

# Towards Greater Happiness

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*Optentia News, 7 (3) 2017 p. 12-13*

We all want a satisfying life for ourselves and our children. Individually, we seek ways to achieve a more satisfying life and this quest is manifested in the soaring sales of 'how-to-be-happy' books and in the ongoing development of life-coaching businesses. Collectively, we call on our governments to improve the social conditions for happiness. This call for greater happiness has instigated a lot of research on conditions for happiness, much of which is gathered in the World Database of Happiness. To date, this source hosts some 25.000 research findings on happiness in the sense of life-satisfaction. It is not easy to distil practical recommendations from this research literature. Not only are the findings too numerous to digest for an interested layperson, but findings are context dependent and not seldom contradictory. One way to extract recommendations is to do a review study, that is, to inspect all the available studies and consider the strengths and weaknesses, and propose a list of best ways to greater happiness. This takes a lot of time, and typically results in a book, which is then added to the pile of existing advisory literature. An alternative way to separate the grain from the chaff among these many recommendations is to pick the brains of several experts and gather their views. That approach is followed in this Delphi study, which was subsidized by National Geographic magazine. In the first round of this Delphi study 14 experts suggested strategies for improving life satisfaction. In a second round, experts rated these strategies for a) effectiveness, b) feasibility and c) cost-effectiveness. They considered 56 strategies that policy makers can use to raise average happiness in a nation and 68 ways in which individuals can raise their own happiness. Experts were informed about the average ratings made by the panel and about the arguments advanced. Then, in a third round, experts made their final judgements. Summed ratings for average effectiveness and feasibility of the strategies ranged between 8,4 and 4.9 on scale 2- 10, which means that most of the recommendations were deemed suitable. Agreement was slightly higher on policy strategies than on individual ways to greater happiness. Policy strategies deemed the most effective and feasible are: 1) investing in happiness research; 2) support of vulnerable people, and 3) improving the social climate, in particular by promoting voluntary work and supporting non-profits. Individual strategies deemed most effective are: a) investing in social networks, b) doing meaningful things and c) caring for one's health. An overview of the policy strategies is presented in the table on the next page.

## **Policy Strategies to Promote Happiness**

- Investing in happiness research
- Supporting vulnerable people
- Improving the social climate, in particular by promoting voluntary work and supporting nonprofits.

## **Individual Strategies to Promote Happiness**

- Investing in social networks
- Doing meaningful things
- Caring for one's health.

## Ways to Greater Happiness for a Greater Number of Citizens

Strategy	Sum of effectiveness and feasibility	
	Mean	SD
Look for What Works for Whom	8.5	1.35
Promote Voluntary Work, Civil Service	8.3	1.25
Assess How Much of the Above is Optimal	8.1	1.66
Reduce Loneliness	8.1	1.24
Monitor Happiness in Nations	8.1	1.56
Focus on the Least Happy	7.8	1.06
Combat Discrimination	7.5	1.08
Increase Support for Non-Profits	7.5	1.27
Foster Freedom to Choose	7.5	1.51
Bring Life Skills to Schools	7.5	1.62
Invest in Education	7.4	1.17
Support of Fairs and Festivals	7.3	1.56
Encourage Healthy Living	7.3	1.42
Facilitate Social Contacts	7.3	1.60
Support Families	7.2	1.47
Foster Ability to Choose	7.2	2.33
Promote Good Government	7.1	0.99
Improve Work Conditions	7.1	1.76
Prioritize Prevention	7.0	1.49
Empower and Involve Citizens	7.0	1.70
Maintain Order in Schools	7.0	1.70
Be Explicit About Focus on Greater Happiness	7.0	2.41
Provide Minimum Income Security	6.9	1.24
Reduce Unemployment	6.9	0.83
Provide Free Healthcare	6.9	1.14
Promote Financial Education	6.9	1.70
Promote Sports	6.8	1.11
Prioritize Mental Health Care	6.7	1.56
Support Happiness Education	6.7	2.35
Top-up' Wages Program	6.5	1.21
Monitor Happiness in Schools	6.5	2.70
Invest in a Greener Environment	6.5	1.43
Limit Urban Sprawl	6.4	1.43
Educate Parents	6.4	1.51
Favor Economic Stability Over Economic Growth	6.3	1.06
Increase Foreign Aid	6.3	1.34
Facilitate Internet Access	6.3	1.01
Promote 8 Hours of Sleep	6.3	1.79
Invest in Clean Air	6.2	1.14
Provide Free Education	6.2	1.14
Favor Saving Over Consumption	5.9	1.29
Promote Healthy Eating	5.8	2.08
Get People to the Dentist	5.8	1.62
Improve Happiness Advise/Coaching	5.8	2.30
Support Home Ownership	5.6	1.43
Increase Taxes	5.6	1.44
Support Ongoing Societal Modernization	5.5	1.29
Foster Economic Growth	5.5	1.04
Reduce Income Inequality	5.5	1.21
Reduce Working Hours	5.4	1.73
CEO Tax to reduce Income Inequality	5.3	1.80
Decentralize	5.3	1.42
Facilitate Study Elsewhere	5.0	1.50
Stimulate Consumption of Stimulus Goods Over Comfort Goods	4.8	1.75
Reduce Use of Cars	4.7	1.37
Counterbalance Global Capitalism	4.2	1.81
	6.6	150

“Look for what works for who ...”

Full report available at:

<https://www.eur.nl/sites/corporate/files/2018-02/DelphiStudyGreaterHappinessfinal.pdf>

