

WORLD DATABASE OF HAPPINESS

Ruut Veenhoven ¹⁾

*In: Alex C. Michalos (Ed.) **Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research** Springer, Dordrecht, Netherlands, 2014. Springer Reference Series, pp. 7257-7260. ISBN 978-94-007-0752-8
DOI:10.1007/978-94-007-0753-5_3662*

1 SYNONYMS

Collection of research findings on subjective enjoyment of life; Findings archive on happiness; Tool for research synthesis on happiness

2 DEFINITION

The World Database of Happiness is a focused findings archive (Veenhoven 2012). The focus is on subjective enjoyment of life as a whole. The archive contains standardized descriptions of research findings on this matter, which can be sorted on subject, population, and several methodological features. The database is available on internet at <http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl>.

3 DESCRIPTION

3.1 The Problem

Social scientists are producing an ever-growing stream of research findings, which is becoming ever more difficult to oversee. As a result, capitalization on earlier research investment is declining, and the accumulation of knowledge is stagnating. This situation calls for more research synthesis, and today, interest in synthetic techniques is on the rise. To date, attention has been focused on techniques for meta-analysis, with little attention paid to the preliminary step of bringing the available research findings together. What we need is (1) techniques that can be used to describe research findings in a comparable way, (2) a system for storing such descriptions in an easily accessible archive, and (3) a system to which research findings can be added on a continuous basis.

3.2 The Tool

The World Database of Happiness is an example of such a tool (Veenhoven

1) Erasmus Happiness Economics Research Organisation, Erasmus University, Rotterdam, The Netherlands and Optentia Research Group, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa

2010). It is tailored to meet the requirements for assembling research findings on happiness, both distributional findings (how happy people are) and correlational findings (what things go together with happiness). With its focus on “findings,” the system differs from data archives that store “investigations” and from bibliographies that store “publications.” As yet there is no established term to describe this tool for research synthesis. I call such a tool a “focused findings archive” (Veenhoven 2011)'.

3.3 Building Blocks

The basic elements of the database are *pages*, which are linked in various ways. “Pages” are organized in *collections*, from which *reports* are generated. “Reports” are bunches of pages on a particular subject. This makeup is presented graphically on [Figure 1](#).

3.3.1 Pages

Four kinds of pages are involved: (1) pages on a particular publication, (2) pages on a particular study, (3) pages on a particular measure of happiness, and (4) pages on a particular research finding. All these pages use a standard format and a standard vocabulary.

3.3.2 Collections

The above-mentioned “pages” are gathered in “collections.” The World Database of Happiness has four such collections: (1) the Bibliography of Happiness, (2) the collection “Measures of Happiness,” (3) the collection of “Distributional Findings,” and (4) the collection of “Correlational Findings” (see [Figure 2](#)).

3.3.3 Reports

Selections of “pages” are assembled automatically from each of the above-mentioned “collections” and presented in “reports.” Two kinds of reports are particularly useful in research synthesis: (1) “publication reports” and (2) “finding reports.”

Publication Reports

Reports of this kind list the publications on a particular subject, using the subject classification of the Bibliography of Happiness. Unlike the “finding reports” mentioned below, these publication reports cover all that is written on the subject, not only research reports but also literature studies and theoretical treatises. Among the research reports mentioned, the publication reports do not limit to publications on studies that used acceptable measures of happiness. These also contain publications on studies that are not included in the findings collections. As such, publication reports provide a complete of the literature, which is helpful for narrative research synthesis.

Finding Reports

Reports of this kind are more focused and limit to empirical observations yielded using an accepted measure of happiness. The direct link to an overview of all the finding reports is <http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/findingreportslinkpage.htm>.

- *Nation Reports*
These reports present an overview of observed distributions of happiness in the general population in nation states. The reports limit to findings in representative samples of the general population. These findings are ordered by the kinds of happiness measure used and by year within these blocks.
- *Rank Reports*
These reports draw on the above nation reports and select findings yielded using the best comparable measure of happiness. Nation ranks are presented in four separate reports on (1) *average happiness* in nations; (2) *inequality of happiness* in nations, as measured using the standard deviation; (3) *inequality-adjusted happiness*, which is an index combining mean and standard deviation; and (4) *happy life years*, which is a combination of average happiness and life expectancy.
- *Trend Reports*
These reports also draw on the above-mentioned “nation reports” and focus on the ones that involve repeated responses to the same question over the years. Trend reports are limited to countries for which at least 15 such data points are available over a period of at least 20 years. To date, there are 14 such cases. As with the above “rank reports,” there are four kinds of “trend reports” on happiness in nations, on change over time in (1) *average happiness*, (2) *inequality of happiness*, (3) *inequality-adjusted happiness*, and (4) *happy life years*.
- *Reports on Correlational Findings on a Specific Subject*
These reports assemble finding pages on the same subject, using the main topics in the subject classification of that collection. To date, there are 104 such reports in the database, some of which contain more than a hundred finding pages, such as the report on “income,” which contains to date 921 correlational findings. Reports on correlational findings start with a subclassification of the available findings in this subject category and enumerate the number of findings in each of these categories. This subclassification follows a standard categorization into (1) *overtime* correlations, for instance, the relation between earlier income and present happiness (this category is labeled “career”); (2) *same-time* correlations, such as the association between present income and present happiness (this subcategory is labeled as “current”), and (3) *attitudes* to the subject matter, rather than the subject, e.g., the observed correlation between income satisfaction and happiness.
- *Reports on Happiness in Specific Public*
This kind of report gathers both distributional findings and correlational findings observed in a specific public, other than the general population. The findings are not presented as such, but the reports present links to these.

4 CURRENT CONTENTS

On 1 January 2012, the database listed about 7,000 publications on happiness, of which about half reported an empirical investigation based on an acceptable measure of happiness.

