

Determinants of Happiness- Continued:

- i. Genetics
- ii. Life events/ circumstances
- iii. Intentional activities

i. Genetics:

1. Happiness Set Point

Like a thermostat, after a setback or a good fortune the happiness levels will come back to its **usual level**. The set point for happiness is similar to the set point for weight. Some people are blessed with a skinny dispositions: Even when they're not trying, they **easily maintain their weight**. By contrast, others have to **work extraordinarily hard** to keep their weight at a desirable level, and the moment they slack off even a bit, the pounds creep back on. The implication of this finding for happiness is that like genes for intelligence or cholesterol, the magnitude of our **innate set points**—that is, whether it is high (a six on a seven-point scale) or low (a two) or in between (a four)—governs to a **large extent** how happy we will be over the course of our lives.

2. According to investigations, **cheerfulness, contentment and psychological satisfaction** maybe inherited. On the other hand, neuroticism is also inherited (Bartels, 2015)

There is lack of a **stable pattern** or order despite the heritable trait- where we are born is a matter of chance.

3. **Serotonin-transporter gene**: The serotonin-transporter gene comes in two functional variants—**long and short**. Longer one produces more transporter-protein molecules than the shorter one. Individuals have two versions of each gene, one from each parent
Therefore, the possible combinations are- Two long variants, OR two short variants, OR one of each. Individuals with **two long** variants of the serotonin transporter gene, report significantly **higher** levels of **well-being** indicators as compared to others.

ii. Life events/ circumstances

Life circumstances denote aspects of one's life over which one has little or **no control**. Perhaps the most counterintuitive finding is that only about **10 percent of the variance** in our happiness levels is explained by differences in life circumstances or situations—that is, whether we are **rich or poor**, healthy or unhealthy, beautiful or plain, married or divorced, etc.

- **Both** negative and positive changes in life can cause **unhappiness**. For example, a positive change such as a **marriage** or **birthday of a child** may be **stressful** to some. Similarly negative circumstances such as a **divorce**, death of a loved one or even a surprise test maybe stressful. Its assessment or measurement was attempted by researchers and **Holmes and Rahe's** (1967) came up with the **Social Re-adjustment Rating Scale**. It identified **life changes experienced** in the past six months and **stress** experienced as a **result** of it; both positive and negative changes were included.
- Life Circumstances could include: Demographic details such as **age, gender, ethnicity, designation, income**, and **religious affiliation** which are **Objective data**. Life status conditions such as material possessions, financial satisfaction, **GNH** which are **Subjective data**.
Gross National Happiness (GNH)- It measures the **collective happiness** and **well-being** of a **population**. It was proposed by **Bhutan** as an **alternative** to Gross Domestic Product (**GDP**) as both economists and psychologists found **GDP** to be an inadequate measure of **overall well-being** of a country.

Major investigations conducted

Lottery Winners & Accident Victims – Brickman et al. (1978)

Brickman and his colleagues studied 22 lottery winners and 29 accident victims. While the lottery winners had won money in the range of \$50000~\$1million, the accident victims had become paralyzed to various degrees. These participants were interviewed within 1 month to 1 year of the critical event, that is, either winning the lottery or being in an accident.

- Participants were **required to rate**:
- their **happiness in the past, present, future**
- happiness generated by some mundane everyday activities

Main findings:

- A **Contrast effect** was present. Lottery winners rated the pleasure of mundane events of **everyday life** significantly **lower than expected**. They kept **comparing** every event with the one **big positive event** in the past.
- A **Nostalgia effect** was seen. Accident victims reported a **happier past**. Here the past is much happier than the present. **Lottery winner didn't** not exhibit this.
- **Habituation effect** was identified. Accident victims were **not as unhappy**, as expected. They showed **lower general happiness** than lottery winners, but these levels were **above the mid-point** of the scale. Interpretation: **Extreme event led to extreme changes in the environment**. However, lottery winners not as happy as expected and accident victims not as unhappy as expected. **Severe outcomes do not** have as **great an impact** as might be expected

What kind of life events have a long lasting impact on happiness?

According to set-point theory, individuals **react to circumstances** and then return to their **earlier level** of happiness.

