

# GROWING KNOWLEDGE ON HAPPINESS

**Ruut Veenhoven**

**Epilogue in** Leo Bormans (Ed.) *The New Worldbook of Happiness*, pp.299-289. Lanno publishers, Tielt, Belgium, ISBN 978 94 014 9725 1 -

**This *New World Book of Happiness* is part of a swelling stream of research on happiness. It adds to the 15000 scientific publications already available in the *Bibliography of Happiness*. Some 1000 more publications will be added in the next year and some day in the future a *World Book of Happiness 3.0* is likely to be added to a pile of then more than 20.000 works. One may wonder why the research output keeps growing. Don't we know everything yet? Drivers of this growth can be found in the mounting *supply* and in the insatiable *demand* for knowledge about happiness.**

## **Supply of knowledge on happiness**

On the supply side, a main reason is that happiness research has matured scientifically. Initial qualms about measurability of happiness have been refuted, as have theoretical claims that happiness is short lived and relative. A research infrastructure has developed involving periodical survey studies, specialized journals and periodical reports, such as the *World Happiness Report*. Now that this subject has reached its academic majority, scientists can get their work on happiness published and are freer to follow their interest.

## **Demand for knowledge on happiness**

The maturation of happiness research has also fostered a demand of information about happiness. Now that greater happiness appears to be possible and 'makable' to some extent, interest in more specific know-how is increasing. Demand comes from individuals, organizations and governments.

### *Individual demand*

Interest in ways to a happy life is always there, but is relatively strong in modern multiple-choice-societies. More than ever, people face questions on how they should live their life and consequently they wonder how life-choices will affect their happiness, for example whether or not they should have children. This trend to greater choice is ongoing and creates a limitless demand for more detailed information. In the case of having children, we not only want to know whether parents tend to be happier than non-parents, but we want to know how parenthood has worked out on the happiness for people like us, that is, people of a similar age, education and sex, preferably also for people with the same type of personality. This is analogous to the development of 'personalized medicine' in health research.

### *Organizational demand*

The rising interest in happiness of individuals is pressing organizations to pay more attention to the effects their products have on the happiness of their clientele. Though this may begin with sales talk, competition will press them to provide to evidence based claims; as has happened in the case of medicine. This tendency is strengthened by the insight that marketing research about what people ‘*want*’ to buy does not predict well how happy they will ‘*feel*’ after the purchase of a product. A basic insight we have gained from happiness economics is that the ‘*expected utility*’ of a purchase does not always fit later ‘*experienced utility*’.

With respect to the effect of happiness on workers performance, it is becoming increasingly clear that happiness is a strong driver. This insight fosters a tendency to include life-coaching in human resource management. New professions, such as a ‘Chief Happiness Officer’ have come into existence, and this professionalization brings about a constant demand for new information on happiness.

### *Governmental demand*

The growing interest in happiness of individual citizens is reflected in the rise of the subject up the political agenda. The priority given to happiness by a government depends on the fit with its other goals, such as political stability and economic growth. Research has shown considerable synergy between happiness and several of these goals, such as the promotion of responsible citizenship. Happy people appear to be better informed voters and more honest in tax paying. This rising policy relevance of happiness creates ever more demand for information on happiness.

### **Accumulation of knowledge**

Nobody can read all the 15000 scientific publications on happiness and the view on the available research findings is also hampered by differences in terminology. As a result, much of the gathered knowledge gets lost. For that reason, we have established the *World Database of Happiness*, an archive of research findings on subjective enjoyment of life. This ‘*findings-archive*’ consist of electronic ‘*finding-pages*’ on which research findings are described in a standard format and terminology. Currently the database holds some 50.000 such pages, which can be sorted in several ways, such as on place and time. Each finding page has a unique internet address to which links can be made in research reviews.

**My days are counted. I have enjoyed spending much of them to the study of happiness. I am happy to see much of the gained knowledge reflected in this New World Book of Happiness. I hope this will add to the happiness of its readers and indirectly also to the happiness of a greater number of people.**

**Ruut Veenhoven**

**Ruut Veenhoven** (°1942) is a pioneer and world authority on the scientific study of happiness, in the sense of subjective enjoyment of life. We asked the *Artificial Intelligence Chat GPT* for the ‘Top 20 of academic researchers in the world, studying happiness, quality of life and wellbeing.’ On top of the list: Ruut Veenhoven. His lifelong work has shown that happiness is a reliable measure to assess progress in societies, which was one of the sources of inspiration for the United Nations to adopt happiness measures as a holistic approach to development.

Veenhoven is an emeritus professor of social conditions for human happiness at Erasmus University Rotterdam in the Netherlands, where he is currently involved in the *Erasmus Happiness Economics Research Organization*. He is also a special professor at North-West University in South Africa, where he is involved in the *Opentia* research program. He is director of the *World Database of Happiness* and a founding editor of the *Journal of Happiness Studies*.

**QUOTE: “The ongoing pursuit of happiness creates an insatiable demand for knowledge on happiness”**

## **More happiness**

For anyone wishing to read more on the subject, an abundance of research on happiness is available in **The World Database of Happiness**: [www.worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl](http://www.worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl)