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The Role of Social Capital in Social Happiness: A Case Study of Youth Aged 18-40 in Kabul

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Abstract: Social capital and social happiness are both considered fundamental assets of any society. These two crucial assets are recognized as drivers of growth and development. The primary aim of the present study is to sociologically examine the role of social capital in social happiness among young people aged 18 to 40 in Kabul. This research employs a quantitative method and adopts a descriptive-explanatory approach. It is conducted through a survey. The sample size was 384 individuals selected through random and convenience sampling. Data were collected using the standard Oxford University questionnaire for social happiness and the Putnam (1999) questionnaire for social capital, measured on a Likert scale. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS software version 26. The findings indicated that both social happiness and social capital among respondents were below average. Education, gender, and marital status had a significant relationship with respondents' social happiness. Age and occupation showed no significant difference. Respondents' social capital, both overall and in its dimensions, had a direct and significant relationship with their social happiness. Regression test results revealed that social capital alone explained approximately 24% of the variance in social happiness among these young people. The overall conclusion is that social capital significantly determines the social happiness of young people. Therefore, scientific and practical policies need to be implemented to enhance social capital and increase social happiness among the country's youth. To improve youth happiness, policies should aim to strengthen social capital.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, *social capital* has gained increasing attention in the social sciences as a key factor shaping social and economic life. It refers to the networks, trust, norms, and relationships that connect individuals and enable cooperation within a society. These elements can foster community development, strengthen social cohesion, and enhance individual well-being (Bourdieu, 2005, p. 51).

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Social happiness—defined as the sense of satisfaction, joy, and emotional well-being within a community—is considered an essential aspect of quality of life. Research suggests that higher levels of social capital often lead to stronger feelings of happiness, trust, and security. When people are connected through reliable networks and mutual trust, they are more likely to experience emotional satisfaction and a sense of belonging (Sanatkhah & Shirvanipour, 2015, pp. 28-29). Social capital also helps reduce feelings of isolation and alienation. When absent or weak, communities may suffer from distrust, disconnection, and lower happiness levels, often resulting in social tensions and psychological challenges (Argyle, 2004, pp. 89-90). Hence, understanding the impact of social capital on social happiness is crucial, especially in urban settings facing complex social and economic problems.

One such setting is Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, where a large portion of the population consists of young people aged 18 to 40. These youth are both vulnerable to social pressures and key to the city's future development. Factors like unemployment, insecurity, and weak social institutions pose serious challenges to their well-being. In such conditions, social capital may serve as an important resource for enhancing social happiness among youth by promoting trust, shared norms, and supportive relationships (Shahabadi et al., 2023, p. 209).

The previous review also indicates that these two important social variables are interrelated, as follows:

Shahabadi et al. (2023), in their study Mapping Social Happiness in Kabul: A Case Study of Educated People between 15- and 40-Years Old, demonstrate that happiness is a critical variable in the efficiency, quality, and health of individuals' lives. Happiness encompasses various dimensions and factors and has been explored from philosophical, social, religious, cultural, and economic perspectives in different studies. Global statistics present various rankings of happiness levels across countries, showing that Afghanistan had the lowest happiness level in the world for two consecutive years (2020 and 2021).

In previous research studies, the role of social capital in generating happiness and life satisfaction has been extensively explored. Majeed and Samreen (2021) found that social capital positively impacts happiness. Their study measured social capital as a multidimensional concept, including generalized trust, institutional trust, and trust in family, neighborhood, and strangers. Using panel data from 89 countries between 1980 and 2017, their findings showed that institutional and generalized trust were more significant for happiness. Rodríguez-Pose and Von Berlepsch (2014), in their study Social Capital and Individual Happiness in Europe, explored the relationship between social capital and happiness across Europe and its macro-regions. They found that social capital—particularly informal social interaction and general and institutional trust—significantly influenced happiness. Additionally, they noted that the impact of social capital on happiness varied across different regions, being weakest in Nordic countries.

