



ESRC Research Group on
Wellbeing in Developing Countries



PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING: A PROPOSAL FOR INTERNATIONALLY COMPARABLE INDICATORS

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Subjective Wellbeing

**Global or domain-specific satisfaction,
ongoing emotional experience**

“Is my life going well, according to the standards that I choose to use?”

Diener, Tiberius (JOLS)

Common international measure as...

- single item
- combines “judgement” & affective variables
- thought to be less historically & culturally specific
- defined by respondent, not ‘expert judgement’

However, SWB “necessary, but not sufficient condition for a good life” (Diener)

Measurement issues:

Adaptation/ response shift;

Context effects;

Discrepancies between global, domain-specific, & objective indicators (e.g. Biswas-Diener & Diener, 2002)

Happiness (positive affect) or *Hedonic Wellbeing*

Preponderance of positive affect (pleasure) over negative (pain)

Epicurus, Bentham

Kahneman (ESM), 'new Utilitarians' (e.g. Layard)

Psychological or *Eudaimonic Wellbeing*

Human flourishing & virtuous action

Aristotle

Huppert (clinical markers), Ryff (PWB), Ryan & Deci (SDT), Seligman & Cziksmenhtalyi (positive psychology)

Measures of *mental ill health* excluded as
“multi and cross cultural contexts call these criteria into question” (p7)

Therefore Ryff also excluded (Christopher, 1999)
But assumption that basic psychological needs universal

Proposed components of measure:

Psychological WB

1. Meaning in Life (Ryan & Sapp, 2007)
2. Autonomy
3. Competence
4. Relatedness

Subjective WB

5. Satisfaction with life “as a whole”
6. Satisfaction with specific domains of life
7. Happiness

Meaning in Life questionnaire (Steger ea, 2006)

Meaning defined as “the sense made of, and significance felt regarding, the nature of one's being and existence”

Two 5-item sub-scales representing *Presence of* and *Search for Meaning*

Three ‘presence’ items selected, which measure whether person understands what makes their life meaningful & whether this translates into a clear & satisfying ‘life purpose’

Basic [Psychological] Needs Satisfaction Questionnaire
(Ryan & Deci, 2000)

3 subscales of *Autonomy, Competence, & Relatedness*,
totalling 21 items

9 items selected, measuring following aspects :

Autonomy: Self-determination, freedom of expression,
authenticity

Competence: External appreciation, sense of
accomplishment, self-efficacy

Relatedness: Smooth social interactions, friendship, care

Global life satisfaction

Single-item measuring satisfaction with life as a whole

Domain-specific life satisfaction

Profile measure representing “first-level deconstruction of ‘life-as-a-whole’”; explains 50% of LAW

Comprehensive review of literature (Cummins 1996); supported by:

- i) Theoretical literature (e.g. “requirements for human flourishing” [Ranis et al., 2005])
- ii) Findings of other studies, e.g. qualitative research in Ethiopia, Bangladesh, Thailand, & Peru (Camfield, 2006)

Happiness

Single-item measuring happiness with life as a whole

Personal Wellbeing Index

Validity & reliability verified in numerous international studies

- Material wellbeing (food & housing)
- Health
- Productivity (work)
- Security (physical safety)
- Intimacy (relationships with family & friends)
- Community (education, neighbourhood, helping others)
- Spiritual, religious, philosophical beliefs

General points:

Large international datasets for global single-item measures, *but* reliability debated; may not capture Eudaimonic WB

May need to choose items that best represent construct in particular contexts

Majority of PWB scales validated with North American psychology undergraduates

May perform very differently with people from different countries, socio-economic statuses, age groups, etc

Psychometric reliability affected by:

i) Changes in method of administration (e.g. interview vs. self-report);

ii) Transposing items from one scale to another;

iii) Translation of items & scales

WHOQOL scaling studies

Need for cognitive debriefing to establish meaning & priority

iv) Positioning of items within scale, e.g. happiness after domain-specific LS (Schwartz & Strack, 1999)

