
Wellbeing

Summary

- Every aspect of your life influences your state of wellbeing.
 - Some people believe that wealth is a fast track to happiness. Yet various international studies have shown that it is the quality of our personal relationships, not the size of our bank balances, which has the greatest effect on our state of wellbeing.
 - Keeping track of a population's wellbeing helps governments to decide on particular policies.
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Wellbeing is not just the absence of disease or illness. It is a complex combination of a person's physical, mental, emotional and social health factors. Wellbeing is strongly linked to happiness and life satisfaction. In short, wellbeing could be described as how you feel about yourself and your life.

Factors that influence wellbeing

Every aspect of your life influences your state of wellbeing. Researchers investigating happiness have found the following factors enhance a person's wellbeing:

- Happy intimate relationship with a partner
- Network of close friends
- Enjoyable and fulfilling career
- Enough money
- Regular exercise
- Nutritional diet
- Sufficient sleep
- Spiritual or religious beliefs
- Fun hobbies and leisure pursuits
- Healthy self-esteem
- Optimistic outlook
- Realistic and achievable goals
- Sense of purpose and meaning
- A sense of belonging
- The ability to adapt to change
- Living in a fair and democratic society.

Factors are interrelated

The factors that influence wellbeing are interrelated. For example, a job provides not just money but purpose, goals, friendships and a sense of belonging. Some factors also make up for the lack of others; for example, a good marriage can compensate for a lack of friendships, while religious beliefs may help a person come to terms with physical illness.

Wealth is not the key

Money is linked to wellbeing, because having enough money improves living conditions and increases social status. However, happiness may increase with income but only to a point.

Many people believe that wealth is a fast track to happiness. But it's not true. Various international studies have shown that it is the quality of our personal relationships, not the size of our bank balance, which has the greatest effect on our state of wellbeing.

Believing that money is the key to happiness can also harm a person's wellbeing. For example, a person who chooses to work a lot of overtime misses out on time with family, friends and leisure pursuits.

The added stress of long working hours may also reduce a person's life satisfaction. Research shows that people who pursue 'extrinsic' goals like money and fame are more anxious, depressed and dissatisfied than people who value 'intrinsic' goals like close relationships with loved ones.

Wellbeing can be elusive

Wellbeing is important, but seems a little hard to come by. One American study into mental health found that, while one in four respondents was depressed, only one in five was happy – the rest fell somewhere between, neither happy nor depressed. A recent Australian consumer study into wellbeing showed that:

- 58 per cent wish they could spend more time on improving their health and wellbeing.
- 79 per cent of parents with children aged less than 18 years of age wish they could spend more time on improving their health and wellbeing.
- 83 per cent are prepared to pay more money for products or services that enhance their feelings of wellbeing.

Measuring national wellbeing

Measuring wellbeing in a population is difficult because the interpretation of wellbeing is so subjective – how you feel about your life largely depends on the way you see it. Like the saying goes, one person's problem is another person's challenge.

Australian researchers try to measure wellbeing in order to keep tabs on living conditions. A typical approach to measuring wellbeing is to count the number of individuals affected by a particular factor. For example, it is helpful to keep track of how many people:

- Have cancer
- Are single, married or divorced
- Exercise on a regular basis
- Smoke or drink
- Are on unemployment benefits
- Are victims of crime
- Are unable to read or write.

Keeping track of a population's wellbeing helps governments to decide on particular policies. For example, knowing the average weekly income of a population helps to set the 'poverty line', which may then influence decisions on social welfare reform.

The result depends on what is measured

Survey results tend to differ depending on what was measured. For example, an Australian survey of young people found that eight in every 10 reported feeling satisfied with their lives, including how they felt about their work, studies, income and relationships.

However, this positive picture is contradicted by another survey, which found that about half of all young Australians

are grappling with a difficult problem such as depression or alcohol abuse. Wellbeing is a nebulous concept that is hard to pin down with graphs, charts and statistics.

How to achieve wellbeing

- Develop and maintain strong relationships with family and friends.
- Make regular time available for social contact.
- Try to find work that you find enjoyable and rewarding, rather than just working for the best pay.
- Eat wholesome, nutritious foods.
- Do regular physical activity.
- Become involved in activities that interest you.
- Join local organisations or clubs that appeal to you.
- Set yourself achievable goals and work towards them.
- Try to be optimistic and enjoy each day.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Family and friends
- Counsellor
- Lifeline Tel. 13 11 14
- Kids Help Line Tel. 1800 551 800

Things to remember

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