been shown to have a strong association with these students' subjective well-being and could inspire a higher degree of community engagement and trust among students. Especially within the current South African tertiary education context – characterised by inequality and social disorder – interventions based on these results could play a pivotal role in embracing diversity, building strong social relationships, improving social inclusion into groups and enhancing recognition and respect for differences among students and faculty members.

### **Critical Reflection**

In reflecting on the research conducted, some limitations were identified. The main limitation of this study was the restriction of the data gathering process to one campus of the North-West University. This had a significant influence on the demographic composition of the sample and therefore, the generalisability and the level of cross-cultural comparison made possible by the results were limited. Future research can extend the sample to include students from all three campuses of the North-West University to gain a better and detailed understanding of how students' cultural and educational surroundings influence social capital and subjective well-being as well as the relationship that has been shown to exist between these variables. As most of the existing studies focus on individuals and their intersubjective experiences, the impact of culture on the behaviours and cognitive processes of individuals is often neglected.

The exclusive use of self-report measures could also be noted as a possible limitation to the richness of data obtained regarding social capital and subjective well-being, as these measures could have limited the responses obtained. Regarding the SC-IQ specifically, the complexity of the measure yielding both nominal and ordinal data, does not lend itself to a detailed and advanced analysis. Although it provided valuable information regarding the participants' social capital, the addition of a qualitative component to the methodology would serve to substantiate the quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire and to provide a detailed understanding of the component of social capital and its importance in the lives of the participants.

Although all possible measures were taken into consideration to avoid the participants providing the answers they deemed socially desirable or what the researchers might want, the possibility exists that this may have had an influence on the results. Future studies should aim to use self-report measures in conjunction with qualitative means of tapping directly into the participants' lived experiences such as making use of individual or focus group interviews or daily diaries. The use of a mixed methodology would ensure a detailed and rounded exploration of the topic at hand, and could serve to provide a more in-depth understanding of what drives the two constructs individually as well as how they complement each other. The methodology can also be planned to aid in determining causality between social capital and subjective well-being. Considering the objectives of this particular study, the chosen methodology was however, well suited to answer the research questions.

In conclusion, the study can be deemed a success, as the research managed to reach the objectives of the study and was able to find strong evidence of an association between social capital and subjective well-being among university students in a South African context. Not



only does this substantiate international research in this regard, but also provides valuable information regarding two constructs which are very relevant within the current South African context.

**Addenda**

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of the Participants' Self-reported Levels of Subjective Well-being

	Total group		Males		Females		Effect size
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	d
<b>SWLS</b>	25.80	5.60	26.55	5.90	25.05	5.30	.25*
<b>FEQ</b>	7.32	1.60	7.48	1.77	7.21	1.47	.15
<b>FEQ Happy %</b>	51.10	17.80	53.38	17.41	49.60	17.99	.21*
<b>FEQ Neutral %</b>	29.58	13.83	27.43	13.69	31.00	13.82	.26*
<b>FEQ Unhappy %</b>	18.85	11.41	19.19	12.41	18.64	10.77	.05

*Note.* Small effect:  $d=.2^*$ , medium effect:  $d=.5^{**}$ , large effect:  $d=.8^{***}$

SWLS = Satisfaction With Life Scale

FEQ = Fordyce Emotions Questionnaire

M= Mean

SD = Standard Deviation

d= Effect size indicated as a Cohen's d-value

Table 2

Correlation (Spearman’s Rho) Between Happiness and Satisfaction With Life

	<b>FEQ</b>	<b>FEQ Happy</b> (%)	<b>FEQ Neutral</b> (%)	<b>FEQ Unhappy</b> (%)	<b>SWLS</b>
<b>FEQ</b>	1.00	.62	-.39	-.49	.57
<b>FEQ Happy (%)</b>	.62	1.00	-.07	-.57	.48

*Note.*

SWLS = Satisfaction With Life Scale

FEQ = Fordyce Emotions Questionnaire

Table 3.1

Correlations (Spearman's Rank Order) Between Social Capital and Subjective Well-being

SC-IQ Item	FEQ	SWLS
1: Number of groups	.30**	.29**
6: Number of close friends	.20*	.24**
7: Number of people can borrow money from	.23**	.22*
9: People in the community willing to help	.28**	.19*
10: Can never be too careful	-.16	-.28**
11: Trust (local government)	.04	.02
11: Trust (central government officials)	.00	.08
12: Trust (people from own ethnic or language group)	.21*	.13
12: Trust (people from other ethnic or language groups)	.15	.09
12: Trust (police)	.03	.12
12: Trust (teachers)	.06	.08
12: Trust (strangers)	.07	.09
15: Community participation	.24**	.19*
16: Community co-operate to solve a problem	.11	.02
17: Made or received a phone call	.19*	.09
19: Differences characterising city residing in	-.14	-.10
23: Getting together with people for food or drinks	.18*	.07

25: Feel safe in own home	.02	.03
26: How happy are you?	.63*	.60**
27: I have the power to change my own life	.30**	.24**
28: I have the power to impact by making my city a better place	.23**	.26**
29: Honesty (local government officials)	.03	.07
29: Honesty (traditional village leaders)	-.01	-.07
29: Honesty (doctors and nurses)	.10	.03
29: Honesty (teachers and school officials)	-.00	.08
29: Honesty (staff at post office)	.01	-.01
29: Honesty(police)	.03	.04
29: Honesty (judges and staff at courts)	.06	.03
29: Honesty (staff at NGO)	.03	.11
29: Honesty (university management)	.05	.14
30: Gotten together to petition government	.12	.08

*Note.* \*\*. Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed)

\*. Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

Table 3.2

Cramer's V Values as Measures of the Strength of Association in Chi-square Tests Between  
Social Capital and SWB

<b>Item</b>	<b>FEQ</b>	<b>SWLS</b>
3: Group have the same religion	.09	.22*
3: Group have the same gender	.14	.12
3: Group have the same ethnic background	.01	.15
4: Members have same occupation	.01	.12
4: Members have same educational background	.04	.14
4: Members have same political party	.09	.04
4: Members have same income	.07	.09
13: Contribute time	.07	.10
13: Contribute money	.10	.19
14: Participation in community activities	.05	.09
20: Differences causing problems	.08	.04
22: Problems leading to violence	.09	.02

24: Gotten together with people from different ethnic backgrounds	.08	.01
24: Gotten together with people from different economic backgrounds	.02	.07
24: Gotten together with people of a different social status	.11	.10
24: Gotten together with people from different religious groups	.04	.28*

*Note.* \* Chi-square test is significant at the .05 level

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