Leung et al. (2013), in their study *Searching for happiness:* The importance of social capital identified social capital as an essential factor in predicting happiness. They used data from the Canadian General Social Survey and found that various dimensions of social capital, including trust, information channels, norms, and a sense of belonging, had significant relationships with happiness, even after controlling for demographic and individual characteristics. Ram (2010), in their study "Social Capital and Happiness: Additional Cross-Country Evidence Revisited," revisited the role of social capital in generating life satisfaction. Their findings showed that the impact of social capital, particularly generalized trust, was fragile, with most models indicating little significant effect. Additionally, the study highlighted the importance of income, noting parametric differences between high-income and low-income groups, while the role of income inequality and inflation varied. Bjørnskov (2008), in their study, "Social Capital and Happiness in the United States," examined the association between social capital and average happiness in the U.S. They found that social trust was positively associated with happiness. However, the effects of informal sociability were only significant at the regional level. The study emphasized the importance of social trust in overall happiness and provided broader implications for social capital theory.

Moreover, scientific concepts and theories also demonstrate the connection between these social phenomena, as discussed in the following sections. Happiness and joy are multidimensional and interdisciplinary concepts that have attracted increasing scholarly interest across various fields. However, it was from the 1960s onward that the concept gained significant traction within the social sciences (Mardani, 2014, p. 26). Although theoretical and empirical studies on happiness began approximately a century ago, the concept has long been plagued by definitional ambiguity due to its diverse interpretations. This conceptual multiplicity has presented challenges to scholarly discourse on the topic. Nevertheless, the recent proliferation of studies focused on happiness has helped to refine the term, leading to more coherent conceptual developments.

Within the realm of social science, happiness is paramount when evaluating the quality of life from the subjective perspective of individuals. Diener conceptualizes happiness as part of what contemporary researchers term "subjective well-being" or "subjective capital," which is often considered a latent construct comprising two core dimensions: the emotional component (happiness) and the cognitive component (life satisfaction). Although closely related, these two components exhibit different associations with macro-level social variables, as evidenced by data from the European Values Study (Veenhoven, 1997, p. 111). Veenhoven further distinguishes between the objective and perceived quality of life. He emphasizes the former, measured by the actual degree and frequency of experienced happiness, as more informative than subjective perceptions. In this framework, the "input approach" concerns itself with whether the goods and services available meet people's needs, while the "output approach" focuses on the real-life consequences, such as the extent to which individuals feel happy or satisfied (Veenhoven, 1997, p. 110).

Social capital has emerged as one of the foundational constructs in contemporary social science, particularly gaining prominence in the late twentieth century in conjunction with increasing attention to sustainable and social development. As the third millennium began, the relevance of social capital continued to expand, gradually solidifying its theoretical and empirical foundations. Defined broadly, social capital encompasses the resources and benefits that individuals and groups acquire through their social networks and interactions (Leung et al., 2023). This concept highlights the critical role of social relationships—whether familial, collegial, or communal—in offering support and facilitating access to tangible and intangible assets.

From a sociological perspective, happiness is not merely an individual or psychological phenomenon but is shaped and sustained within social structures. As Haller and Hadler (2006) argue, happiness is influenced by four interrelated domains: (1) fundamental social networks and relationships, (2) cultural and social solidarity and altruism, (3) participation, occupational success, and status, and (4) macro-sociopolitical contexts. The first three domains, in particular, are rooted in the dynamics of social capital—encompassing interaction, commitment, belonging, altruism, and social support.

Veenhoven (2001) emphasizes both primary (intimate) and secondary (institutional) relationships as critical contributors to happiness. Argyle (2006) similarly highlights that the positive emotions generated through social interaction are primarily shaped by support from family, friends, and other groups. These perspectives suggest that social capital acts as a key mediating mechanism between the individual and broader societal forces in shaping emotional well-being.

Putnam's research underlines the positive correlation between individuals' social competencies and their levels of happiness. He asserts that social capital is a stronger predictor of well-being than economic capital, suggesting that investment in relational networks yields higher returns in happiness (Jafari et al., 2002, p. 53). Carr (2007) reinforces this view, identifying three ways in which interpersonal relationships contribute to happiness: first, happier individuals are more likely to be chosen as companions; second, strong relationships fulfill emotional needs; and third, social support serves as a buffer against distress.

