

# **SOCIAL CONDITIONS FOR HUMAN HAPPINESS**

## **A review of research**

Ruut Veenhoven<sup>1</sup>

*International Journal of Psychology* 2015 , 50 (5) 379 - 391

*DOI: 10.1002/ijop.12161*

### **ABSTRACT**

*Empirical research on life-satisfaction took off in the 1970s and today has resulted in some 8000 publications. In this paper I take stock of the findings on social conditions for happiness and distinguish between conditions at the macro-level of society, the meso level of organizations and the micro-level of individual conditions. A new review technique is applied, an online findings archive is used in which research findings on happiness are described in a uniform way and sorted by subject.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

All humans want a satisfying life for themselves and their children. This is seen in the high ranking given to happiness in the value hierarchies of students all over the world (Diener & Oishi 2004).

Individually people seek ways to achieve a more satisfying life and this quest is manifests in the soaring sales of ‘how-to-be-happy’ books and in the ongoing development of life-coaching businesses. One of the questions in this context is what place in society one should seek; should one aim for a high status position? How much should one focus on family and friends? Others of us, in their quest for happiness consider moving to another country.

Citizens in western societies also call on their governments to improve the social conditions for happiness; for example 85% of the British agree with the statement that: ‘A governments prime aim should be achieving the greatest happiness of the people, not the greatest wealth’ (BBC 2006, question 14). This begs the question of which issues should be prioritized in policy making.

### **1.1 Development of empirical happiness research**

Over the ages the subject of happiness has absorbed a lot of thought. Happiness was a major theme in early Greek philosophy and gained renewed interest in the later West-European Enlightenment. The philosophic tradition has produced a lot of ideas, but little factual knowledge. In fact, philosophers have raised more questions than they have answered, and most of the controversies they have raised cannot be solved by the logic of reasoning. Settlement of the question of what promotes happiness on the basis of reality checks has long been hindered by a lack of adequate research techniques.

<sup>1</sup> Erasmus University Rotterdam in the Netherlands, Erasmus Happiness Economics Research Organisation (EHERO) and North-West University in South Africa, Opentia Research group.

**E-mail: [Veenhoven@ese.eur.nl](mailto:Veenhoven@ese.eur.nl)**

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the social sciences achieved a breakthrough with new methods for empirical research, which opened up the possibility of identifying conditions for happiness inductively and even the possibility to test theories. This advance instigated a lot of research, most of which was embedded in the newly established specializations of 'social indicators research', 'health related quality of life research' and recently, 'positive psychology' and 'happiness economics'.

This stream of research is growing fast, the rising number of scientific publications on happiness is depicted in [figure 1](#). Much of this work is published in journals on quality of life, such as 'Social Indicators Research'<sup>2</sup>, 'Quality of Life Research'<sup>3</sup>, 'Applied Research in Quality of Life'<sup>4</sup> and 'Psychology of Wellbeing'<sup>5</sup>. In 2000 the focused 'Journal of Happiness Studies'<sup>6</sup> was established (current editor in chief Antonella Della Fave).

Reviews of this research literature have been published by, Diener et. al (1999, 2008), Dolan et. al. (2008), Veenhoven (1984) and Argyle (1987).

## 1.2 World Database of Happiness

The soaring stream of research papers on happiness has made it difficult to keep an overview of the results. To handle this, a focused *findings archive* has been established; the World Database of Happiness<sup>7</sup> (Veenhoven 2014a).

This web based archive consists of several *collections*. It builds on a collection of all scientific publications about happiness, called the 'Bibliography of Happiness' (Veenhoven 2014b). To date this collection includes some 8000 books and articles, of which half report an empirical investigation in which an acceptable measure of happiness has been used. Indicators that fit the concept of happiness, as defined below, are listed in the collection 'Measures of Happiness' (Veenhoven 2014c).

The findings yielded by studies that past this test for adequate measurement of happiness are described on separate 'finding pages', using a standard format and terminology. Two kinds of findings are discerned: *distributional findings* on how happy people are at a particular time and place and *correlational findings* about the things that go together with more of less happiness in these populations.

To date, the database contains about 9000 distributional findings, of which 6000 deal with happiness in the general population of nations (Veenhoven 2014d) and 3000 with happiness in particular social categories, such as students or psychiatric patients (Veenhoven 2014e).

The collection 'Correlational Findings' (Veenhoven 2014f) contains some 15.000 research results. These findings are sorted on subject and the collection can also be searched on characteristics of the population investigated, i.e. public, place, time, and on methodological features such as sampling and measurement. Though far from complete<sup>8</sup>, this is the best available source of data on conditions for happiness at present.

## 2 CONCEPT OF HAPPINESS

The word 'happiness' is open to many interpretations and these 'meanings' are often mixed up. When used in a broad sense, the word happiness is synonymous with 'quality of life' or 'well-being'. In this meaning happiness denotes that life is good, but does not specify what is

good about that life. The word 'happiness' is also used in more specific ways, and these meanings can be clarified with the help of the classification of qualities of life presented in [Figure 2](#)

## 2.1 Four qualities of life

Vertically in [figure 2](#) there is a difference between *chances* for a good life and actual *outcomes* of life. Horizontally there is a distinction between *external* and *internal* qualities. Together, these two dichotomies mark four qualities of life, all of which have been denoted by the word 'happiness'.

### *Livability of the environment*

The left top quadrant denotes good living conditions. Often the terms 'quality-of-life' and 'wellbeing' are used interchangeably for this particular meaning, especially in the writings of ecologists and sociologists. Economists sometimes use the term 'welfare' to denote this meaning. 'Livability' is a better word, because it refers explicitly to a characteristic of the environment. Politicians and social reformers typically stress this quality of life.

### *Life-ability of the person*

The right top quadrant denotes inner life-chances. That is: how well we are equipped to cope with the problems of life. This aspect of the good life is also known by different names. In biology the phenomenon is referred to as 'adaptive potential'. On other occasions it is denoted by the medical term 'health'. Sen (1992) calls this quality of life variant 'capability'. I prefer the simple term 'life-ability', which contrasts elegantly with 'livability'. This quality of life is central in the thinking of therapists and educators.