However, some studies have shown that a few circumstances have a **sustained impact** on one's happiness in **adult life** (Lucas, et al, 2004)

- **Loss of spouse**
- Continued **unemployment**

Individuals who experience such events **may not return** to their **earlier level of happiness**.

Loss by death/divorce

Lucas, et. al. (2003) - Loss of a spouse (by death/divorce) has been "rated as being more **stressful than going to jail**". Easterlin (2006) found that individuals who are **divorced, separated or widowed** are significantly **less happy** than individuals who remain in **happy relationships** for the rest of their lives. Michael & Ben-Zur (2007) discovered that **financial difficulties, change in social status, adjustment to new household roles and responsibilities effects** individuals' **emotions, behavior and health** and could lead to **depression and anxiety** symptoms

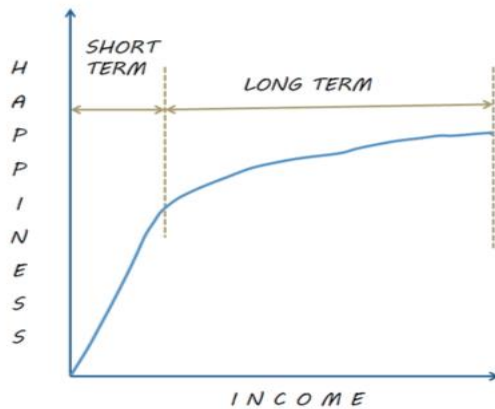
Unemployment and Happiness

Unemployment has a **significant impact** on one's happiness levels. Lucas (2004) **tracked changes** in life satisfaction before, during, and after the experiences of **job loss** that had a **significant impact** on **lifestyle**. Participants reported **less satisfaction** in the years following unemployment; this **decline in happiness** continued **even though** individuals ultimately obtained **employment again**. Participants did not return to their **original levels** of happiness **for many years** after the unemployment struggle.

Diener and Seligman (2004) also studied unemployed individuals and found that they had significantly **lower levels of well-being** than the employed. They also tend to have **higher levels of suicidal behavior**. This was due to a **lack of a sense of purpose** in their life. Participants didn't know which direction their life was going in and **lacked meaningfulness** in their activities.

Income and Happiness - Richard Easterlin Paradox

- Easterlin's (1974) study "Does Economic Growth Improve the Human Lot? Some Empirical Evidence" found the following: Within a given country people with **higher incomes** are **more** likely to report being **happy** as compared to those with lower incomes. However, the rate of growth of **happiness** did **not correspond** with the **rate of growth of income**. After the individual reaches the income required to meet basic needs, the rate of growth of happiness **was found to decline**.



Reasons behind this paradox:

- **Habituation:** People get **used** to money very **quickly**
- **Fulfilling needs** versus **fulfilling wants**
- **Social comparison:** The richer one gets, the more likely it is that they will compare themselves with others
- Other factors that are positively correlated with income, but are associated negatively with happiness: More **responsibility**, more **working hours**, more **commuting time**, **less time spent with family/friends** (from findings by Diener, Easterlin)

Majority of the population (including many **developing countries**) **claims to enjoy life more or less**.

Only in very **poor countries** the number of unhappy citizens **equals** that of the happy ones

(Veenhoven, 1984). In **developed** nations positive affect typically **outbalances** negative affect (Bless & Schwartz 1984; Veenhoven 1984).

Money vs. Social relationships

Using regression equations, economists have been able to work out the “prices” of social relationships. In other words, they were able to put a **financial value on friendships**.

This approach of comparing money to relationships has received more criticism than acceptance by psychologists worldwide. Psychologists approach: If money doesn’t make you happy then you probably aren’t spending it right (Dunn et al., 2011). Dunn et al. (2011) recommend **buying experiences** instead of things, use money to **benefit others** rather than themselves. For example, going on trips, going out with friends and/or family. It is important to beware of **comparison shopping**. For example, splurging on an i-phone simply because others have it even if there is no need for it.