Social participation and trust are additional components of social capital that significantly influence happiness. Membership in voluntary groups and informal networks provides individuals with emotional support and opportunities for social exchange, both of which contribute to feelings of joy and satisfaction (Rezadoust et al., 2015, p. 6). Trust, in particular, plays a pivotal role by reducing the costs of uncertainty and enhancing the predictability of social interactions. As Richard (2000) posits, social capital—characterized by trust, control, and connectedness—has a more profound impact on happiness than human capital. Turner also notes that trust enhances coping mechanisms, reduces stress, and improves both mental and physical health by fostering a secure environment for social participation (Mehdizadeh et al., 2015).

Several classical and contemporary sociological theories provide a strong foundation for understanding the relationship between social capital and happiness:

1. Auguste Comte: In Comte's positivist framework, happiness and capital are ultimate societal aspirations. He argued that achieving happiness requires systematic knowledge of the world, particularly in areas that can be modified through human intervention. In this way, positivism's optimism is inherently tied to the possibility of achieving social happiness through rational reform (Leung et al., 2013).

2. Émile Durkheim: Durkheim emphasized that the quality of social integration determines life satisfaction. The shift from mechanical to organic solidarity, he argued, weakens collective values and leads to anomie—a state in which the weakening of moral regulation diminishes happiness. He stressed the role of voluntary associations and religious communities in fostering solidarity and, by extension, happiness (Tsuruta, 2019; Bjørnskov, 2008).

3. Georg Simmel: Simmel viewed happiness as both a pursuit and a state of being. He characterized it as an emotional response to the fluidity of life, emphasizing its subjective and situational nature. For Simmel, happiness is not merely a goal but a reflection of the individual's relation to the dynamics of everyday life (Putnam & Goss, 2002).

4. Talcott Parsons: Parsons proposed that social systems must fulfill four essential functions: adaptation, goal attainment, integration, and latency. Each of these functions contributes to societal stability and individual well-being. According to Chelebi, when these systemic needs are effectively addressed, they generate "positive feelings" that culminate in happiness (Ritzer, 1996, pp. 131–132).

5. Ronald Inglehart: Inglehart suggested that happiness results from a perceived balance between personal aspirations and one's objective conditions. When expectations are met or exceeded, individuals report higher levels of happiness (Inglehart, 1995, p. 245).

6. Anthony Giddens: Giddens linked declining happiness to the uncertainties of modernity, including industrial violence, erosion of trust, and existential insecurity. He argued that rebuilding cautious trust in institutions and fostering authentic relationships—what he termed "pure relationships"—are key to restoring happiness.

7. Relative Deprivation Theory: This theory emphasizes the emotional consequences of social comparison. When individuals perceive themselves as lacking relative to others—especially peers or family—they may experience dissatisfaction, anger, or depression. These negative emotions can significantly diminish happiness and lead to alienation or social unrest (Bernburg, 2009, p. 1227).

This study aims to explore the relationship between social capital and social happiness among young people in Kabul. It seeks to understand:

1. What are the levels of social capital and social happiness among Kabul's youth?

2. How does social capital influence their sense of social happiness?

By addressing these questions, this research aims to provide insights that can inform policies aimed at strengthening social ties, fostering trust, and enhancing the quality of life for the younger generation in Kabul. The findings may also contribute to broader discussions on youth well-being in post-conflict urban societies.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is applied in nature, utilizing a descriptive-explanatory approach with a survey method. The statistical population of this study comprises citizens aged 18 to 40 years in Kabul. Although precise data on the population size was not available, based on Morgan's table and Cochran's formula, a sample size of 384 individuals was determined. This is because the table and formula indicate that if the population exceeds 100,000, the sample size stabilizes at 384. Of the selected sample, 382 individuals responded to electronic questionnaires distributed via email and social media. Data collection was conducted using standard questionnaires from Oxford University for the social capital section, and Putnam's (1999) questionnaire for the social capital section, both based on the Likert scale. The sampling method was random and accessible. Data analysis was performed using SPSS software version 26.

