PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING: A PROPOSAL FOR INTERNATIONALLY COMPARABLE INDICATORS

Author: Emma Samman, OPHI, University of Oxford
Presenter: Laura Camfield, Wellbeing in Developing Countries ESRC Research Group (University of Bath) & ‘Young Lives’ (QeH, Oxford)
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 & Cziksmemthalyi (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 ea, 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)