- Overall conclusion: **Demographic** and environmental **factors** **affect** happiness at varying levels, **but to a lesser degree than do genetics**.

iii. Intentional Activity

Intentional activities are actions which people choose to engage in. They are understood to have the effect of **changing one’s levels** of happiness (Lyubomirsky & Sheldon, 2005). It includes **behavioural** as well as **cognitive** activities. For example, **choices**, **locus of control**. Higher **internal locus** of control leads to **greater engagement** with intentional activities thereby **increasing** happiness and well-being. However, it also increases the likelihood of **self-blame after a failure** thereby affecting well-being **negatively**. An **external locus** of control **reduces engagement** with intentional activities but acts as a buffer against self-blame after failure.

Character Strengths and Virtues

In **Seligman’s and Peterson’s** (2004) book, “Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification”, the authors describe a total of **24 universal character strengths**, grouped into **6 broader universal virtues**. VIA – 6, is the 6th version of the VIA-IS currently is available as an online (<http://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu>) measure in English and several other languages.

There are **240 items** (10 for each strength), which are answered with a **5-point scale**. These can be

completed online after which a report is generated. The feedback report consists of the top 5 strengths, which are called signature strengths.

Character strength: Psychological ingredients that define the virtues. A person may have only 1 or 2 strengths within a virtue and will rarely display them all at once. These help us be productive. They are also parts of our personality such that they answer questions of-

- Who am I/ you?
- What makes me/you tick?
- How can I/ we contribute to the greater good?

Research shows that women score higher on Humanity strengths than men. While African Americans score higher than members of other racial and ethnic groups on the scale of spirituality strength

Overview of Research on Character Strengths: Gratitude is constantly identified as one of the five top strengths for individuals across various studies. Thus engaging and practicing techniques of gratitude in daily life is expected to increase feelings of well-being.

Character Strength of Gratitude

Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all the others -Cicero, Roman Philosopher.

What is Gratitude?

Gratitude is more than saying “Thank You”. It is about living in a state of thankfulness – and appreciating people, experiences, blessings and circumstances that matter (Emmons 2004). Term is derived from gratia (Latin) – equivalent of grace, gracefulness. It is defined as: “...an emotion which emerges upon the realization that one has obtained a positive outcome from another individual who behaved in a way that was:

- (1) costly to him/her
- (2) valuable to the recipient
- (3) intentionally rendered

– Emmons (2005); Wood, Maltby, Stewart, Linley, & Joseph, (2008)

What are the effects of gratitude on human health, happiness and well-being?

1. **Psychological** (Positive affect: alert, attentive; Interpersonal relationships: more helpful and connected to others, less isolated)

Physical (better sleep, fewer symptoms)

Research also shows that grateful athletes are more satisfied with their team and show less athlete burnout (Social Indicators Research, 2008). Gratitude leads to happiness and well-being and is positively associated with performance, commitment, morale (Wright & Staw, 1999). It also helps cope with stress and trauma (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh & Larkin, 2003).

How to enhance well-being?- POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY INTERVENTIONS

Built on the foundation of character strengths. The basic premise is, that if an individual is high on a character strength, engaging in intentional activity/ exercises directed at these will increase the person's well-being. It tries to not only bring a person experiencing psychological distress to a state without symptoms but also make a happy person happier. Seligman, Rashid, & Parks (2006) propose that positive psychology interventions increase positive emotion, engagement, and meaning rather than directly targeting depressive symptoms. Seligman & Wyatt (2008) have argued that positive psychotherapy involves a person discovering insight, and going beyond the pain and suffering of the process.

“Positive psychology intervention may be understood as any intentional activity or method (training, coaching, etc.) based on

- (a) the cultivation of valued subjective experiences,
 - (b) the building of positive individual traits, or
 - (c) the building of civic virtue and positive institutions”
- (Meyers, Woerkom & Bakker, 2013)

- a) Peterson and Seligman proposed that well being can be enhanced by enhancing character

strengths.

- b) This can be done by (a) searching for signature strengths and (b) using these signature strengths in personal and professional domains.
- c) Such interventions are useful for making an unhappy person happy and a happy person happier

Strengths- Based Developmental Intervention: Instructions

- Take the Values in Action (VIA) Strengths Survey and write down your five highest strengths
- Next one week, use the strengths in a way not used before
- Write down - strength you used, how you felt before, during, and after the activity, and whether you plan to repeat it in the future.