FINDINGS

Table 1: *Descriptive statistics of research variables*

Independent Variable and Dimensions of Dependent Variable	Number of Items	Observed Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Theoretical Mean	One-Sample T-Test	
							T	Sig.
Social capital	15	39.1	5.66	15	70	45	-7.2	0.000
Social Participation	7	20.9	6.1	7	35	21	-2.16	0.002
Social Trust	7	19.8	4.9	7	35	21	-2.64	0.001
Social Cohesion	7	19.2	1.78	7	35	21	-2.9	0.003
Social Norms	7	18.16	5.2	7	35	21	-5.3	0.001
Social Network	7	17.99	3.1	7	35	21	-2.4	0.002

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics of the independent and dependent variables along with the results of the one-sample t-test used to examine the difference between the theoretical mean and the observed mean. The results show that the observed mean for all variables is lower than the theoretical mean, and this difference is statistically significant according to the one-sample t-test. This implies that the descriptive findings on the status of social capital and social happiness among the research sample indicate that social capital and social happiness in this study's field are below average.

Table 2: *Descriptive Statistics Related to Gender and Marital Status*

Variable	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Gender	Female	73	38.7	6.20	0.73
	Male	319	41.8	8.45	0.47
Marital Status	Single	227	39.8	7.50	0.50
	Married	184	38.35	6.89	0.51

The descriptive statistics presented in the table show that male participants (N=319) had a higher mean score (M=41.8, SD=8.45) compared to female participants (N=73, M=38.7, SD=6.20). Regarding marital status, single individuals (N=227) reported a slightly higher mean score (M=39.8, SD=7.50) than married individuals (N=184, M=38.35, SD=6.89). These results suggest some variation in the measured variable based on gender and marital status.

Table 3: *T-Test Results for Gender and Marital Status Variables*

Variable	Group Comparison	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-Test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Gender	Female vs. Male Group Means	6.23	0.013	3.9	390	0.004	3.12	0.80	.002	1. 4
Marital Status	Single vs. Married Group Means	4.77	0.030	2.1	390	0.002	1.45	0.69	0.3	1.3

The results of the Independent Samples T-Test in Table 3 above indicate statistically significant differences in the mean levels of social capital based on gender and marital status. For gender, Levene's test revealed unequal variances (F = 6.23, p = .013); therefore, the unequal variances version of the t-test was interpreted. The results show that males (M = 41.8) reported significantly higher levels of social capital than females (M = 38.7), t(390) = 3.90, p = .004. Regarding marital status, Levene's test also indicated unequal variances (F = 4.77, p = .030), and the analysis showed that single participants (M = 39.8) had significantly higher social capital than married ones (M = 38.35), t(390) = 2.10, p = .002. The 95% confidence intervals for both comparisons do not include zero, confirming the robustness of the findings.

The descriptive statistics in Table 4 indicate variations in the measured variable across different levels of education, occupation, and age. Participants with university or graduate-level education (N = 250) reported the highest mean score (M = 41.20, SD = 7.40), while those with only elementary education (N = 54) had the lowest mean (M = 37.80, SD = 6.30).

Table 4: *Descriptive Statistics Related to the Variables of Education, Occupation, and Age*

Variable	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Education	University/Graduate	250	41.20	7.40	0.47
	High School Diploma	92	38.10	6.80	0.71
	Student (undergrad)	16	39.50	5.60	1.40
	Elementary Education	54	37.80	6.30	0.86
Occupation	Unemployed / Homemakers	256	39.00	7.10	0.45
	Self-employed	66	39.90	6.95	0.86
	Government Job	53	40.10	7.80	1.07
	Private Sector	9	38.70	5.40	1.80
Age	18–24	123	38.90	7.10	0.64
	25–30	137	40.50	7.60	0.65
	31–35	73	39.80	6.80	0.79
	36–40	41	38.40	6.20	0.97

In terms of occupational status, individuals employed in government positions (N = 53) showed the highest mean score (M = 40.10, SD = 7.80), whereas participants working in the private sector (N = 9) reported the lowest mean (M = 38.70, SD = 5.40). Regarding age, the 25–30 age group (N = 137) demonstrated the highest average score (M = 40.50, SD = 7.60), while the 36–40 age group (N = 41) had the lowest (M = 38.40, SD = 6.20). These findings suggest that the measured variable may vary meaningfully across different demographic categories.

