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The Pitfalls of the Virtues of Trust, Obedience, and Patience : A Psychological Analysis of Finland's Happiness under Pandemics

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Abstract

This study attempts to analyze the Finnish happiness and the narratives of high compliance with policies related to the prevention of the spread of new coronaviruses. According to an online interview survey, Finns were observed to actively choose various restriction requests required by public health based on the national virtues of trust, obedience, and patience. Finnish citizens appear to be intelligent and mature in their respect for human survival rights through high compliance. On the other hand, the homogeneity of behavioral regulations and attitudes appears to the opposite direction of diversity. This paper presents a psychological analysis of how high trust and obedience, as a result of trust, which are known as factors of high wellbeing in Finland, contribute to the happiness and development of individuals and society. I also warned of the dangers posed by a lack of critical spirit due to excessive trust.

Key Words : freedom, trust, happiness, obedience, control, virtue

1. The problem: Happiness/ Trust /Freedom

The definition of happiness varies depending on the field of expertise and position. In the field of positive psychology, it has been rephrased as subjective wellbeing, life satisfaction, etc., and the concept has been well discussed. In this paper I will adopt the index of the World Happiness Report (1) for convenience sake.

The Psychological factors such as 'the level of freedom of choice in life' and 'the trust in government, society, and others' have been attracting attention as factors that have a significant impact on happiness. Especially in countries where basic living conditions related to

safety, such as life-threatening situations due to conflicts, hunger, and poverty, these psychological factors are important indicators for determining the level of happiness.

Finland has been reported to be the world's happiest country in the World Happiness Report for three years since 2019. (1) In this paper, I will examine Finland's "happiness" (life satisfaction according to Tokumaru) (2) by focusing on two of the six factors that defines happiness: "freedom of choice in life" and "lack of political corruption" (trust in the government inferred from this).

Why Finns are "happy" and why their trust in the government is unshakable (3)? Despite the

restrictions on behavior and narrowing of freedom of choice imposed by various public health policies during the Corona disaster. I would like to raise the issue of the danger of a nation in which virtues such as "trust," "obedience," and "patience" have been taken too far.

2. Background: Freedom of Choice and Trust in Government in Finland

One of the reasons why Finland is nominated as the happiest country in the world is that it has a high degree of freedom of choice in life, which is considered to realize the high respect for human rights. The "freedom of choice in life" in the World Happiness Report means that there is the equality for chance to get higher education or entrepreneurship, which is not based on economic background or social class, and that people are given equal opportunities to advance in society. Finland has a system that allows people to freely choose their own lives at any time, without the implicit rails of "you have to get a job as a new graduate" or "you have to work for a big company and serve until retirement" as in Japan. Not only are the systems guarantee the freedom, but there is no psychosocial resistance such as peer pressure. In addition, because of the strong economic security, the environment allows people to freely choose the path they want to take at the turning points of their lives. In fact, half of the Finns I interviewed last year reported that they had taken this Corona disaster as opportunity to change jobs or workplaces (4).

In terms of marriage, same-sex marriage is socially and religiously recognized. Non-marital partnerships and divorce are accepted in the society, making it easier to change marital status than in other countries. Toilet facilities are also becoming more accessible regardless of gender, and the country is more tolerant of gender diversity. In other words, Finland is a free society that accepts individuality.

In terms of education, there are teaching guidelines by the ministry of education, but it is up to the teachers to decide what materials to use. Each teacher, a public servant, is free to spend her/his own budget and provide education that she/he considers good (note 1). As a result, teachers are more motivated and can provide better quality education. It is no wonder that people have a high level of trust in a government that allows them to make such choices freely.

In addition, Finns are known to have a high level of trust in their government, with a low score for political corruption, one of the indicators related to happiness. In this pandemic, the level of trust is still reported to be high. Among the countries which show high trust for the government Finland's point of the possibility to change the government policy is rather low (3).

3. Current Situation: Trust and Patience in the Pandemic

3.1. Absolute trust and little complain

In the Corona pandemic that has been sweeping the world since 2020, the Finnish people, who have a high level of trust in their government, showed a high level of compliance with the infection prevention measures put forth by the government. In other words, the people were willing to follow the government's crisis management without questioning, because of their confident trust that the policies of this welfare state would create happiness for the people. Because of the high level of trust, the people actively chose to comply with restrictions and guidelines that were explained and imposed as necessary for public health (3).

Case 1; When I showed a woman in her thirties, who is a public health expert and works as a civil servant, what I thought of the data that made her question the government's policy, she replied,

"I don't know what the truth is because there is a

lot of data out there, but Finnish researchers are high level and look at data critically. In that sense, I have no problem with the government's data because I think it is reliable.