It contained about 20,000 finding pages of which 5,000 were about distributional findings and 15,000 were about correlational findings.

5 HISTORY IN EARLIER BOOKS

The database started as a series of reference books, within 1984 the first “**Databook of Happiness.**” Separate book named “**Bibliography of Happiness,**” “**Happiness in Nations,**” and “**Correlates of Happiness**” were added in the early 1990s. The database became available on a website in 1998, and its development is ongoing with data being added as it becomes available.

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German Data Forum RatSWD, Working paper 169

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Erasmus University Rotterdam, Netherlands

Available at: <http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl>

Cross-References in encyclopedia

[Databook of Happiness](#)

Figure 1

World Database of happiness: buildings blocks of the findings archive

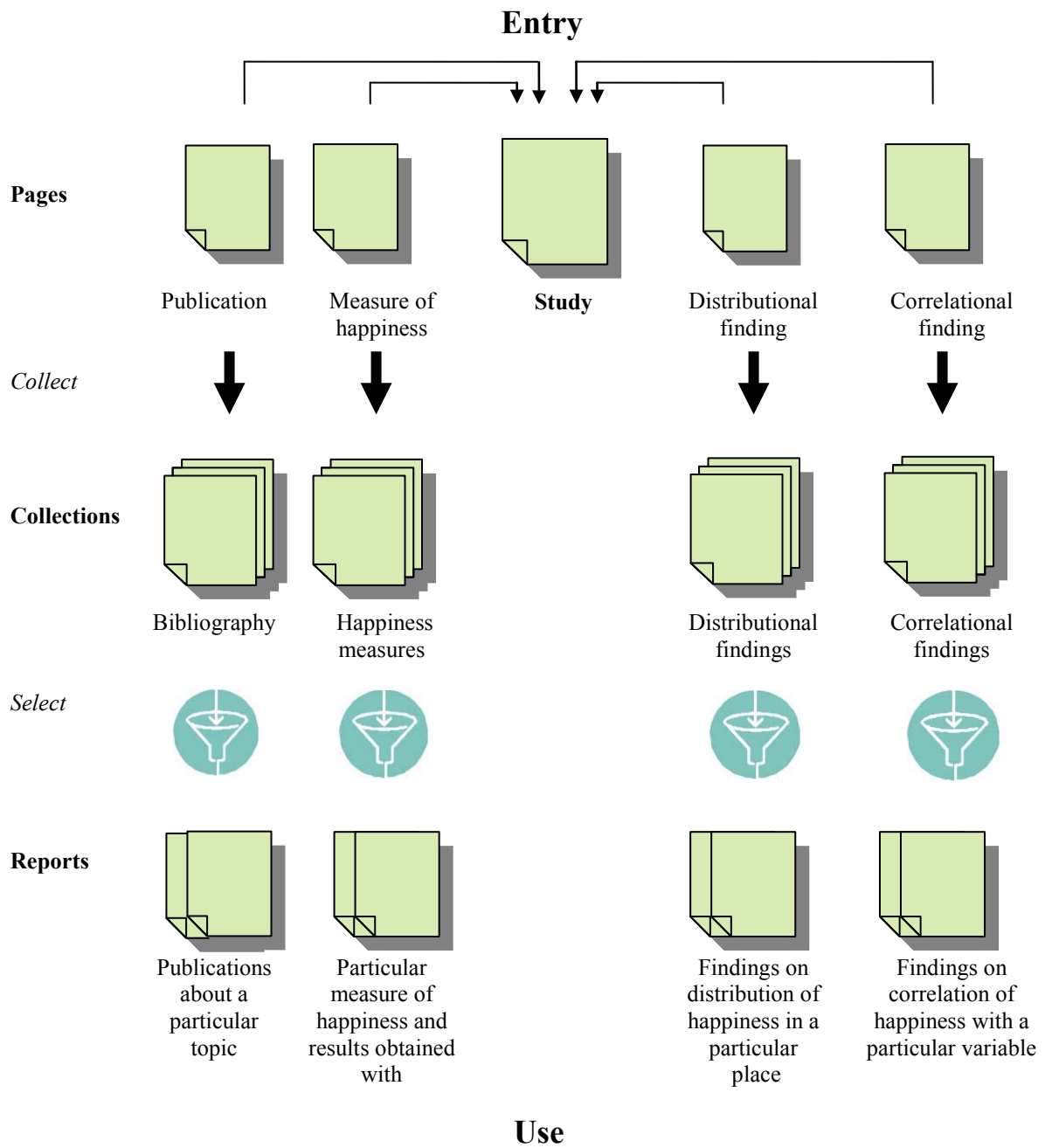


Figure 2
Start page World of Happiness

World Database of Happiness
Continuous register of scientific research on subjective appreciation of life
 Directed by: [Ruut Veenhoven](#), [Erasmus University Rotterdam](#)

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Structure of the collections
 The World Database of Happiness is an ongoing register of scientific research on the subjective enjoyment of life. It brings together findings that are scattered throughout many studies and provides a basis for synthetic work.

World literature on subjective wellbeing
 ↓
 Selection on fit with definition of happiness
 ↓
 Bibliography and Directory
 ↓
 Selection of empirical studies and within these on valid measurement: [Happiness Measures](#)
 Abstracting and classification of findings
 ↓
 How happy people are, distributional findings: [Happiness in Nations](#), [Happiness in Publics](#)
 ↓
 Listing of comparable findings in Nations: [States of Nations](#), [Trends in Nations](#)
 ↓
 What goes together with happiness: [Correlational Findings](#)

Size of the collections
 7028 publications on Bibliography of happiness, of which 3431 report empirical investigations using accepted measures of happiness.
 760 measures of happiness used in 1467 studies.