### *Usefulness of life*

The left bottom quadrant represents the notion that a good life must be good for something more than itself. This presumes some higher value, such as ecological preservation or cultural development. In fact, there is a myriad of values on which the usefulness of a life can be judged. There is no current generic for these external turnouts of life. Gerson (1976: 795) refers to these kinds as 'transcendental' conceptions of quality of life. Another appellation is 'meaning of life', which then denotes 'true' significance instead of mere subjective sense of meaning. I prefer the more simple 'usefulness of life'. Moral advisors, such as your pastor, emphasize this quality of life.

### *Satisfaction with life*

Finally, the bottom right quadrant represents the inner outcomes of life. That is the quality of a life in the eye of the beholder. As we deal with conscious humans this quality boils down to subjective appreciation of life. This is commonly referred to using terms such as 'subjective wellbeing', 'life-satisfaction' and 'happiness' in a limited sense of the word. This is the kind of happiness I deal with in this paper.

## 2.2 Four kinds of satisfaction

This brings us to the question of what 'satisfaction' is precisely. This is also a word with multiple meanings and again we can elucidate these meaning using a simple scheme. Scheme 2 is based on two distinctions; vertically between satisfaction with *parts* of life versus satisfaction with life *as-a-whole*, and horizontally between *passing* satisfaction and *enduring* satisfaction. These two bi-partitions yield again a four-fold taxonomy.

### *Pleasures*

Passing satisfaction with a part of life is called 'pleasure'. Pleasures can be sensory, such as a glass of good wine, or cerebral, such as the reading of this text. The idea that we should maximize such satisfactions is called 'hedonism'.

### *Part-satisfactions*

Enduring satisfaction with a part of life is referred to as 'part-satisfaction'. Such satisfactions can concern a *domain* of life, such as 'working-life', and an *aspect* of life, such as its 'variety'. Sometimes the word happiness is used for such part-satisfactions, in particular for satisfaction with one's career.

### *Peak-experience*

Passing satisfaction can be about life-as-a-whole, in particular when the experience is intense and 'oceanic'. This kind of satisfaction is usually referred to as 'peak-experience'. When poets write about happiness they usually describe an experience of this kind. Likewise religious writings use the word happiness often in the sense of a mystical ecstasis. Another word for this type of satisfaction is 'Enlightenment'.

### *Life-satisfaction*

Enduring satisfaction with one's life-as-a-whole is called 'life-satisfaction' and also commonly referred to as 'happiness'. Elsewhere I have delineated this concept in more detail and defined happiness as 'the overall appreciation of one's life-as-a-whole' (Veenhoven 1984).

## 2.3 Conceptual focus of this review

This paper is about happiness in the sense of life-satisfaction, that is, enduring enjoyment of one's life as a whole. This definition is fundamental to the above mentioned World Database of Happiness, which serves as an online appendix to this review of the available research findings on this subject.

## 3 MEASUREMENT OF HAPPINESS

Thus defined happiness is something we have in mind and consequently we can measure it using questions. That is, by simply asking people how much they enjoy their life-as-a-whole. Questions on happiness can be posed in various contexts; clinical interviews, life-review questionnaires and survey interviews. The questions can also be posed in different ways; directly or indirectly, and by means of single or multiple questions. All questions that fit the

above definition of happiness are listed in the collection ‘Measures of Happiness’ of the World Database of Happiness.

A common question<sup>9</sup> reads as follows:

All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Dissatisfied											Satisfied

Many misgivings have been advanced about such self report of happiness, it has been doubted that responses validly reflect how people feel about their life, that responses are erratic and incomparable across persons and cultures. Though plausible at first sight, these qualms have not been supported by empirical research, see for example Diener & Oishi (2004) VanPraag & Ferrer-i-Carbonell (2004) and Veenhoven (1984, 2008). So I assume that these measures can be trusted.

## 4 DIFFERENCES IN HAPPINESS

Questions on happiness are commonly used in large scale survey studies, such as the General Social Survey in the USA and the Eurobarometer in the EU. This has taught us much about the differences in happiness *within* and *across* nations.

### 4.1 Differences in happiness within nations

Surveys in developed nations show typically that most people enjoy their life. In [figure 4](#) is an example is given of responses to the above mentioned question on life satisfaction in the USA in 2007. The most frequently ticked options are 7 and 8, which together comprise 51% of the answers. About 34% is even more positive and ticked options 9 and 10. Negative responses are less frequent; 12 % ticked 5 or 6 and only 4% ticked a value lower than this. The average score was 7.9.

Yet life is not so satisfying everywhere. In [Figure 5](#) the distribution of responses to the same question in Zimbabwe in 2008 is shown. In this case the most frequent ticked option is 1. The average was 2.8<sup>10</sup>.

### 4.2 Differences in average happiness across nations

Happiness has now been assessed in most countries of the world, a notable exception being North-Korea. A world map of happiness is presented in [Figure 6](#). Differences in average happiness are indicated by the shades of the color green; the darker the green, the happier the people in the nation. One can now see that the high average happiness in the USA is typical for developed nations, some of which score even higher, such as Denmark with an average of 8.3. One can also see that the low level of happiness in Zimbabwe is no exception, since happiness is equally low in most African nations. Latin America surprises us in this picture, with higher scores than one would expect on the basis of the news reports emanating from that region.

### *Trend of Happiness in Nations*

Survey research on happiness started in the late 1940s and took off in the early 1970s. Until recently, it was difficult to discern a pattern in the data; changes over time tend to be small and our view of the trend is often blurred by minor variations in sampling and questioning. Now that we have more and better data, a pattern of rising happiness has emerged (Veenhoven 2014h). Some illustrative cases are presented on [Figure 6](#).

