

Subjective Well-Being

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Subjective well-being (SWB) is defined as an individual's cognitive and affective evaluations of his or her life. The cognitive element encompasses how one feels about his or her life, and the affective element refers to emotions, moods, and feelings. In simpler terms, SWB represents an individual's happiness and life satisfaction. The concept of SWB has been discussed for centuries; however, interest in this field has grown exponentially since the 1950s as Psychologists expanded their focus on negative emotional states such as depression to also explore positive emotional states such as happiness and feelings of well-being.

Measurement of SWB relies heavily on self-report surveys which assess happiness by asking individuals to evaluate specific aspects of their lives and their lives as a whole. These surveys have allowed researchers to better understand the underlying factors of SWB, which has revealed SWB is not made up of one single element. Rather, these studies have found SWB to be comprised of a variety of factors- both internal and external. Internal factors that have been found to influence SWB include personality and temperament as well as outlook and resilience, whereas external factors include family experiences, life and work engagements, and physical health.

One of the strongest factors that has been found to influence SWB is an individual's personality and temperament. Previous literature has paid special attention to how neuroticism and extraversion influence SWB, as individuals high in neuroticism tend to report lower levels of SWB compared to highly extroverted individuals who report higher levels of SWB. Another significant internal factor in an individual's SWB is their outlook on life and resilience. Research

has shown that individuals who adapt to adversity and overcome failures are more likely to have higher SWB than individuals who are less able to do so.

External factors known to significantly influence SWB include family experiences. This includes findings that consistently married individuals have a higher purpose in life, which directly relates to higher SWB compared to single and divorced individuals. Further, parenting style plays a role in an individual's SWB. Those who recall having parents who were authoritative, as opposed to authoritarian or uninvolved parenting styles, report higher SWB, and those whose parents were permissive tend to have lower SWB. Other family experiences that have been associated with enhancing SWB include parenting and helping other family members, while family experiences such as loss of a parent as a child or experiencing psychological or physical violence compromises SWB.

Additional external factors related to individuals high in SWB are life and work engagements. Social participation and having a purpose in life- both components of life and work engagements- are strong predictors of life satisfaction and ultimately SWB. For example, individuals with larger social networks, more stable and rewarding relationships, are satisfied with their work, and are successful tend to have high SWB. Furthermore, engaging in work and educational opportunities are the strongest predictors of SWB among older adults. Moderate amounts of volunteering, especially in late life, are associated with higher levels of purpose revealing both paid and unpaid work can provide individuals with higher SWB.

Finally, physical health is a significant external factor related to higher levels of SWB. Researchers have found well-being to be compromised in individuals with chronic pain, disabilities, and various illnesses. Conversely, when SWB is explored as an antecedent factor rather than an outcome, it can serve as a protective factor against a multitude of conditions such

as stroke, myocardial infarction, and Alzheimer's disease. These individuals also tend to engage in greater amounts of positive health-related behaviors, such as adhering to medical regimens and wearing seat belts more often than those with lower SWB.

Previous literature claims personality, specifically certain personality traits, have a strong influence on SWB however many other internal and external factors are also correlated with levels of SWB. Although additional research is needed to understand which factors are most significant in determining SWB, it is clear that individuals with high SWB have many positive outcomes. Most evidence on this topic today reveals people of high SWB are more likely to help others, are socially connected, engage in purposeful and meaningful work, perform healthy behaviors, and are less prone to various illnesses. In sum, people with the highest levels of SWB tend to live longer, healthier lives- and every individual has the ability, to an extent, to engage in specific behaviors and associate with certain environments that can promote higher SWB.

See Also:

Further Reading:

Diener, E. (2018). Happiness: the science of subjective well-being. In R. Biswas-Diener & E.

Diener (Eds), *Noba textbook series: Psychology*. Champaign, IL: DEF publishers.

Ryff, C.D. (2014). Psychological well-being revisited: advances in the science and practice of

eudaimonia. *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics*, 83, 10-28.