



Research Article

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Therapeutic Notepad: A Path to Happiness and Well-Being

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Abstract

Human beings are curious, intrinsically motivated and often look for sensations based on goals and plans to overcome the difficulties and challenges that arise towards happiness, wellbeing, and personal growth. The present study aims to understand the usefulness and practicality of a therapeutic notepad, which is composed of inspiring quotes and tasks underlying happiness and well-being. 111 young people and adults, aged between 18 and 58 years ($M= 21.81$; $SD= 5.34$) participated in this study, being 47.3% male individuals and 52.7% female individuals. First, a sociodemographic questionnaire was applied to collect personal data; then was administered the Psychological Well-Being Manifestations Scale (Échelle de Mesure des Manifestations du Bien-Être Psychologique) which translates into a response instrument five-point likert type with five subscales including happiness. Finally, a semistructured interview was applied to understand the functionality of the therapeutic agenda. The results showed, both qualitatively and quantitatively, that the notepad can be assumed as an agent that promotes happiness and well-being as well as reducing the negative mood of individuals. This study focuses on the importance of well-being and happiness in the daily lives of individuals. This is an important contribution, as it allows to gauge that the notepad leads to positive and motivating results when applied.

Keywords: Adults, Well-Being, Happiness, Youth

1. Introduction

Human beings are curious, intrinsically motivated and are constantly looking for sensations based on goals and plans, with a view to overcoming difficulties and challenges, but also fostering warm

relationships and moving forward (in a hedonistic perspective¹) towards happiness, well-being and personal growth. All these positive motivational elements are identified in a common way in a framework of different cultures, ages, life experiences, historical, and genetic periods (Reeve, 2018).

Previous research showed that happy people share some characteristics among themselves, like strong sense of control, higher levels of self-esteem, a tendency to be extroverted, an outlook of optimism, and a stable social support network (Tantam, 2014). Both men and women are generally happy in the same matrix of activities, although this tendency is not always present (Boyd-Wilson et al., 2004; Krueger, 2007; Peterson, 2000).

Happiness and well-being, both concepts under discussion in this research, show flexibility with overlapping meanings and theories, which triggers a large number of models and perspectives, as, for example, the self-determination theory of Ryan & Deci (2008), the social welfare model of Keyes (1998), the model of the four qualities of life and the index of years of happy life proposed by Veenhoven (2013).

In this context, well-being refers to a general term that has as its core the assessment of people about their lives in relation to thoughts and emotions, a global reflection of life satisfaction, developing like this the theory SWB² (Diener et al., 2009). This theory focuses on the external and internal aspects that influence individuals' lives. However, the main interest is always the individual and his subjectivity factors such as health, comfort, or wealth, which are potential influencers on the level of subjectivity of well-being. Likewise, factors such as personality, social relationships, or material resources are considered critical determinants of subjective well-being. This idea is assumed as the basis of the theory SWB, that fosters the importance of living in cooperative societies in which trust is reinforced (Diener et al., 2009; Toy & Diener, 2009). Yet, this theory encompasses some criticisms, including the fact that it presents a limited positivist perspective, in which values are only evaluated based on the positive impact they produced on people's life quality, and not as an end in itself (Martino et al., 2017).

In addition to what was mentioned above, well-being can also encompass traditional elements of moral value, such as rational selfishness (which directs the person to maximize their own well-being) and ethical utilitarianism (which directs the person to maximize the well-being of all) as well as identified virtues as traits through which the individual is governed to achieve a positive outcome. In this way, well-being is conceptually linked to benevolence and kindness as to attitudes of personal care and personal concern (Raibley, 2011).

Furthermore, to the scope of this concept, the nature of well-being is closely linked to the concepts of benefit and harm, that is, when an individual benefits the other, i.e., the person has a positive impact on the well-being of the other. In turn, the same happens in an antagonistic way in relation to damage, more specifically, when an individual harms another, that person has a negative impact on the well-being of the other (Feldman, 2016).