## 5 CONDITIONS FOR HAPPINESS

The conceptual scheme presented in [figure 2](#) can also be used to chart conditions for happiness. This *outcome* of life in the right bottom quadrant is evidently dependent on the *chances* for a good life denoted in the upper half, happiness depending on both the *livability* of an environment and the individual's *ability* to use these chances. In this review of social conditions for happiness I focus on the top-left livability quadrant. In addition to social conditions, this quadrant also covers physical conditions within a country, such as climate, which will not be considered in this review.

Social conditions for happiness are studied at the *macro* level of nations, the *meso* level of organizations and at the *micro*-level of individuals.

### 5.1 Macro level of society

As we have seen in section 4.2, there are large differences in average happiness across nations and this has instigated much research on the causes of these differences. The main results are summarized in [table 1](#). The many dark shaded cells in this table indicate that the subject is well researched. The dark shaded cells in the column 'partial' denote that many attempts have been made to clean the zero-order correlation from spurious effects, typically using regression analyses involving many controls. Since national characteristics are typically much intertwined, this involves the risk of underestimation. The blank cells in the column 'longitudinal' indicate that analysis of trends is scarce as yet.

#### *Wealth*

It may be no surprise that people live typically happier in rich countries than in poor ones. This difference is at least partly due to an effect of material affluence as such, since much of the correlation remains when other nation characteristics, such as climate, are controlled. Analysis of change over time reveals that economic growth goes together with rising happiness (Veenhoven & Vergunst 2014). This contradicts the well-known 'Easterlin Paradox', which holds that rising wealth in nations does not add to the happiness of citizens (Easterlin 1974). Economic growth adds more to happiness in poor nations than it does in rich ones.

#### *Freedom*

People also live happier in nations that provide the most opportunities to choose. Economic freedom adds more to happiness in developing nations than in developed ones, but political freedom correlates stronger with happiness in developed nations. Data on private freedom are limited to developed nations. A related finding is that people live happier in individualistic cultures than in collectivistic ones (Veenhoven 1999).

Correlations are halved when economic development is controlled. The available data do not yet allow comparison over time. An explanation for this correlation holds that freedom allows people

to choose a way of life that fits them best and that the benefits of a good outweigh the costs of choice. It has also been suggested that human nature involves a preference for independence (Veenhoven 1999).

### *Equality*

Gender equality stands out as a strong correlate of happiness, but income equality does not. The positive correlation with gender-equality is largely due to a greater opportunity to choose. The non-correlation with income equality is probably the result of both positive and negative effects that balance out (Berg & Veenhoven 2005).

### *Security*

Surprisingly there is no correlation between murder rate and average happiness in nations, probably because of the small number of people affected. Below we will see a much stronger correlation with white color crime (corruption), which affects a greater share of the population.

At first sight social security is positively correlated to average happiness in nations, but no association is left when wealth is controlled. Analysis of change over time does not show a decline in happiness in western nations following cuts in welfare expenditure (Veenhoven 2011).

### *Institutional quality*

People live happier in well organized societies, where people can count on rule of law and where government organizations function properly. This pattern also appears in a negative correlation with corruption. In the case of government effectiveness, the 'technical' quality of the bureaucracy counts more than its 'democratic' responsiveness. The effect of quality of government on the happiness of citizens is stronger in developed nations than in developing ones, among other things because central coordination is more required for the functioning of modern societies (Ott 2010).

Much of the correlation with institutional quality remains when wealth of the nation is controlled, which is again a rather severe test, since institutional quality is an important determinant of economic success. In this line it is argued that institutional quality also facilitates success in individual lives, since it provides us with a predictable environment in which we are not too dependent on kin and can safely invest in our future. At this point there is an important connection between institutional quality and freedom.

Irrespective of these effects on goal achievement a solid institutional is rewarding in itself, like playing a soccer match is more pleasurable when the rules of the game are respected. Frey et. al (2004) refer to this effect as 'procedural utility'.

### *Modernity*

Most of the above correlates are part of the 'modernity' syndrome and more direct measures of modernity also show a strong correlation with happiness, such as urbanization and globalization. The more modern the country, the happier its citizens are. This finding will be a surprise to prophets of doom, who associate modernity with anomie and alienation. Though modernization may involve problems, its benefits are clearly greater (Veenhoven & Berg 2013).

The macro-social conditions listed in [table 1](#) together explain about 75% of the differences in average happiness in nations depicted on the world map on [figure 6](#). Since measurement error in all variables is likely to have attenuated the coefficients, this is close to perfect correlation. Explained variance is lower in individual level analysis when country characteristics are entered after personal characteristics.



## 5.2 Meso level of organizations

We spend much of our life in organizations, such as schools, work-places and retirement homes and it would be worth knowing what kind of organizations are the most livable. There is a lot of research on the relation between organizational characteristics and satisfaction with these, such as satisfaction with work conditions, which belong in the ‘part-satisfaction’ quadrant of [figure 3](#). As yet there is little research on the relation with life satisfaction, bottom-right quadrant in [figure 3](#). See [Table 2](#) for a visualization of the state of this research. Most of the cells are empty.

One of the reasons for this lack of research is that organizations are more interested in satisfaction with their product than on their products impact on the wider life-satisfaction of those using their product. A related reason is that managers are more interested in satisfaction with details they can change, i.e. How satisfied are you with the coffee?, than with looking at the joint impact of organizational conditions, which they may be unable to effect. Another reason is probably that the effect of organizational changes on life-satisfaction will often be marginal because life-satisfaction is typically determined by many more things than just organizational conditions.

### *Autonomy*

Autonomy stand out as a predictor of life satisfaction in three kinds of organizations, care homes, cloisters and work organizations. Yet in all cases autonomy is measured using self reports, which involves the risk of a ‘top down effect’ of happiness affecting the perception of autonomy. Still these findings fit the observation that people in prison are quite unhappy, even unhappier than institutionalized psychiatric patients<sup>11</sup> The correlation of individual happiness with autonomy in organizations also fits the above noted correlation of average happiness with freedom in a nation.

