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Subjective Well-Being

- School-Based Interventions

Subjective Well-Being (SWB)

Carmel Proctor
Positive Psychology Research Centre,
St. Peter Port, Guernsey, UK

Synonyms

Happiness; Hedonic level; Individual well-being; Life satisfaction; Morality and subjective well-being; Satisfaction with life

Definition

Subjective well-being (SWB) is the personal perception and experience of positive and negative emotional responses and global and (domain) specific cognitive evaluations of satisfaction with life. It has been defined as “a person’s cognitive and affective evaluations of his or her life” (Diener, Lucas, & Oishi, 2002, p. 63).

Simply, SWB is the individual evaluation of quality of life (QOL) and therefore converges with the definition of QOL.

Description

The term SWB was first introduced by Diener (1984) as a means of identifying the field of psychology that attempts to understand people’s evaluations of their QOL, including both their cognitive judgments and affective reactions (Diener, Suh, & Oishi, 1997). The scientific term “subjective well-being” introduced by Diener (1984) is often used interchangeably with, or in order to avoid the ambiguous meaning of, the term “► happiness.” The SWB literature covers studies that have used such diverse terms as happiness, hedonic level, ► satisfaction with life, moral, and ► positive affect.

The first broad review of happiness research was conducted by Wilson (1967) and concluded that “the happy person emerges as a young, healthy, well-educated, well-paid, extroverted, optimistic, worry-free, religious, married person, with high ► self-esteem, high job moral, modest aspirations, of either sex and of a wide range of ► intelligence” (p. 294). In the decades since Wilson’s (1967) review, investigations into SWB have broadened and evolved to include not only the correlates and demographic characteristics of happiness but also the underlying processes, interactions between internal and external circumstances, and causal pathways through which personal and environmental factors effect and influence how individuals perceive their lives.

Subjective well-being has three components: ► life satisfaction (LS), positive affect (PA), and ► negative affect (NA) (Andrews & Withey, 1976). Individuals are said to have high SWB if they experience LS and frequent PA (e.g., joy, optimism) and infrequent NA (e.g., sadness, anger). Conversely, individuals are said to have low SWB if they are dissatisfied with life, experience little joy, and frequently feel negative emotions such as anger or ► anxiety (Diener et al., 1997). However, positive SWB is not to

be considered synonymous with mental or psychological health, just as the absence of psychopathology is not indicative of positive SWB. It is possible for an individual to have high levels of psychopathology and high SWB, just as it is possible for an individual to have low levels of psychopathology and low SWB (Greenspoon & Saklofske, 2001).

As a tripartite category of phenomenon, SWB is viewed as a broad area of scientific interest that includes global and domain specific judgments of LS and positive and negative emotional responses (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). The field covers the entire range of well-being from agony to ecstasy and therefore not only concerns itself with the causes of depression and anxiety but also seeks to differentiate slight happiness from moderate and extreme happiness and determine what leads to happiness over time (i.e., interest is not in momentary moods or fleeting emotions, but what produces long-term positive SWB) (Diener et al., 1997). Subjective well-being is defined by internal experience and measured from an individual's own perspective (i.e., self-reported), a characteristic which differentiates the field from clinical psychology (Diener et al.).

According to research conducted by Lucas, Diener, and Suh (1996), PA, NA, and LS are separable constructs, and therefore, researchers interested in studying SWB may wish to assess these components separately. In general, the affective components of SWB have received more attention in the literature than the cognitive components (i.e., LS) (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985; Pavot & Diener, 1993), despite their equal importance (Gilman, Huebner, & Laughlin, 2000). This imbalance is accounted for in part by the fact that the affective components are based on emotional responses which, although invariably short lived and fluctuating, are representative of the nature of everyday life (Gilman et al., 2000). Indeed, Diener and Emmons (1985) demonstrated that trait measures of PA and NA are essentially uncorrelated, and therefore, how much one experiences pleasant affect has little impact on how much they experience unpleasant affect. This research led to

considerations of the independent contributions of the hedonic (and cognitive) components of SWB (see also Bradburn, 1969; Bradburn & Caplovitz, 1965). The hedonic component is most often viewed as the ratio of PA to NA over time (see Fordyce, 1988) and is considered to be an important component in the overall structure of SWB (Larsen & Eid, 2008; Larsen & Prizmic, 2008). Research investigating the characteristics of PA and NA, such as the intensity and frequency of affective experience (e.g., Diener, Larsen, Levine, & Emmons, 1985; Larsen & Diener, 1985), has demonstrated that it is the frequency, not the intensity, of affective experiences which has the greatest impact on overall SWB in a person's life over time (Larsen, Diener, & Emmons, 1985). The cognitive component (i.e., LS), on the other hand, is based on overall appraisals of QOL and thus is not typically susceptible to change due to short-term emotional reactions to life events. Therefore, LS is considered not only to be the more stable component (Eid & Diener, 2004) but also the key indicator of positive SWB (Diener & Diener, 1995). Interestingly, in most populations, PA, NA, and LS are moderately and sometimes highly correlated (Diener, Napa-Scollon, Oishi, Dzokoto, & Suh, 2000).