Regarding happiness, this concept refers to a construct in which many contemporary philosophers maintain that it expresses a psychological property that translates into the fact that the subject feels happy at the moment or presents an episode of happiness. This dynamic characteristic of happiness represents a variety of theories about its nature, including various forms of hedonism about happiness, desire/satisfaction about happiness, the "objective happiness" of Kahneman (1999) and the emotional state theory of happiness (Feldman, 2016).

It should be noted that the use of the expression "be happy" in our daily lives, and more specifically the expression "you are happy now", often provide social epistemic access in line with episodic happiness, which will allow the individual to focus on the feeling of "feeling good" for themselves and for others (Raibley, 2011). Despite the ups and downs throughout life, most people tend to be reasonably happy and manage to adapt to difficulties and challenges, returning to a

¹Hedonism is a doctrine, or philosophy of life, that defends the pursuit of pleasure as the end of human life.

²Subjective Well-Being Theory.

balanced level of happiness. This usual level of happiness can have long-term implications such as protective factors (Duncan, 2010; Eriksson et al., 2007).

The concept of happiness can have another meaning, as the philosopher Haybron stated in 2007 when saying that the expression “is happy” or “be happy”, expresses a different psychological property of the subject and has a robust characteristic of being happy in a conventional way (Haybron, 2007). This author's perspective results, in part, from the focus that individuals place on happiness as a life goal. As such, this form of happiness is conceived as an emotional condition, which differentiates it from personality traits, temperament, or reference points (set-points), since it involves dispositions to respond to life events, being particularly sensitive to the circumstances of life and the changes that occur in the environment. At the temporal level, emotional conditions persist for shorter periods of time than temperament/personality traits and may alternate over time with emotional conditions of opposite valence (Diener et al., 2009).

Relating the concepts of happiness and well-being, one of the psychologists who explored and fostered this mixed field was Martin Seligman, one of the fathers of the “Positive Psychology” movement (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This author's theory argues that happiness encompasses positive emotions, involvement, and meaning and was developed based on a theory of well-being that encompassed two more domains: relationships and achievement (Seligman, 2011). Within this area of research, the authors Ryan & Deci (2008) developed an integrative model of motivational determinants of happiness and self-fulfilment, which was based on the theory of basic psychological needs, i.e., relationship, competence and autonomy. This theory focuses both on the content of an objective or goal that one seeks to achieve as well as on the reasons for this attempt to reach the goal that can influence the subject's well-being. In this way, environmental and social conditions are responsible for stimulating or hindering human growth using three basic needs (listed above) for both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

In general, Feldman (2016) points out that there is significantly greater agreement among philosophers about the well-being construct than about happiness. Thus, an individual reports high levels of well-being when his life develops in a favourable and pleasurable way, even if moral virtue is required, the value of well-being is conceptually different from his moral value and from its value aesthetic (example: a story can be interesting because it is treated as an object of contemplation).

The context for choosing the sample of young people and adults mirrors the core of human development, in which change is marked by new phenomena that encompass different aspects of development (emotional, physical, and psychosocial) in a network of interactions. This change usually has a systematic and adaptive nature (Papalia & Feldman, 2013).

In summary, the literature review seems to present a perspective characterized by humanism and positivism, a strong link between happiness and well-being, through which human beings look for beneficial and pleasurable stability and a source of motivation to foster their personal development.

1.1 *The Present Study*

The research team aimed to build and disseminate a therapeutic notepad, where young people and adults reflect their state of well-being and happiness, as well as working on their adaptation and integration skills in society. Simultaneously and with the aim of obtaining a better understanding of these psychological processes and of regulating possible therapeutic interventions, the team committed itself to the application of a specialized questionnaire in this field as well as the elaboration of a semistructured interview to understand the functionality of this therapeutic tool, the notepad. This quantitative and qualitative study aimed to address the practicality of a therapeutic notepad both in young people and adults and at the same time to promote the subjects' happiness and well-being, thus providing a better quality of life and reducing the eventual negative mood of the participants.

