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<b>Principal Investigator</b>	<b>Co-Principal Investigator</b>	<b>Co- Principal Investigator (Technical)</b>
<b>Prof N.K.Chadha</b> Head and Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Delhi	<b>Dr Jaswinder Singh</b> Principal and <b>Dr.H.V.Jhamb</b> (Associate Professor) SGTB Khalsa College University of Delhi	<b>Dr Vimal Rarh</b> Assistant Professor, Department of Chemistry, SGTB Khalsa College, University of Delhi <i>Specialised in : e-Learning and Educational Technologies</i>
<b>Paper Coordinator</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Reviewer</b>
<b>Prof N.K.Chadha</b> Head and Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Delhi & <b>Dr. Pooja V. Anand</b> Assistant Professor Department of Psychology Daulat Ram College University of Delhi	<b>Dr. Pooja V. Anand</b> Assistant Professor Department of Psychology Daulat Ram College University of Delhi	<b>Prof. Promila Batra</b> Head and Professor Department of Psychology M.D. University, Rohtak
<b>Anchor Institute : SGTB Khalsa College, University of Delhi</b>		

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## 1. Learning Outcomes

After studying this module, you shall be able to

- Know the measures of happiness
- Understand the importance of happiness
- Learn the ways of enhancing happiness

## 2. Introduction

Understanding subjective well-being and studying the factors affecting it are the central objectives of positive psychology. Happiness and well-being refer to both positive feelings, such as joy or serenity, and to positive states such as those involving flow or absorption.

Happiness is understood as how much one likes one's life and the evaluation of one's life positively. The main element in this definition is subjective evaluation of life, also referred to as 'satisfaction' with life. In a broad sense, the word happiness is synonymous with 'quality of life' or 'well-being'.

Even though there may be a set-point for happiness which is predominantly genetically determined, there are ways so that we are at or above our happiness set-points.

Evolution has ensured that we experience deep happiness under conditions that are good for the propagation of our genes. Mating, maintaining close kinship ties, and developing deep friendships with a few people, maintaining co-operative alliances with larger groups, living in a safe and productive environment, developing skills for goal-oriented activities etc all produce happiness since they contribute to our survival.

## 3. Measurement of Happiness

Many theories have been formulated related to the sources of happiness. Subjective well-being (SWB) is the degree of how one views his/her life as a whole, or some particular domain of one's life. SWB can be studied by asking people how they feel.

One way to measure an individual's SWB is through questionnaires. The questionnaires may include single-item or multiple-item questions which ask the respondents to rate their level of happiness.

**Some of the popular measures of happiness are:**

- *Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ)* (Hills & Argyle, 2002)
- *Satisfaction with Life Scale* (Deiner, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin, 1985)

- *PANAS Scale* (Watson, Clark, Tellegen, 1998)
- *The Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS)* (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1997)

One of the main problems with the self-report methods is that the individuals may report to be happier than they really are.

A method of measuring happiness which has become very prominent these days is the Experience Sampling Method. This method requires the individual to report his moods at different times during the day.

It is always recommended to use a *multi-method approach*. With the use of multiple methods researchers can understand how people construct subjective well-being judgments.

#### 4. Importance of Happiness

Many studies have shown that happy individuals are successful across various life domains. This is because positive affect leads to success. It has also been found that positive affect may be the cause of many of the desirable outcomes correlated with happiness.

According to the Broaden and Build theory of happiness by Professor Barbara Fredrickson (2002) positive affective experiences lead to personal well-being, personal growth and development. Positive emotions broaden momentary thought-action repertoires and offer opportunities for building personal resources. In contrast, negative emotions narrow the momentary thought-action repertoires because of which people act in a self-protective way.

Hence, when a person is happy he experiences frequent positive affect. Due to this his productivity and well-being are enhanced.

Happiness also leads to better outcomes in terms of physical and psychological health. Happy people have found to fall ill less often. They usually possess an optimistic outlook. They tend to take good care of their health.

The pursuit of happiness is one of the primary goals in life. Therefore, a lot of research is now focused on determining the sources of happiness and happiness enhancement.

#### 5. Happiness Enhancement

**Fava et al. (1998) and Licher et al. (1980)** have all developed and evaluated community-based training programmes for enhancing happiness which include elements of the overall set of happiness-enhancement strategies.

**Seligman** has developed a highly effective program to promote optimism in children and adults (Seligman, 1998). He developed a curriculum for school children to inculcate an optimistic explanatory style in them which is known as the Penn Resiliency Program (PRP). It works on the idea that inculcating optimism in young people might serve to protect them from developing depression.

Seligman formulated the PERMA theory to summarize Positive Psychology's findings. According to him, humans are happiest when they have:

1. *Pleasure,*
2. *Engagement,*
3. *Relationships,*
4. *Meaning and*
5. *Accomplishments.*

### The 12 Happiness Enhancing Strategies (Lyubomirsky, 2008)

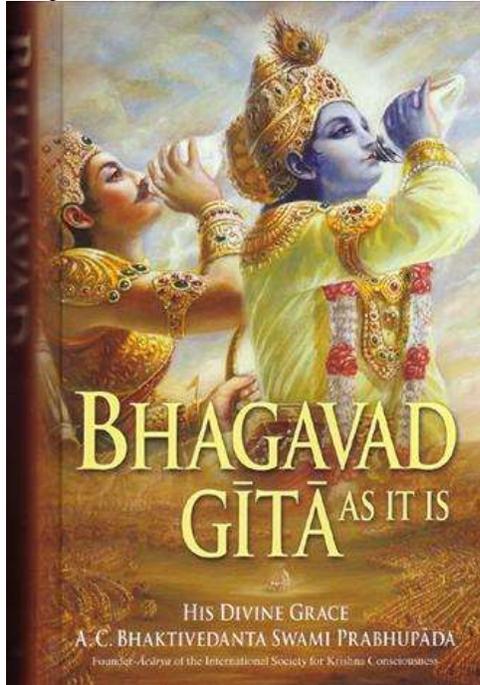
- (1) Counting your blessings
- (2) Cultivating optimism
- (3) Avoiding overthinking and social comparison
- (4) Practicing acts of kindness
- (5) Nurturing Relationships
- (6) Doing more activities that truly engage you
- (7) Savoring life's joys
- (8) Committing to your goals
- (9) Developing coping strategies
- (10) Learning to forgive
- (11) Practicing religion and spirituality
- (12) Taking care of your body



## 6. Indian Perspective on Happiness

The philosophy of Charvaaka is a materialist view which states that the fulfilment of desires leads to pleasure. It reflects the hedonistic perspective. A second perspective is based in transcendental view of reality. Happiness and well-being according to this view is subjective and this view aims for the well-being of everyone in the universe. A third perspective is the collectivist perspective.

The Vedic and Upanishadic texts defined the ultimate truth with reference to permanent and impermanent. To realize the Atman and to know that Atman and Brahman are the same was considered as the path to liberation or moksha.



The Bhagawad Geeta asks us to be predominated by sattva which is the principle of illumination.

The pursuit of desires (kaama), wealth (artha), values (dharma) and liberation (moksha) is considered as the main aim of life. The Indian tradition focuses a lot on giving (daan) and helping those in need. These help in developing a feeling of happiness and well-being for the giver as well as the receiver.

Hence, in the Indian philosophy well-being and good life were to be achieved more in terms of restraint, and detachment. Hence meaning, purpose, and well-being depends on the evolutionary status of the individual.

Self-realization and expansion of consciousness is considered as the highest aim of human life which leads to a state of bliss.

## 7. Future Directions for Happiness Research

As noted above there is abundance on research in happiness. Therefore, more attention should be paid to developmental processes involving subjective well-being. The relationship between positive affectivity in infancy and childhood and subjective well-being in adulthood should also be explored. Similarly, a longitudinal approach should be taken in an investigation of society and culture. Studies should also be conducted to study the effect of changes in political, economic, and cultural situations have an impact on people's well-being.

Hence, more research efforts should be directed towards finding out the determinants of happiness in people.

## 8. Summary

- Understanding and enhancing happiness is the main objective of positive psychology.
- In a broad sense, the word happiness is synonymous with 'quality of life' or 'well-being'.
- Subjective well-being (SWB) is understood as to how one views one's life as a whole, or some particular domain of one's life, as favorable.
- Various ways to measure an individual's SWB is through surveys, single-item scales, and multi-item scales. The use of multiple methods also allows researchers to understand how people construct subjective well-being judgments'.
- Numerous studies show that happy individuals are successful across multiple life domains.
- **Fava et al. (1998) and Licher et al. (1980)** have all developed and evaluated community-based training programmes for enhancing happiness which include elements of the overall set of happiness-enhancement strategies.
- **Fordyce (1977, 1983)** published several studies in which he evaluated a program designed to boost people's happiness.
- **Seligman** has designed many interventions to inculcate optimistic explanatory style to enhance happiness.
- More attention should be paid to developmental processes involving subjective well-being. In particular, the link between positive affectivity in infancy and childhood and subjective well-being in adulthood should be explored.
- According to the Indian perspective, wellbeing and good life were to be achieved more in terms of restraint, and detachment from bodily need fulfillment rather than indulgence, and striving for need fulfillment.