She replied. She did not follow the basic procedure of a scientist, which is to go to the original source for confirmation, as she had done in the past.

Case 2; When I asked an epidemiologist, a female doctor in her thirties, how she interpreted the global data, she sent me a medical paper that contradicted it. In response, I asked her how she would interpret the paper which overruled it. After some back and forth, we got to talking about vaccination. She said that she had gotten the third dose of the vaccine because she was working on the front lines and she thought the benefits outweighed the risks.

"The Finnish government, unlike other countries, does not allow politicians to be bribed. Everything is transparent and open to the public, so I know that the information and policies of the government are correct. I can't do all the research on my own, so I trust and follow what the government says. She said.

Case 3; On the other hand, I heard a male entrepreneur in his 40s say, *"Media information is biased and seems to be brainwashing the people,"*

Case 4; and a female author in her 60s says, *"Big money is flowing and the government is being driven.*

Case 5; A female elementary school teacher in her 30s expressed her discomfort with the government's control, saying, "It's not like Finland at all" as the government's control over various matters, which had been left freely to the field, became much stricter, she says;

"During the pandemic, schools were closed, which required a lot of creative ways to interact with and educate students. We were grateful to the Finnish government for providing us with a lot of money,

including money for auxiliary teachers. This made it possible for us to make home visits to children who needed special support and to provide them with a detailed education. At the same time, however, various rules were imposed from a public health standpoint, and we could no longer freely and flexibly respond to situations as we had in the past, deciding what was best for the situation. I was surprised to find that this was not Finnish at all, and that I had never experienced anything like this before."

Due to the limited information available, generalizations cannot be made, but the following trends were observed. Intellectual public servants such as doctors, researchers, and teachers generally had high levels of trust in the government, while some of the independent authors and entrepreneurs were minority however critical of the government.

3.2. patience and positive attitude

Finns, who showed high compliance due to their high level of trust in the government, also boasted the highest level of life satisfaction in Europe (5). Patience to hardships, as expressed in the national character called *sisu*, is observed as they have responded by silently following the lockdown as well.

Even in the case of what seems to be a medical mistake, they are said to just focus on treatment in a calm manner without filing a lawsuit. Surprisingly in the case of a famous musician who was unable to perform due to a medical error, he did not make any issue of it, partly because of the large state guarantee from the government. According to the Finns, this is because they operate on the premise that people always make mistakes, and it is natural. As for the side effects of the vaccine, people just took medicine at home and rested, taking it for granted that side effects would occur, and rarely dared to report them or seek medical attention. (note 1). Her husband has suffered the side effects of vaccine and had to stay

in bed for more than a week, however he expressed no complain to the medicals, she said.

In Finland, unlike in Japan, people were encouraged to go for nature walks outdoors even under the request not going out. The number of people spending time in summer cottages by forests and lakes has increased several times over the previous years. The lifestyle of spending quiet time in nature and not interacting with non-family members seemed to suit the Finnish temperament, and many people say that it increased their happiness (4).

Thus, Finns' trust in the government's opinion is unshakable, and the difficulties that arise from it are overcome by *sisu*. Even in situations of severe behavioral restrictions, the Finns were observed to find what they could do to enjoy their lives. This may be due to the security, satisfaction, and expectations based on the high level of trust in the government that existed before the Corona disaster. In addition, the psychological mechanism of denying some discomfort also works. Because the social security system is in place and people are receiving benefits from the government in various aspects of their lives, such as medical care and education. People are satisfied with the government policies.

4. Psychological Analysis of Trust, Obedience, and Patience

4.1. Positive Illusion

In a crisis where we cannot see the future, we tend to depend on something reliable to maintain our mental stability. The corona disaster is a state of crisis that no one can predict called VUCA (note 2). In situations where we cannot find the answers ourselves, we try to get it by following religious beliefs or authority.

During the corona disaster, Finns' trust in the government grew stronger and compliance with

policies was higher, which can be explained as an unconscious avoidance of anxiety and fear during the crisis. In a crisis, it is difficult to make rational judgments about whether a measure is good or bad, and it is common psychology to want to cling to something that seems trustworthy in order to feel secure. In addition, People may think the decision to follow the strict control was a rational one, the notion that one should assume the worst as a principle of crisis management. In the case of Finland, the fact that there is enough economic security and less economic damage caused by various restrictions may have a lot to do with the high compliance.