Table 5: *Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for Education, Occupation, and Age Variables*

Variable	**Group Comparison**	**F**	**Sig.**	**Mean Difference**	**Std. Error**	**df**	**95% CI Lower**	**95% CI Upper**
Education	University vs. High School	3.2	0.002	3.10	0.82	390	1.48	4.72
	University vs. Elementary			3.40	0.94	390	1.56	5.24
	University vs. Student			1.70	1.50	390	-1.24	4.64
	High School vs. Elementary			0.30	1.12	390	-1.89	2.49
Occupation	Unemployed vs. Self-employed	0.1	0.39	0.90	0.88	390	-0.82	2.62
	Government vs. Private			1.40	1.32	390	-1.19	3.99
	Self-employed vs. Private			-0.70	1.41	390	-3.48	2.08
Age	25–30 vs. 18–24	0.31	0.34	1.60	0.86	390	-0.09	3.29

31–35 vs. 36–40	1.40	1.00	390	-0.56	3.36
25–30 vs. 36–40	2.10	1.13	390	-0.12	4.32

Table 5 provides an analysis of variance (ANOVA) of individual characteristics such as education, employment, and age of respondents concerning their social capital. The results indicate a significant difference between education and social capital, with an F-value of 3.2 and a significance level of 0.002. However, there is no significant difference between employment status and social capital, with an F-value of 0.1 and a significance level of 0.39. Similarly, no significant difference was found between respondents' age and their social capital, with an F-value of 0.31 and a significance level of 0.34.

Table 6: *Pearson Correlation Test Results between Dimensions of Social Capital and Social Happiness*

Dimensions of Social Capital	Social Happiness		Mean	Std. Deviation	Bias	Std. Error	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	Sample Size (N)
	R	Sig.							
Social Network	0.248	0.003	28.43	5.02	0.0087	0.3092	27.81	29.04	384
Social Trust	0.336	0.001	30.18	5.34	0.0104	0.2746	29.63	30.76	384
Social Norms	0.194	0.004	25.69	4.61	0.0079	0.2623	25.13	26.22	384
Social Cohesion	0.309	0.002	27.91	5.00	0.0098	0.2884	27.32	28.49	384
Social Participation	0.276	0.001	29.24	5.13	0.0106	0.2791	28.67	29.86	384
Social Capital (Total)	0.387	0.001	141.45	11.69	0.0203	0.7753	139.97	142.89	384

Table 6 presents the results of the Pearson correlation test between social capital and social happiness. The findings suggest that social capital, both overall and in its various dimensions, has a direct and significant relationship with social capital. This relationship is strong and positive.

Table 7: *Stepwise Regression Analysis Results*

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficient	Standard Error	Standardized Beta	t-value	Significance Level
Constant	34.8	4.51	-	6.18	0.000
Social Participation	0.35	0.123	0.178	4.72	0.000
Social Trust	2.302	0.89	0.587	10.69	0.002
Social Cohesion	-0.38	1.40	-0.146	-2.88	0.000

Multiple Correlation Coefficient: 0.55
Coefficient of Determination: 0.28
Adjusted Coefficient of Determination: 0.24

In the stepwise regression test, all dimensions of the independent variable were included in the model. As shown in Table 7, all dimensions of social capital remained in the model. These dimensions, which encompass significant aspects of social life, explain 24% of the

variation in the dependent variable (social capital of the study sample). The stepwise regression model has a correlation coefficient of 0.55, and the model fit is approximately 28%.

DISCUSSION

Sociologists define happiness as positive emotions that consist of both social behaviors and internal feelings (Sanatkhah & Shirvanipour, 2015, p. 28). Social capital, on the other hand, is considered one of the most important and effective social indicators for measuring public life satisfaction, promoting constructive social interactions, fostering public trust, encouraging comprehensive social participation, and influencing collective behavior. A decrease in social capital among young people, more so than among other groups, can have severe and costly consequences. This is because young people are the dynamic, active, and energetic force of a society, playing key roles in positive transformations and the development of a country. Therefore, a reduction in social capital in this age group can lead to a decline in talent, reduced mobility, erosion of human capital, deterioration of social capital, and an increase in social issues such as addiction, violence, and other crimes (Arampatzi et al, 2018).

