

Chapter 1

AIMS OF THIS BIBLIOGRAPHY

1/1 **Overview of the scientific literature on happiness**

1/1.1 Interest in happiness

1/1.2 Information demand

1/1.3 Limitation to view on the available scientific literature

1/1.4 Contributions of this bibliography

1/2 **Tool for this findings archive**

1/2.1 Work list

1/2.2 Reference list

1.1 **Overview of the research literature**

Interest in happiness is rising and this generates a demand for 'hard' information. A large scientific literature has been developed in response to that information demand. This literature is difficult to oversee, both because of its size and because of the confusion of tongues in this field. This bibliography provides a selection of scientific works, focused on happiness in the sense of 'the subjective enjoyment of one's life as-a-whole'. All the literature on this particular topic is gathered and ordered in different ways.

1.1.1 *Interest in happiness*

Happiness is a highly valued concept in present day Western society. Not only does everybody agree that it is better to be happy than unhappy, but studies on values show that present day people prioritize happiness. A happy life is typically considered more valuable than social prestige or material affluence. Happiness for everybody even outranks cherished social goals such as 'peace' and 'equality'.

This is not to say that happiness is widely considered the only and ultimate goal. Utilitarianism is in fact seldom practiced. We typically seek ways to optimize happiness and other valued matters: for instance, to make life more rewarding without doing injustice to others or falling into empty hedonism. Such optimal mixes are pursued individually in private life styles, as well as collectively in public policy.

1.1.2 *Information demand*

Rational pursuit of happiness requires an understanding of its nature and determinants. Attuning with other valued matters also requires insight into consequences of happiness. These matters have been given much thought by many

scholars, which has crystallized into a vast literature on happiness.

The greater and eldest part of this literature concerns advice on matters of living and is based on worldly wisdom and ideological conviction. In this tradition the receipt is typically more prominent than its deduction.

In the smaller and newer part of the literature, an attempt is made to gain an understanding of happiness using modern social scientific concepts and research methods.

1.1.3 *Limitations to view on the available scientific literature*

The classic moralist literature on happiness is rather easy to survey. It is well documented in various reference works and bibliographies. See subject category U 'Philosophy of happiness' of this bibliography. The modern scientific literature on happiness is less easy to assess. It is more recent and less crystallized. Also, it is less well documented.

The following problems obscure our perspectives on the available scientific information about happiness.

- The word 'happiness' is used in different ways; not only to denote 'the subjective enjoyment of one's life as-a-whole', which is the focus of this bibliography (cf. Chapter 2), but also for related phenomena, such as positive mental health or good living conditions. Hence literature searches on this term yield a mixed bin.
- The phenomenon aimed at in this bibliography is also denoted using other terms, such as, life-satisfaction, 'subjective well-being', 'affect balance' and 'contentment'. Hence the literature must be searched on several other terms as well, which also yield many mishits.
- At present, much of the modern scientific writing on happiness is scattered over different disciplines, such as economics, gerontology, psychology and sociology.
- The scientific literature on happiness is also scattered over many different languages.
- Happiness is often a side-subject in a study and therefore not mentioned in the titles or abstracts of research reports. Much valuable information is lost in this way.
- The number of scientific publications on happiness is rising rapidly. This year (2000) some 700 scientific works on happiness, as we define it, will appear, and to identify these, about 1200 publications must be inspected.
- The scientific literature on happiness has grown so large, that it cannot be overseen, not even by specialists. To date (June 2020), a search in Google Scholar on 'happiness' yields 2.130.000 hits. Finding one's way in this morass of texts requires first of all a rigorous selection on a particular concept of happiness and next a fine-grained subject classification.

1.1.4 Contributions of this bibliography

Poor accessibility of the literature seriously impedes progress in the understanding of happiness. It causes a lot of repetition of work and it hinders cumulation of knowledge in this field. This bibliography is meant to improve that situation. It does so in the following ways:

- Focus on happiness in the sense of ‘the subjective enjoyment of one’s life-as-a-whole’ This meaning is delineated in more detail in [Chapter 2](#) of this introductory text
- Gathering of *all* scientific publications on this particular subject. Though never fully complete, the collection covers the literature fairly well.
- Uniform description of the publications
- Fine-grained subject classification
- Advanced search tools are provided on the website
- Links to full texts are provided
- Links to standardized descriptions of research findings reported in the publications included in the ‘findings collections’ of this database are provided.

1.2 Tool in this findings archive

A main aim of this World Database of Happiness is to prepare data for research syntheses, for quantitative meta-analyses in particular. This aim requires that acceptable studies are identified and that only the findings on happiness obtained in these studies are entered into the database. For that reason, all publications are scanned to see whether they report findings of an empirical study that used an acceptable measure of happiness (cf. [Chapter 5](#)). As such, this bibliography functions as the first step in the process of research synthesis. tool.

1.2.1 Work list

About half the scientific publications on happiness included in this bibliography report the results of an empirical study in which a valid measure of happiness has been used. The noting of the validity of a measure of happiness used in a study, allows users of this database to choose ‘eligible’ studies from this bibliography.

Research synthesis typically focuses on a particular subject and this bibliography allows a selection of eligible studies by subject.

Adding research results to the findings archive is time consuming and for that reason, not all eligible findings have been entered yet. To date (July 2020), about half the available findings is on the waiting list. This requires that we know, whether, eligible findings reported in a publication have been entered. This is recorded in the bibliography.

1.2.2 Reference source

This World Database of Happiness is an archive of research findings, which are described on standardized electronic 'finding pages'. Research findings are taken from 'publications' and the finding pages must involve a reference to that bibliographical source. Rather than providing full bibliographical detail on each findings page, we add links to this bibliography.

LITERATURE

Veenhoven, R. (2017)

[Happiness research, Past and Future](#)

Senshu Social Wellbeing Review