Positive illusion refers to extreme optimism where the perception of reality is not objectively correct. The mental health evaluation of the positive illusion is not constant, depending on how one views mental health. On the other hand, as the broad and built theory of positive emotions says, that positive beliefs bring about a sense of well-being, and that these positive emotions have a positive impact on health, relationships, etc., increasing the sense of well-being (6). The fact that unrealistic beliefs of positive illusions contribute to health can be rephrased as the placebo effect on vaccines and other medications, which may be one attitude to survive a pandemic. In other words, there is a pursuit of happiness by daring not to recognize reality in order to protect one's optimistic beliefs. One of the factors that contribute to the high level of trust among Finns may be the positive illusion that 'the government would never do anything against the welfare of the people.'

Trust, or a sense of security through belief, is an essential element when confronting a crisis. If trust is broken, a psychological crisis can be so dangerous that it can lead to a personality breakdown. For this reason, we tend to avoid the attitude of exploring our suspicions, even if they should sprout. One honest Japanese doctor said, "The more I look into it, the more I see the risks of vaccines, so I stopped looking into it. We'll just

contribute by being guinea pigs in human experiments," he laughed. In other words, he chose the peace of mind of positive illusions and the beautiful sentiment of contributing rather than the anxiety of searching for the truth.

From the perspective of happiness, it is better to be at ease in the positive illusion than to be hopelessly aware of the tragic reality, as they say, "ignorance is bliss." How we perceive and interpret the truth as it is revealed to us by the passage of time will be determined by where we stand as individuals. Psychological defense mechanisms are a natural response to protect one's mental health from undue shock that cannot be processed, so depending on one's personal qualities, it may not always be advisable to confront the facts. However, as professionals, we believe that we have a responsibility to value the narratives of individuals while at the same time confronting the facts.

4.2. Joy of contribution

Another factor that may explain the high level of compliance among Finns is the noble slogan of contribution to society. The beautiful sentiment that complying with policies such as the lockdown is more about preventing infection of the elderly and other vulnerable groups than it is about preventing infection of oneself, has led them to prioritize compliance over freedom. Contributions to others are known to promote positive emotions, which lead to happiness as a meaningful life (7).

In the UK, a debate has been launched on whether it is ethically permissible for a policy of fearmongering about a coronary pandemic based on the advice of behavioral scientists (8). Tame Räsänen, Bishop of the Helsinki Church District, wrote a scathing commentary on the rejection of the corona vaccine in the Helsingin Sanomat newspaper (9). It was reported in the news that hundreds of believers left the church because the archbishop, who is considered a bastion of conscience, condemned those who do not take the

vaccine, and the government and the other religious groups made condemnatory comments about it.

Appealing to beautiful emotions instead of fear seems to be working in Finland. With the love for your neighbor people would have proudly chosen to comply with the government's request. And, as in the UK and other countries, the result was the same; that many people obediently followed the policy. In the case of Finland, it has not been investigated whether the policy was intentional or not, but it cannot be denied that the campaign itself was psychological manipulation in its nature.

The pros and cons of psychological manipulation by appealing to beautiful emotions such as neighborly love are a matter of great debate. The issue includes considerations of human right, dignity and ethics and beyond this article. I will limit myself to describe the facts here.

4.3. "The Mental Illness of Obedience"

The sense of security that comes from obeying authority inhibits critical attitudes. This is because criticism and doubt can be threats to one's own mental stability. In order to survive in a state of crisis, protecting the mind becomes a most important task. Such mechanisms are unconsciously chosen as defense regulations, and it is difficult to be aware of it. Grün explains in "The Mental Illness of Obedience" (10) that

"When we are threatened and frightened, we tend to become one with the person who frightened us, and nothing is stranger than this. Moreover, the threatened person merges with the threatening person, aligning his or her judgment with that of the fearful authority figure and even abandoning his or her own identity. It is in this way that the terrified person hopes to save himself - even though he will never succeed." (p.17)

Furthermore

"By perceiving integrity as a self-chosen moral value, we mask the obedience that unites us with

those in power. Both honesty and obedience are rooted in authority, and voluntary discernment of that authority is celebrated as a morally valuable or humanly admirable quality."

He also points out the dangers of good-natured simplicity, which is one of the virtues of the Finnish people.

German journalist Koelling pointed out that uncritical obedience to authority figures and the government is deeply rooted in Japanese culture (11) in relation to the 2011 nuclear accident. Grün says that unconscious obedience is also clearly present in Western culture. Citing the Milgrim experiment (12, note 2), he also mentions that ordinary, good citizens will perform brutal actions as requested, without violent protest or rebuttal, when someone who inspires respect demands obedience. In other words, when people obey authority, they give up their moral judgment and are capable of brutal actions. What is noteworthy here is that these obedience and submission are not the result of negative feelings of following or defeating authority, but rather the recognition of a rational and honorable attitude that one voluntarily chooses.