### *Size*

The scant data on size of an organization show no correlation with the happiness of nuns and students, but a positive correlation with the happiness of managers in work-organizations. Apparently small is not always beautiful.

## 5.3 Micro level of individuals

Numerous studies from all over the world have examined the relation between individual happiness and social position. The results are summarized in [table 3](#).

### *Social status*

Many studies have assessed links with social status variables. The guiding assumption is typically that people in advantaged social positions will take more pleasure in life. The differences are mostly in the expected direction, but small.

*Income:* Another commonly investigated issue is the relationship of life-satisfaction with earnings. Studies in affluent welfare states typically find only small correlations, but quite substantial differences are observed in other countries. The poorer the nation, the higher the correlations tend to be.

*Education:* The pattern of correlation with schooling is similar. Again there are high correlations in poor nations and low correlations in rich ones. Recent studies in rich nations have shown even slightly negative correlations with level of school-education. In rich nations there is no correlation between IQ and life-satisfaction (Veenhoven & Choi 2012). This suggests that education, as such, does not contribute to a more satisfying life and this counter-intuitive implication calls for more research.

Despite the above, average life-satisfaction is higher in the most educated countries and this



means that education does affect life-satisfaction indirectly. A high level of education is required for the functioning of modern society and life in modern society appears to be more satisfying than in traditional societies. So education is a case of different effects being found at the macro and the micro level.

*Occupation:* There is more correlation of happiness with vocation. All over the world, professionals and managers tend to be most satisfied with life. It is not clear as to what extent this difference results from the rewards of work-tasks, related advantages or differential selection.

### *Social capital*

Social-relations have been considered, both our primary ties in our private sphere of life and secondary relations in public life. Together, these variables explain another 10% of the observed variation in life-satisfaction.

*Primary relations:* Happiness is consistently related to presence and quality of intimate networks, however, not all kinds of ties are equally related to happiness in all countries. In western nations, the tie with a 'spouse' is more important than contacts with 'friends' and 'relatives'. Follow-up studies have shown a causal effect of marriage on happiness. Studies in western nations on the effect of having children show little difference in cross-sections, but a slight negative effect in follow-up. Though happy people more often raise a family, their happiness declines a bit after the birth of their first child. It is a yet not clear how children affect happiness in developing nations.

*Secondary relations:* Happiness tends to be higher among persons who have 'paid work', however, 'house wives' are not less satisfied, and neither does 'retirement' make life less satisfying. Happiness is more consistently related to participation in 'voluntary organizations'. In both cases follow-up studies show a causal effect of social participation on happiness.

Together these micro-social conditions explain no more than 15% of the differences in individual happiness in modern nations<sup>12</sup> and some 10% can be attributed to strikes of good or bad luck (Headey & Wearing 1992). Most of the variance is found in individual life-ability; right-top quadrant in [figure 2](#). Twin studies suggest that some 35% of the differences in happiness has a genetic basis (Bartels & Boomsma 2009) and the additional effect of learned skills and behavior has been estimated 40% (Lyubomirski 2008). This reflects that living conditions are typically sufficient in modern society, and that inequalities therefore do not affect happiness very much. Differences are greater in developing nations and the correlations between happiness and social conditions therefore stronger.

## **6 DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

So much for what we do know now. What can we do to learn more?

### *Follow-up*

Since its inception in the 1970s research on social conditions for happiness has provided us mainly with correlational findings. Yet correlations do not always denote causes, since they can be spurious or result from reversed causality. For instance the high correlation between

happiness and marital status can be due to the fact that healthy people have better marriage chances, and that it is health that determines happiness rather than marriage. The correlation can also be due to an effect of happiness on marriage chances, since happiness facilitates social contacts in general and intimate contacts in particular.

These causal paths have been explored in the case of marriage, as can be seen in [table 3](#). The dark shaded cell in the column ‘partial’ correlations indicates that the correlation has survived several checks for spuriousness. Likewise the shaded cell in the column ‘longitudinal’ denotes that follow-up have shown that entering marriage goes with a rise in happiness. However the many blanks in the tables show that this case of marriage is an exception rather than the rule. In most cases we can only speculate about the direction of causality involved. This calls for more longitudinal analyses, which can use the growing number of large scale panel studies, such as the German Socio-Economic Panel Study<sup>13</sup> and the British Household Panel Survey<sup>14</sup>.

### *Causal paths*

Assessing direction of causality is one thing. The next step is to assess how causality works. Several mechanisms have been mentioned in the case of marriage, such as gratification of the need to belong, mutual support and behavioral correction, but as yet it is difficult to demonstrate such effects empirically and to assess their relative importance. In the case of income some studies differentiated between income as such and comparative income and found independent effects on happiness. Research of this kind is still in its infancy. In most cases we can only speculate about the way in which social conditions affect happiness.

### *Specifications*

Most studies have looked for effects of social conditions on the happiness in the general public. Yet many effects are likely to be contingent on persons and situations. Though marriage may gratify universal needs for sex and to belong, some will benefit more from matrimony than others, e.g. people with good social skills and without sexual disorders. Likewise earning a high income will not add equally much to the happiness of everybody and the data show a stronger effect of a high income on males than females. Research on such differences will allow more informed choices in life and evidence based life coaching (Veenhoven 2015).

Split-up of social conditions for happiness by sub-groups is not very common as yet; the focus is rather on distilling ‘pure’ general effects using many control variables. As of 2014 the specifications made so far can be selected in the collection ‘Correlational Findings’ of the World Database of Happiness.

