WORLD DATABASE OF HAPPINESS

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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

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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.
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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Cross-References in encyclopedia

_Databook of Happiness_
Figure 1
World Database of happiness: building blocks of the findings archive

Entry

Pages
Publication
Measure of happiness
Study
Distributional finding
Correlational finding

Collect

Collections
Bibliography
Happiness measures
Distributional findings
Correlational findings

Select

Reports
Publications about a particular topic
Particular measure of happiness and results obtained with
Findings on distribution of happiness in a particular place
Findings on correlation of happiness with a particular variable

Use
Figure 2
Start page World of Happiness