As we have seen, in Finland, where there is "freedom of choice in life," the attitude of willingly choosing to give up one's freedom and moving toward being bound seems to embody what Fromm calls "flight from freedom" (13). In other words, modern man "may willingly surrender his freedom to a dictator of any kind, and may choose to abandon it and become a small cog in a machine. We will have enough food, clothing, and shelter, but we will not have freedom. There is a fear of wanting to be like an automatic machine." Fromm points out that this attitude was the cause of the rise of fascism and led to the disastrous situation.

4.4. Control by Virtue vs. Free Will

I have discussed that Finns' high level of trustworthiness, obedience, and compliance is

supported by the beautiful sentiment of positive illusion and joy of contribution. This attitude can be objectively observed as being controlled due to uncritical servitude to authority, however the people actually recognize it as a choice of their own will. Under this firm sense of trust, the check function of a critical attitude does not operate (14), and it is predicted that trustworthiness will increase more and more in order to strengthen the psychological security.

If Finland's well-being is based on such a sense of security experienced in voluntary submission to a trustworthy authority, can this be considered psychosocially healthy? In terms of mental health, high levels of positive emotions or successful social adjustment are considered healthy, as well as a clear and independent perception of reality. Obedience, evaluated as an honest and sincere attitude, needs to be reconsidered as it is also described as an immature attitude that abandons independence. If human dignity is based on having free will, not being controlled or manipulated, and living a life that freely expresses one's individuality, then obedience to authority can be said to lead to its destruction.

The coronary pandemic, or infodemic as it is called, was a mixture of information that led to a state of VUCA around the world. Due to human-centered scientism, various measures have been taken around the world based on the belief that it should be controllable and that the infection should be stopped. Control of viral infections has been the top priority, with human rights violations that would be unthinkable in normal times - invasions of privacy, surveillance of people's lives, restrictions on freedom of speech and action. Despite the fact that the data are beginning to show some shades on this draconian policy, surveillance by an overly controlled society is increasingly being carried out in the name of infectious disease control. And it is, as Fromm says, our own choice.

5. Conclusion: The Perils of Being a Man of Integrity

I mentioned the risk of the virtues of trust, obedience, and patience going too far in the current situation in Finland. This is also true for our country, Japan, where people are "obedient" and "patient" despite low trust in the government and tend to be subservient to authority.

Easily controlled by authority driven by anxiety and fear in a state of crisis is not only the ordinary people who have abandoned thinking. Forgetting the principle that all hypotheses and theories are doomed to be disproved (Note 4), have we not fallen into the trap of focusing only on interpreting data and theorizing in accordance with established theories, and refusing to see the inconvenient reality?

This is not surprising, since experts are also human beings with fragile and weak minds, who need security to survive in a prolonged crisis. However, such an attitude is not only neither scientific nor rational, but also even destructive. I would like to point out the danger that it is the experts who are so confident in their past successes that they are blinded to the truth by unconscious psychological tricks. It is only by sincerely and deeply reflecting on ourselves once again, that we can paradoxically use this historical crisis as the best opportunity to contribute to the development of a better world.

Finland has won the honor of being the happiest country in the world, and its way of being tends to be praised as a model, and there is little critical discussion at present. In this study, I attempted to psychologically elucidate a problem that cannot be seen only through superficial observations and data. It is undeniable that the conclusions are limited due to the analysis within the limited information. It is difficult to have a comprehensive view because of the lack of fieldwork in the field, limited interview data, insufficient literature

research, and the fact that we are still in the midst of ever-changing issues. Nevertheless, I have raised the issue here because I recognize that it is an important one in this emergency situation.

Notes and References

Note 1: Based on information collected in online interviews with Finns conducted in (Ref. 3)

Note 2: A narrative by self-employed woman in her 50s.

Note3: Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity are the acronyms used to describe the state of crisis.

Note 2: In Milgrim's so-called "Eichmann Experiment," several people followed the orders of a supposedly authoritative experimenter and gave electric shocks to innocent people. The more powerful the shocks, the more they justified their actions. In order to adapt to the world, we entrust our thinking to our superiors (the experimenters). And the more unforgivable our actions are as human beings, the more we try to justify the world and its stories. Eichmann, the infamous Nazi, is said to have been in this state when he committed the massacre of millions of Jews. (Ref. 12)

Note 4: Karl Popper, „If we are uncritical we shall always find what we want: we shall look for, and find, confirmations, and we shall look away from, and not see, whatever might be dangerous to our pet theories. In this way it is only too easy to obtain what appears to be overwhelming evidence in favor of a theory which, if approached critically, would have been refuted.- from The Poverty of Historicism. (Ref.14)

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