**REFERENCES**

- Argyle, M. (1987)  
*The Psychology of Happiness*  
Methuen, 1987, London, UK
- Bartels, M. & Boomsma, D.I. (2009)  
*Born to be Happy? The Etiology of Subjective Well-Being*  
Behavior Genetics, 39: 605 - 617
- BBC (2006)  
*The happiness formula: Opinion poll*  
GfK-NOP poll 421059. Report available at:  
[http://news.bbc.co.uk/nol/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/29\\_03\\_06\\_happiness\\_gfcpoll.pdf](http://news.bbc.co.uk/nol/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/29_03_06_happiness_gfcpoll.pdf)
- Berg, M. & Veenhoven, R. (2010)  
*Income inequality and happiness in 119 nations*  
In: Bent Greve (ed.) 'Social Policy and Happiness in Europe', Edgar Elgar, chapter 11,  
pp.174-194
- Bruni, L. & Porta, P.L (2005)  
*Economic and Happiness*  
Oxford University Press
- Diener, E., Lucas, R.E., Smith, H.L. & Suh, E.M.(1999)  
*Subjective Well-Being: Three Decades of Progress*  
Psychological Bulletin, 125: 276 - 301
- Diener, E. & Biswas-Diener, R. (2008)  
*Happiness. Unlocking the Mysteries of Psychological Wealth*  
Blackwell Publishing, USA
- Diener & Oishi (2004)  
*Are Scandinavians happier than Asians? Issues in comparing nations on subjective well-being*  
In: Columbus, F.; Ed.: "Asian Economic and Political Issues", 20: 1 – 25
- Dolan, P.; Peasgood, T.; White, M (2008)  
*Do we really know what makes us Happy? A Review of the economic Literature on the Factors associated with subjective Well-being*  
Journal of Economic Psychology, 29: 94 – 122
- Easterlin, R.A. (1974)  
*Does economic growth improve the human lot?*  
In: David, P.A, ;Melvin, W.R. (Eds.) "Nations and Households in Economic Growth",  
Academic Press, 1974, New York, USA, 89 – 125

- Frey, B.S., Benz, M. & Stutzer, S. (2004)  
*Introducing procedural utility: Not only What, but also How matters*  
Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics, 160: 377–401
- Gerson, E.M. (1976)  
*On quality of life*  
American Sociological Review, 41: 793-806
- Headey, B. & Wearing, A.J. (1992)  
*Understanding Happiness: A Theory of Subjective Well-Being*  
Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, Australia
- Layard, R. (2005)  
*Happiness: Lessons from a new science*  
Penguin Books, London, UK
- Lyubomirsky, S. (2008)  
*The How of Happiness. A Scientific Approach to Getting the Life you Want*  
Penguin Books, London, UK
- Ott, J.C. (2010)  
*Good governance and happiness in nations: Technical quality precedes democracy and quality beats size*  
Journal of Happiness Studies, 11: 353-368
- Sen, A. (1993)  
*Capability and wellbeing*  
In: Sen, A. & Nussbaum, M. (Eds.) 'The quality of life', Clarendon Press, Oxford, UK,
- VanPraag & Ferrer-i-Carbonell (2004)  
*Happiness Quantified. A Satisfaction Calculus Approach*  
Oxford University Press, UK
- Veenhoven, R. (1984)  
*Conditions of Happiness*  
Reidel (now Springer), Dordrecht, Netherlands
- Veenhoven, R. (1999)  
*Quality-of-life in individualistic society: A comparison in 43 nations in the early 1990's*  
Social indicators Research, 48: 157-186
- Veenhoven, R. (2000)  
*The four qualities of life: Ordering concepts and measures of the good life*  
Journal Of Happiness Studies, 1: 1-39
- Veenhoven, R. (2008)  
*Comparability of happiness across nations*  
School of Sociology and Social Work Journal, 104: 211-234, Kwansai Gakuin University, Japan, ISSN 0452-9456

Veenhoven, R. (2011)

*Happiness and society*

Soziale Sicherheit (Social Security) 9: 298-302

Veenhoven, R. (2014a)

*World Database of Happiness*

Erasmus University Rotterdam, Netherlands

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

Veenhoven, R. (2014b)

*Bibliography of Happiness*

World Database of Happiness, Erasmus University Rotterdam

Available at: [http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/hap\\_bib/bib\\_fp.php](http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/hap_bib/bib_fp.php)

Veenhoven, R. (2014c)

*Measures of Happiness*

World Database of Happiness, Erasmus University Rotterdam

Available at: [http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/hap\\_quer/hqi\\_fp.htm](http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/hap_quer/hqi_fp.htm)

Veenhoven, R. (2014d)

*Happiness in Nations*

World Database of Happiness, Erasmus University Rotterdam

Available at: [http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/hap\\_nat/nat\\_fp.php](http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/hap_nat/nat_fp.php)

Veenhoven, R. (2014e)

*Happiness in Publics*

World Database of Happiness, Erasmus University Rotterdam

Available at: [http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/hap\\_pub/pub\\_fp.php](http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/hap_pub/pub_fp.php)

Veenhoven, R. (2014f)

*Correlates of Happiness*

World Database of Happiness, Erasmus University Rotterdam

Available at: [http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/hap\\_cor/cor\\_fp.htm](http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl/hap_cor/cor_fp.htm)

Veenhoven, R. (2014h)

*Long-term change of happiness in nations: To times more rise than decline since the 1970s*

In: Sheldon, K. & Lucas, R. (eds), *Stability of happiness: Theories and evidence on whether happiness can change*, chapter 9, pp. 167-200, Elsevier Publishing

Veenhoven, R. (2014i)

*Informed pursuit of happiness: What we should know, do know and can get to know*

Journal of Happiness Studies, 14: (in press)

Veenhoven & Berg (2013)

*Has modernization gone too far? Happiness and modernity in 141 contemporary nations*

International Journal of Happiness and Development, 1: 172-195,

Veenhoven & Choi (2012)

*Does intelligence boost happiness? Smartness of all pays more than being smarter*