Furthermore, social capital is regarded as a driving factor for development. Since 2000, the United Nations has included the happiness and social capital index as one of the key indicators for determining a country's level of development. Social capital is also seen as a form of wealth for a society. Social thinker Ruskin believed that the wealthiest country is the one that has the happiest citizens. Given the importance of capital in both collective and individual life, the crucial role of young people in societal growth and development, and the extraordinary importance of social capital in personal and social life, this study aimed to explore the relationship between social capital and social happiness among 18- to 40-year-olds in Kabul. This study, employing a quantitative approach and survey technique, yielded the following results:

Descriptive findings revealed that the level of social capital among young people in Kabul is below average. Additionally, the scores for the dimensions of social capital were also lower than the theoretical mean. It seems that overall societal conditions, including socio-cultural changes, unfavorable economic conditions, and dissatisfaction, have contributed to this situation. According to the Global Happiness Report (2023, 2024), Afghanistan has been reported as the world's saddest country for four consecutive years.

Another part of the findings showed that there is a significant difference in social capital based on gender. It appears that the state of social capital and the general conditions of society have negatively impacted the social capital of both men and women. However, a significant difference was observed between marital status and capital, with unmarried individuals reporting higher capital than married individuals. The main reason for this could be the absence of family responsibilities and having more opportunities to participate in social networks. A significant difference was also found between education level and social capital, with higher education associated with lower social capital. This suggests that social fields in Afghanistan have undergone significant changes. As education levels increase, lifestyles tend

to move toward social isolation, dissatisfaction, and distancing from family and kinship networks. This is also true for aging and unemployment. However, no difference was observed between the place of birth and the capital, likely due to the prevailing social conditions affecting everyone.

The main finding of the study indicates a direct and significant relationship between social capital and social happiness among the research sample. This relationship is powerful and positive, with social happiness decreasing as social capital diminishes. Pierre Bourdieu argued that social capital is the accumulation of actual and potential benefits derived from having a relatively stable network of institutionalized relationships of acquaintance and mutual recognition. Obligations, duties, and social responsibilities are the building blocks of social capital in Bourdieu's view (Bourdieu, 2005). Carr (2008) argues that limited relationships and friendships are likely to correlate with happiness for three reasons: first, happier individuals are more likely to be chosen as friends or trusted individuals because they are more attractive companions compared to unhappy people; second, limited relationships and friendships fulfill the need for affection and contribute to feelings of happiness and satisfaction; and third, close friendships provide social support, and cooperation with acquaintances serves as a potential source of happiness and a way to avoid unhappiness. In general, society, as the context for social relationships, provides a domain where members can form and expand social bonds, thereby achieving their goals. Social membership and relationships involve participation in voluntary groups and informal networks of kin and acquaintances. Through these relationships, individuals engage in exchanges that provide them with the relationships and support they need. Emotional resources, including feelings of happiness and capital, are exchanged through these social relationships (Rezadoust et al, 2015, p. 6). Burke (2006) believes that deep emotional bonds formed with specific individuals, such as parents and friends, contribute to feelings of calm during interactions with them, and during times of stress, the presence of these individuals brings a sense of calm (Burke, 2006, p. 419). Therefore, expanding relationships and social interactions within formal and informal networks, and the resulting support, increases feelings of happiness and capital. Additionally, these findings are consistent with research by (Johnson and Krueger, 2006; Chalabi and Mousavi, 2008; Firozi et al, 2022).

In response to the main research question—whether there is a positive and significant relationship between young people's social capital and their social happiness—the findings of the study demonstrated that such a relationship exists. In other words, the greater the social capital of young people in Kabul, the more significantly their level of social happiness increases. This result indicates that the enhancement of social ties, mutual trust, participation in formal and informal networks, and the receipt of social support all contribute to increased social happiness among young people.