Using this developmental programme Williamson (2002) found that students fared better in studies and other activities than those who did not undertake the programme. Similarly, Connelly (2002) in Toyota North American Parts Center California, conducted this intervention on 400 employees and 54 work teams. Within a year per person productivity at the warehouse increased by 6% as compared to previous three years of less than 1%.

Interventions for the Character Strength of Gratitude

Gratitude Interventions: Most popular intervention tools:

1. Three Blessings Exercise
2. Gratitude Diary
3. Gratitude Visit
4. Gratitude Journal

Positive selectivity bias: Consciously focusing on what went right instead of what went wrong.

From negative selectivity to positive selectivity

- While negative selectivity is important from the point of view of survival, it often catastrophizes some events that do not deserve to be treated as serious threats
- On the other hand, positive selectivity or focusing on positive events helps to acknowledge positive emotions, and cherish those experiences.

Pollyanna Principle:

The story of Pollyanna (Author: Eleanor H. Porter) that is commonly cited in this context; It is the tendency to focus on the positive side of events, even if there is an adversity.

Three Blessings Exercise/ Three Good Things:

At the end of the day think of three good things that you are grateful for & ask *what did you do to make those things happen?*

Example: From Seligman (2005)

“At the workplace: Identify three things that you are grateful for or that have gone well for you this week - try to focus specifically on your work and people you work with
Write them down

Homework - continue this exercise for the next month and see if you notice any differences in behaviour (your own or that of others)

Emmon’s instructions:

“Each day for at least one week, write down three things that went well for you that day, and provide an explanation for why they went well. It is important to create a physical record of your items by writing them down; it is not enough simply to do this exercise in your head. The items can be relatively small in importance (e.g., “my co-worker made the coffee today”) or relatively large (e.g., “I earned a big promotion”). To make this exercise part of your daily routine, some find that writing before bed is helpful.”

Benefit finding: Difficult situations can be viewed as challenges or opportunities for self growth and discovering strengths instead of treating them like unsurmountable obstacles. In situations of adversity, benefit finding could help us notice the blessings in an unfavorable situations that otherwise would not have come to light.

Gratitude Journal: Regular accounts of situations when “you benefited because of someone else’s kindness, helpfulness, or generosity” - Jeffrey Froh

Gratitude Visit: “Think of someone to whom you are very grateful, but who you have never properly thanked. Compose a letter to them describing your gratitude, and read the letter to that person by phone or preferably in person” – Seligman

Things to keep in mind:

- Use the method best suited to you: **writing**, art, choosing a particular time everyday, or identify just one thing that ordinarily goes unnoticed or substitute an ungrateful thought for a grateful one
- Keep the strategy fresh: **vary it**
- Most effective when conveyed directly to another person: phone, letter or face-to-face

Positive Psychology Interventions are most effective when (Conditions):

1. **Self-selection**- individuals select the exercises they want to perform themselves
2. With increase in age – due to more emotional and self-regulation
3. Format of treatment is individual therapy. Followed by group and then self-administered PPI.
4. Longer durations of PPIs lead to greater well-being

PPI and Physical Health: Findings about their usefulness are **inconclusive** (Ghosh & Deb, 2017).

Conclusion

- Lyubomirsky and Della Porta (2008): Happiness can be amplified by intentional activity
- Positive psychology interventions aim to enhance well-being by increasing positive emotions and experiences. This is different from the deficit based approach popular earlier where symptom reduction was the aim of psychologists
- Peterson and Seligman proposed that well-being can be enhanced by developing and enhancing character strengths; and practicing their use in personal and professional domains regularly
- Researchers study (1) the relationship of each character strength with other strengths, and also (2) the effect of these strengths on well being
- Most researches show that positive psychology interventions have led to an increase in happiness and well-being levels.
- Interventions limited to some character strengths only; future researchers need to develop interventions for other character strengths as well
- Also, more interventions with a focus on specific populations such as clinical samples, employees, and students are required
- Positive psychology interventions may be considered useful for making an unhappy person happy and a happy person happier.