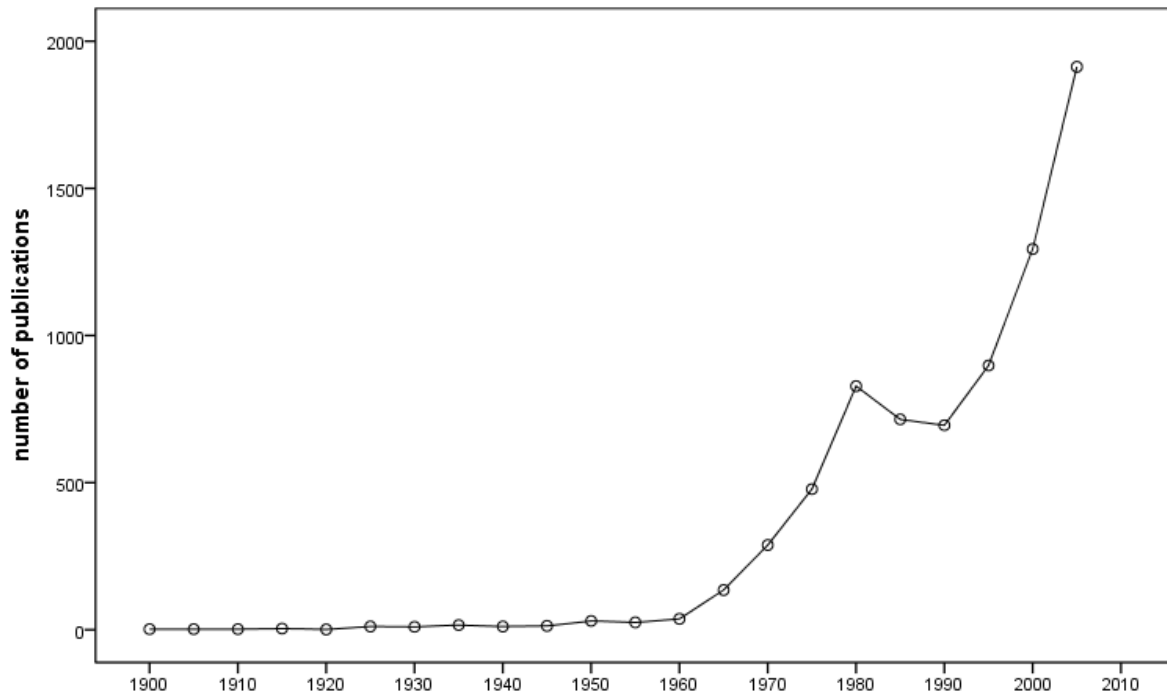
International Journal of Happiness and Development, 1: 5-27

Veenhoven, R. & Vergunst, F. (2014)

*The Easterlin illusion: Economic growth does go with greater happiness*

International Journal of Happiness and Development, 2 (in press)

Figure 1

**Number of scientific publications on happiness by 5 year periods**

Source: Bibliography of Happiness<sup>15</sup> (Veenhoven 2014b)



Figure 2

**Four qualities of life**

	<i>Outer qualities</i>	<i>Inner qualities</i>
<i>Life chances</i>	Livability of environment	Life-ability of the person
<i>Life results</i>	Usefulness of life	<b>Satisfaction with life</b>

Source: Veenhoven 2000

Figure 3

**Four kinds of satisfaction**

	<i>Passing</i>	<i>Enduring</i>
<i>Part of life</i>	Pleasure	Aspect satisfactions
<i>Life-as-a-whole</i>	Peak experience	<b>Life satisfaction</b>

