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# Brookdale Index of Individual Wellbeing: Preliminary Findings

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# Abstract

## Background

The common denominator of all social programs is the desire to improve wellbeing, that is, the overall condition of individual members of society. Therefore, every intervention program shares the following basic assumptions: (1) Participation in the program will indeed improve wellbeing; and (2) This improvement can be measured when the program's effectiveness is evaluated.

However, wellbeing is composed of multiple aspects. Some of these aspects are difficult to measure, and the relative contribution of each to overall wellbeing is not always known. In addition, the relative importance of different aspects for overall wellbeing may vary by gender, age, population group or other individual and social variables. Given the complexity of measuring wellbeing, many social programs are measured and evaluated using proxy variables such as satisfaction, increases in income, program participation rates, and many other variables that do not directly and fully measure the actual desired outcome – improved wellbeing.

Given the limitations of such measurement, a Myers-JDC-Brookdale research team has developed a measure of wellbeing that is rich and validated, yet simple to use. This report presents the findings of a survey used to determine the relative importance of a variety of life aspects, which in turn will be used to weigh these different aspects of wellbeing into a single index.

## Objective

The overarching objective of this study was to create, for the first time in Israel, an individual-level, practical wellbeing index comprising a relatively short list of aspects, that can be used to assess the impact of intervention programs on individual wellbeing. The objectives of the research stage presented in this report are: (1) To compile a shortlist of aspects to be included in the wellbeing index; and (2) To determine the relative weight of each aspect.

## Method

The proposed index is based on the seminal work of Benjamin et al. In that paper, the researchers suggested using a stated-preferences approach to create an index of total wellbeing. In other words, they examine individuals' statements regarding their own preferences. Following their methodology, a research team at the Brookdale-JDC-Myers Institute selected 27 of the 136 aspects proposed by Benjamin et al., which were

determined to best capture wellbeing, based on both the professional literature and the expert opinions of Brookdale researchers. The aspects selected included such areas as health, personal security, standard of living, and sense of community belonging.

After compiling the list of aspects, the relative weight of each in the overall index was determined using an online survey of 1,032 respondents, conducted in October 2022. The survey measured individuals' stated preferences regarding the various aspects of wellbeing, allowing the research team to assess respondents' priorities. In each of four rounds, the respondents were asked to rate on a scale of 0-100 their personal circumstances over the past year with regard to three randomly selected aspects. They were then presented with six pairs of scenarios involving those aspects. Each scenario involved a change in the rating of one of the aspects; respondents were required to make a hypothetical choice between the two scenarios, and were also allowed to respond "I don't know". Based on the respondents' choices, the relative weight of each aspect in the overall welfare index was calculated using a linear regression model.

## **Findings**

The researchers found that *the aspects affecting wellbeing most strongly* are family happiness; the family's overall wellbeing; individual health, physical and mental status; the quality of intimate and family relationships; and happiness and love. Approximately one half of the overall index is based on the cumulative effects of these aspects.

*The aspects affecting wellbeing to a medium degree* are individual satisfaction with life; the degree to which one's life is peaceful and calm; the extent to which life is meaningful; one's economic situation; one's ability to raise children; the degree of physical security; and the freedom to choose between options in life. About one-third of the overall index is based on the cumulative effects of these aspects.

*The lowest-weighted aspects of wellbeing* are the quality of the individual's relationships with friends and neighbors and one's ability to turn to them in times of trouble; the individual's satisfaction with work and with the work-leisure balance in their life; the degree to which the individual lives their life as a good person and the degree to which they are proud of themselves; the degree to which the individual is surrounded by people who think highly of and appreciate them; and one's satisfaction with one's home. The combined effects of these aspects contribute about one-tenth of the overall index.

When the aspects were divided into seven content areas, it was found that aspects related to individuals' satisfaction with their personal circumstances were the most important for their wellbeing, whereas social and environmental aspects had relatively little impact on individual wellbeing.

Finally, aspect ratings were analyzed by respondent characteristics. No gender differences were noted, except that men ascribed more importance to romantic relationships, and women ascribed more importance to aspects relating to health and physical security. Health-related aspects carried greater weight among the older age group (43-85), compared to the younger age group (18-42). Finally, spirituality and religion had significantly greater influence on wellbeing among religious people, compared to nonreligious people. Moreover, among secular individuals, a higher level of spirituality *reduced* wellbeing. Health aspects were relatively more important for secular respondents' wellbeing.

## **Summary and Conclusions**

The findings indicate that commonly studied aspects of wellbeing such as satisfaction and health are indeed the most influential on individual wellbeing, particularly aspects of family happiness (8% of the total index), and physical and mental health (7% each). The quality of intimate and family relationships was also found to be important (6% each), while the quality of individual relationships with friends were found to have little effect on wellbeing. It was also found that the respondents rated their economic status as only slightly affecting their wellbeing (5%). Finally, aspects related to emotions, such as joy and love (6% each) were more influential on wellbeing, than spirituality (less than 1%), or aspects related to the meaning of life (4%).

The wellbeing index proposed in this report can enable policymakers, program providers and evaluators to directly measure the effect of social programs on participant wellbeing. By including questions about wellbeing program evaluation surveys, using the weights from this study, and computing the change to the index after the intervention, the total impact of the program can be measured. This impact can then be compared to the impacts of similar programs.