From this perspective, the present study aligns with the research conducted by Majeed and Samreen (2021). Their study, which involved data from 89 countries, demonstrated that social capital—especially generalized trust and institutional trust—has a direct relationship

with levels of happiness. Similarly, in the context of Kabul, the weakness of social institutions and the lack of trust in structures are among the main reasons for the decline of social capital and, consequently, a reduction in happiness among the youth.

Furthermore, the study by Rodríguez-Pose and Von Berlepsch (2014) in Europe found that informal interactions, social network participation, and trust are among the key determinants of happiness. These findings correspond with the current study, as the weakness of informal interactions and the lack of public trust networks in Kabul have likewise contributed to a decrease in social happiness.

Shahabadi et al. (2023), in a study focusing on educated youth in Kabul, also found that happiness in Kabul lies below the global average. Their results indicated that social factors such as social despair, anomie, and the lack of a positive outlook significantly impact levels of happiness. These findings are consistent with the descriptive section of the present study, which also revealed low levels of social happiness and below-average levels of social capital among Kabul's youth.

Regarding educational level, this study found that as education increases, social capital decreases. This outcome stands in relative contrast to some studies, such as Leung et al. (2013), which argued that education fosters a sense of belonging and participation in social networks. However, in the Afghan context—especially in Kabul—factors such as insecurity, inadequate employment opportunities, and widespread social mistrust may lead educated individuals toward social isolation and diminished participation.

Theoretically, these findings align closely with Bourdieu's perspective, which views social capital not merely as a set of connections but as a resource for obtaining support, recognition, and well-being (Bourdieu, 2005). In Kabul, young people who are more active in social networks not only receive greater emotional support but also enjoy a stronger sense of belonging and purpose, which ultimately leads to enhanced happiness. The study by Ram (2010), which conducted a cross-country analysis, concluded that the impact of social capital on happiness is weaker in low-income countries. However, contrary to that, the present study shows that even in a low-income country such as Afghanistan, social capital remains a meaningful factor in generating happiness. This discrepancy may be attributed to Kabul's unique socio-cultural context and the vital role of social relationships in confronting crisis and adversity. The research by Bjørnskov (2008) in the United States revealed that social trust has a more substantial effect on happiness than informal sociability. Similarly, in Kabul, social trust has been severely damaged, significantly contributing to the erosion of social capital. Therefore, rebuilding trust can potentially strengthen social capital and, in turn, enhance social happiness.

Another important finding of this study was the statistically significant difference in social capital based on marital status. Single individuals were found to possess higher levels of social capital than their married counterparts. This finding is consistent with the research of Carr (2008), who argued that close friendships and supportive relationships are primary sources

of happiness and emotional capital. Single individuals, having more free time and fewer responsibilities, are more likely to engage in these social interactions.

From a theoretical standpoint, Veenhoven (2001) emphasized the role of both primary relationships (family, friends) and secondary relationships (institutions, groups) in producing happiness. In Kabul, the weakening of institutional structures, internal migration, and the disintegration of traditional family systems have diminished these relationships and, consequently, have led to reductions in both social capital and happiness.

Overall, the findings of this study are consistent with a wide range of international research and sociological theories. This consistency points to the universality of the relationship between social capital and happiness. However, in specific contexts such as Kabul, the intensity of this relationship becomes more pronounced, as social relationships play an even more crucial role in securing emotional and social well-being in the absence of strong governmental support systems.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that social capital plays a pivotal role in shaping social happiness among youth aged 18–40 in Kabul, confirming that both social capital and social happiness are essential elements for the sustainable development and well-being of Afghan society. The findings show that a decline in social capital can lead to a range of individual and social challenges that negatively affect overall happiness. However, this research is limited by its cross-sectional design, its focus on a single urban area, and the restricted age group, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other contexts within Afghanistan. Therefore, future research should build on these findings by exploring targeted interventions to strengthen social capital among youth, conducting longitudinal and comparative studies on gender and marital status, examining the role of education and socioeconomic factors, and expanding the scope to other regions and age groups to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how social capital influences happiness in different social and cultural contexts.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest with anyone in this article

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