Figure 4  
**Happiness in the USA 2008**

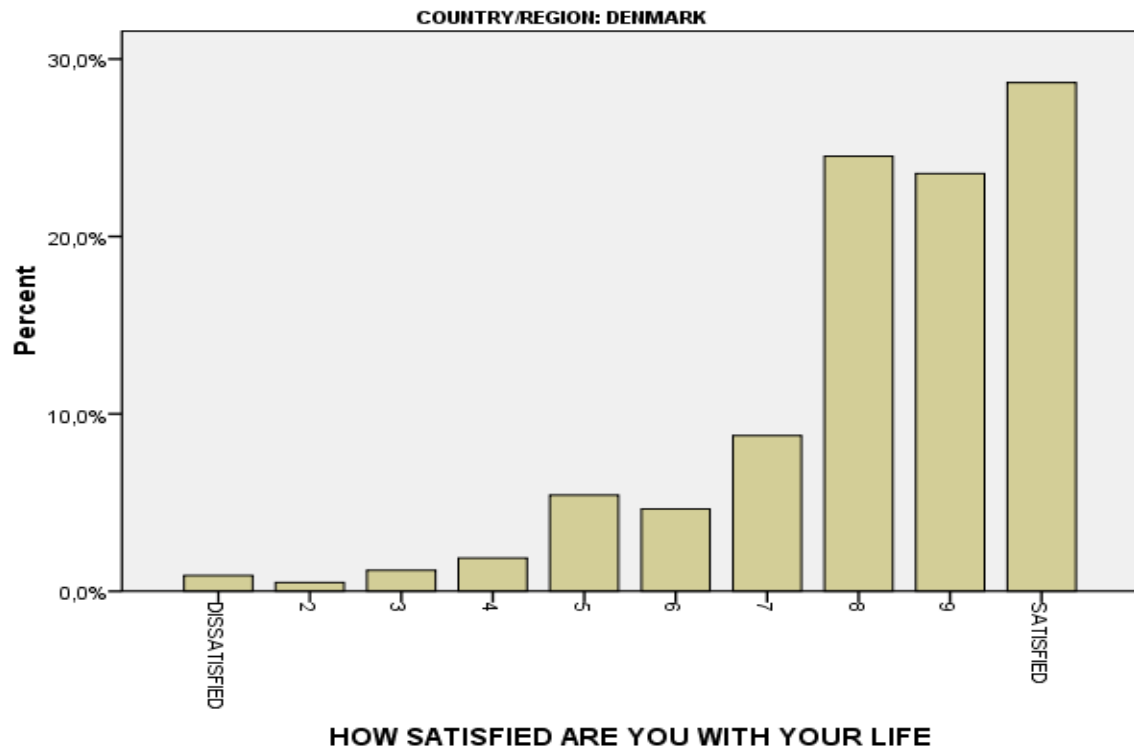


Figure 5  
**Happiness in Zimbabwe 2001**

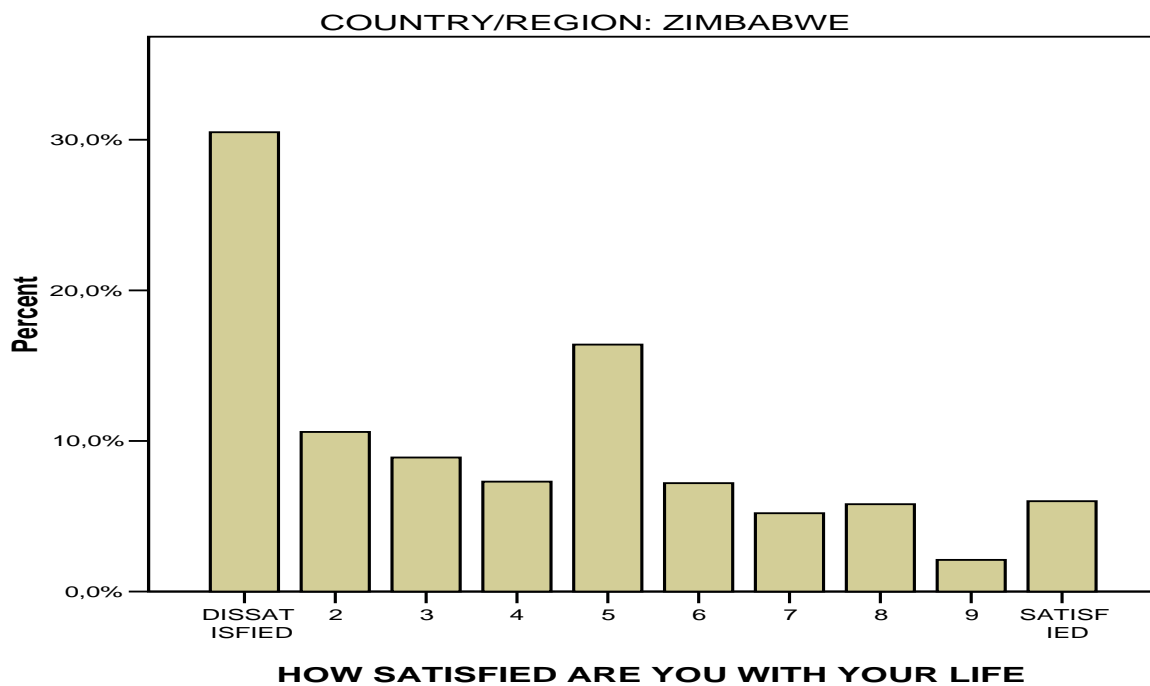
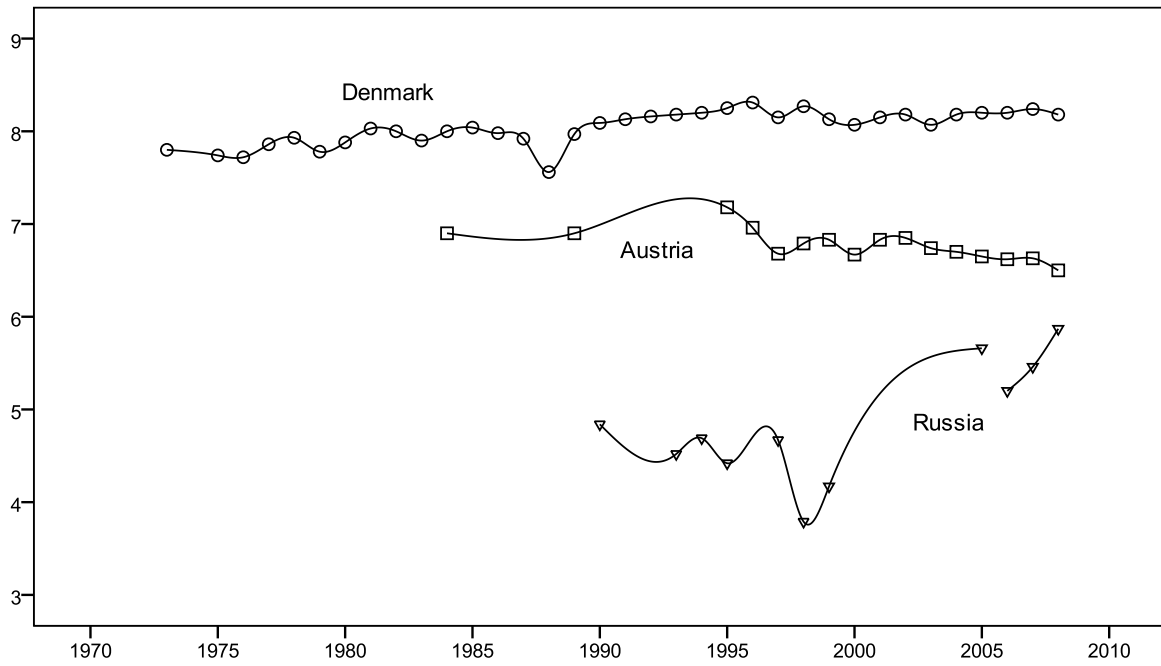


Figure 6  
Average happiness in 148 nations 2000-2009



Source: Happiness in Nations (Veenhoven 2014d)

Figure 7  
Trend average happiness in nations



Source: Happiness in Nations (Veenhoven 2014d)

**APPENDIX****Key to summary markers in tables 1, 2 and 3***Strength of observed correlations*

- ++ very positive
- + positive
- +/- mixed findings, both positive and negative
- negative
- 0 unrelated

*Similarity of findings across people and nations*

- = similar
- ≈ similar direction, but difference in strength of correlation
- ≠ dissimilar

Shading of cells indicates availability of research findings	
	none
	a few
	some
	considerable
	a lot