Measurement

Both the affective and cognitive components of SWB can each be assessed via self-report. Examples of the most common measures include the ▶ Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985), the ▶ Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), and the ▶ Affect Balance Scale (Bradburn, 1969). Techniques for assessing the intensity and frequency of PA and NA have also been developed (e.g., Larsen & Diener, 1985; Schimmack & Diener, 1997) along with ▶ experience sampling methods for assessing SWB in situ (Scollon, Kim-Prieto, & Diener, 2003). However, a more comprehensive assessment of SWB requires a multimethod approach (Diener, 1994; Diener & Eid, 2006). Methods used in a multimethod approach may include, but are not limited to, self-reports and peer reports; observational,

physiological, motivational, cognitive, and behavioral methods; and emotion-sensitive tasks (Larsen & Prizmic-Larsen, 2006; Lucas, Diener, & Larsen, 2003; Sandvik, Diener, & Seidlitz, 1993).

Determinants

There is no single determinant of SWB, but some conditions are necessary for high SWB such as positive mental health and positive relationships, but they are not in themselves sufficient to cause happiness. Research findings suggest that personality traits (e.g., positive and negative affect) and temperament factors (e.g., introversion and extroversion) account for most of the variance in SWB (Costa & McCrae, 1980; Diener, 1996; Emmons & Diener, 1985). However, other determinants include good social relations (Diener & Seligman, 2002), variability due to genetic contributions (Lykken, 1999), environment (Diener & Seligman, 2004; Diener & Suh, 1999), employment (Diener, Nickerson, Lucas, & Sandvik, 2002; Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, & Diener, 2004), marriage (Lucas, Clark, Georgellis, & Diener, 2003), age (Diener & Suh, 1998), culture (Diener, Suh, Smith, & Shao, 1995), and individual characteristics (Diener, Diener, & Diener, 1995).

Consequences

According to Diener and Diener (1996), most people are happy. In fact, cross-national data has shown that the average level of SWB is above the neutral point throughout the world (Diener & Diener, 1996). Individuals with positive SWB have consistently been shown to report high LS, as well as satisfaction across multiple life domains (e.g., marriage, income, physical health), positive emotions, increased mental health, and a longer life (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). Indeed, cross-sectional, longitudinal, and experimental data have all shown that positive SWB precedes diverse positive personal, behavioral, psychological, and social outcomes (see Lyubomirsky et al., 2005 for a review). Happy people are more extroverted, social, active, healthier, and enjoy more positive relationships, and their pleasant mood fosters

creative thinking (Fredrickson, 2001; Larsen & Eid, 2008). Indeed, happiness may be the ultimate goal of being human.

Cross-References

- ▶ Affect Balance Scale
- ▶ Anxiety
- ▶ Experience Sampling
- ▶ Happiness
- ▶ Intelligence
- ▶ Introvert/Introversion
- ▶ Life Satisfaction
- ▶ Mood
- ▶ Negative Affect
- ▶ Positive Affect
- ▶ Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS)
- ▶ Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), an Overview
- ▶ Self-Esteem
- ▶ Spain, Personal Well-Being Index; Application with People Aged 50 Years and Older

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Subjective Well-Being in ASEAN

SioK Kuan Tambyah and Soo Juan Tan
Department of Marketing, NUS Business School,
National University of Singapore, Singapore

Definition

ASEAN

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established on August 8, 1967, in Bangkok by the five original member countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. It is now a 10-member organization comprising the original founding members, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam. As of 2011, the ASEAN region has a population of about 592 million, a total land area of 4.4 million square kilometers, a combined gross domestic product of almost US\$ 1,500 billion, and a total trade of about US\$ 1,500 billion (Selected Basic ASEAN Indicators, <http://www.aseansec.org/stat/SummaryTable.pdf>).

Description

Overview

Issues relating to ► subjective well-being in the five founding members of ASEAN, using data from the 2004, 2006, and 2007 AsiaBarometer surveys, will be reported and discussed here. Although individual ASEAN countries may have studies on subjective well-being, there are very few studies that have systematically discussed these issues across various ASEAN countries. This research is timely as ASEAN works toward a vision of “ASEAN as a concert of Southeast Asian nations, outward looking, living in peace, stability and prosperity, bonded together in partnership in dynamic development and in a community of caring societies” (ASEAN, <http://www.aseansec.org/64.htm>).

Subjective well-being research is concerned with individuals’ subjective experiences of their lives and “the underlying assumption is that well-being can be defined by people’s conscious experiences – in terms of hedonic feelings or cognitive satisfaction” (Diener & Suh, 1997, p. 191). Hence, empirical research on subjective well-being has focused on cognitive and affective measures, including ► happiness, ► enjoyment, ► satisfaction, accomplishment, and ► quality of life (e.g., Cramer, Torgersen, & Kringlen, 2004; Diener & Suh, 2000; Pichler, 2006; Shin & Rutkowski, 2003; Trzcinski & Holst, 2008). We explored various aspects of subjective well-being by having the ASEAN residents evaluate how happy they were, whether they were enjoying life, and if they felt a sense of achievement. To gain better insights into their subjective well-being, the impact of four demographic variables (gender, age, education, and income) and five non-demographic variables (religiosity, national pride, satisfaction with the personal life, satisfaction with the interpersonal life, and satisfaction with the public life) on happiness, enjoyment, and achievement was also examined.

Method

Data Sources

The datasets used for the analysis were from the AsiaBarometer project, a regional opinion survey