Table 1  
Findings on societal conditions for happiness

Characteristics of nations	Observed correlation with happiness				Detail in World Database of Happiness Links to sections in the collection of correlational findings N4 <b>Conditions in one's Nation</b>
	Across all nations		longitudinal	In particular kinds of countries	
	cross sectional	raw			
<b>Wealth</b>					
GDP p/c	++	+	+	≈	N4.1.3 Economic affluence
<b>Freedom</b>					
Economic freedom	++	+		≈	N4.15.3 Economic freedom
Political freedom	++	+		≈	N4.15.2 Political freedom
Private freedom	+	+			N4.15.1 Private freedom
<b>Equality</b>					
Income equality	0	0		≈	N4.8.2 Income inequality
Gender equality	++	+		≈	N4.8.1 Gender inequality
<b>Security</b>					
Physical security; murder rate	0	0		≈	N4.13 Safety
Social security	+	0	0	≈	N4.5.1.4 Social security
<b>Institutional quality</b>					
Rule of law	++	+		≈	N4.10 Justice
Good governance	++	+		≈	N4.6.6 Quality of Government
Corruption	--	-		≈	N4.10.1 Corruption
<b>Modernity</b>					
Urbanization	++	+		≈	N4.2.4 Urbanization
Globalization	+	+		≈	N5 <b>Position of one's nation</b>

Symbols explained on [appendix](#)

Table 2

**Findings on happiness and organizational conditions**

<i>Characteristics of organization</i>	<i>Observed correlation with happiness</i>					<i>Detail in World Database of Happiness</i> <i>Links to sections in the collection of correlational findings</i>
	<i>among people in general</i>			<i>In different sets of</i>		
	<i>cross sectional</i>		<i>longitudinal</i>	<i>people</i>	<i>nations</i>	
	<i>raw</i>	<i>partial</i>				
<b>Care homes</b>						
Autonomy	+					I2 <b>Institutional Living</b> Restrictiveness of setting
<b>Cloister</b>						
Size	0					I2 <b>Institutional Living</b> Size of setting
Autonomy	+					W4 <b>Work Conditions</b> Self direction at work
<b>Schools</b>						
Size	0					S1 <b>School</b> Size
Performance	0		0			S1 <b>School</b> Intellectual level
Private/public	0	0				S1 <b>School</b> Social characteristics
Ethnic homogeneity	0					S1 <b>School</b> Ethnic homogeneity
<b>Work organizations</b>						
Size	+					W4 <b>Work Conditions</b> Size of plant
Supportive leadership	+					W4 <b>Work Conditions</b> Leadership of boss
Autonomy	+	+				W4 <b>Work Conditions</b> Self direction at work

Symbols explained on [appendix](#)



Table 3

**Findings on happiness and social position**

<i>Characteristic of position</i>	<i>Observed correlation with happiness</i>					<i>Detail in World Database of Happiness</i> <i>Links to sections in the collection of correlational findings</i>
	<i>In general population samples</i>			<i>In different sets of</i>		
	<i>cross sectional</i>		<i>longitudinal</i>	<i>people</i>	<i>nations</i>	
<i>raw</i>	<i>partial</i>					
<b>Social rank</b>						
Income	++	+	+	≈	≈	I 1 <b>Income</b> , P10 <b>Possessions</b>
Education	+	±	+	≈	≠	E2 <b>Education</b>
Prestige	+	+	0	=	=	O1 <b>Occupation</b> , S9 <b>Socio Economic Status</b>
Minority	-	-	-	≠	≠	E3 <b>Ethnicity</b> , M8 <b>Migration</b>
<b>Social participation</b>						
Employment	++	+	+	≈	≈	E1 <b>Employment</b>
Voluntary work	+	+	+	=	≈	S7 <b>Participation in voluntary organizations</b>
<b>Intimate network</b>						
Married	++	+	+	=	≈	M1 <b>Marital career</b> , M2 <b>Marital status</b>
Children	0	-	-	≠	≠	C3 <b>Having children</b>
Contacts with wider family	+	+	+	=	=	F3 <b>Family of relatives</b>
Contacts with friends	+	+	+	=	=	F6 <b>Friendship</b>

Symbols explained on [appendix](#)

---

**NOTES**

<sup>1</sup> Erasmus University Rotterdam in the Netherlands, Erasmus Happiness Economics Research Organisation (EHERO) and North-West University in South Africa, Opentia Research group. E-mail: Veenhoven@ese.eur.nl

<sup>2</sup> <http://link.springer.com/journal/11205>

<sup>3</sup> <http://link.springer.com/journal/11136>

<sup>4</sup> <http://link.springer.com/journal/11482>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.springer.com/psychology/klinische+psychologie/journal/13612>

<sup>6</sup> <http://link.springer.com/journal/10902>

<sup>7</sup> The World Database of Happiness is based at Erasmus University Rotterdam and is free available in internet at :

<http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl>

<sup>8</sup> To date (September 2014) the collection of distributional findings in nations is almost complete. The collection of correlational findings is fairly complete up to the year 2000, but a lot of findings published since still need to be entered.

<sup>9</sup> Question used in Gallup World Survey. Code in collection Measures of Happiness (Veenhoven 2014b): O-SWL-c-sq-n-11-a

<sup>10</sup> This average has been recorded on scale 0-10 in the 2008 Gallup World Poll. Unfortunately the distribution of responses is not published as yet. Therefore the bar chart on Figure 5 presents the distribution observed in 2001 in the World Values Survey where a 1-10 scale was used. The average score on that scale was 3.9, which equals 3.3 on scale 0-10.

<sup>11</sup> World Database of Happiness, Correlational Findings (Veenhoven 2012d): **Happiness and Prison** (P11)

<sup>12</sup> World Database of Happiness, Correlational Findings: S15.2 **Summed effects of current conditions**

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.diw.de/en/soep>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/bhps>

<sup>15</sup> Publications in this Bibliography are selected for fit with the *concept* of happiness as defined in section 2 of this paper and this concept is called by different names, such as life-satisfaction and subjective wellbeing. So this graph is not a count of the use of *word* happiness in scientific literature.