2. Methods

2.1 Participants

111 young people and adults, aged between 18 and 58 years ($M= 21.81$; $SD= 5.34$) participated in this study, with 52.7% of the population being females and 47.3% males. Regarding professional status, 6.4% are unemployed, 14% are students, 12.4% are students and are employed, 45% are employed by another person, 14.2% are self-employed and 36% have more than one source of employment. Regarding marital status, 34.2% are single, 38.7% are married, 17.8% are in a de facto union, 7.5% are divorced, and 1.8% have another matrimonial status. Regarding socioeconomic status, 9.1% are of low status, 30% have medium-low status, 52.7% have medium status, 6.4% have medium-high status, and 0.9% have high status. Regarding the degree of satisfaction with life, 0.1% are not at all satisfied, 0.6% are little satisfied, 19.9% are moderately satisfied, 47.3% are satisfied, and 32.1% are very satisfied.

2.2 Materials

To collect sociodemographic information about the participants, like age, gender, professional status, matrimonial status, socioeconomic status, and degree of satisfaction with life, a sociodemographic questionnaire was applied. At the same time, and to assess well-being and happiness, the Portuguese version of Échelle de Mesure des Manifestations du Bien-Être Psychologique-ÉMMBEP was chosen (Massé et al., 1998). This instrument was validated for the Portuguese population by Monteiro and collaborators (2012) and it concerns a scale consisting of 25 items divided into six subdimensions: self-esteem (4 items), balance (4 items), social involvement (4 items), sociability (4 items), control of self and events (4 items) and happiness (5 items). The subject has to indicate for each area his/her answer in a Likert scale of 5 points where 1= Never and 5= Almost always. The higher the score obtained, the greater the psychological well-being perceived by the individual.

Note that in the present study, a good global internal consistency was obtained ($\alpha = 0.90$), and as a note of interest, it is pertinent to mention that the happiness subscale had an alpha of 0.88, accordingly with the original psychometric values (Massé et al., 1998), with adequate levels of global internal consistency translating into alphas of 0.93. The six subscales in question presented values ranging between 0.71 for social involvement and 0.85 for happiness.

Finally, and taking into consideration the therapeutic notepad, this material was built for the present study, consisting of quotes and inspiring thoughts and tasks that participants can share with whomever they want and is not mandatory in nature. These activities have as their core to help individuals towards well-being and happiness. At the end of the notepad, participants found three types of coloured sheets: green (thoughts/ pleasant matters); yellow (thoughts/ neutral matters) and orange (thoughts/worrying matters). In this case, a semistructured interview was administered, used to understand the functionality of this material.

2.3 Procedure

In the first sentence, and after choosing the scale and preparing the sociodemographic questionnaire, two pretests were carried out in which structural and semantic changes emerged. Consequently, a form was administered, in which no data that would allow the identification of the participant would be included. This protocol was put online through the Google Docs platform of Google Drive, having been disseminated through Facebook as well as in other social networks but also in student groups, youth associations, and public spaces for social interaction.

All participants were informed about the voluntary nature of the study, and the anonymity and confidentiality of data was guaranteed. This method also allows researchers to experiment with a wide range of individuals. Data collection occurred between October 2014 and February 2015.

The present study is in accordance with the ethical principles of scientific research, as defined

by the Portuguese Psychologists Order (OPP) as well as with the guidelines of the American Psychological Association (APA) regarding the conduct of studies in humans.

Finally, the collected data was analysed using the statistical program Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 22.0 (Corporation, 2013). The age division present in this sample is supported by the investigation of Papalia & Feldman (2013).

3. Results

Regarding the participants' perception of well-being and happiness, and since there was no scoring table, it was necessary to resort to a theoretical reference (calculation of the theoretical median) so that it was possible to compare the averages obtained. The cut-off point was 36. The descriptive analysis referring to the EAPEU responses (Table 1) is presented: $M= 58.85$; $SD= 9.18$, which indicates that individuals have significantly moderate levels of psychological well-being.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of total PASS.

M	DP	Median	Minimum	Maximum
58.85	9.18	53.00	17	60

With reference to gender, and when comparing the averages between the groups of male and female students (Table 2), statistically significant differences were found between men and women, which indicates that males perceive less well-being when compared to female individuals ($t(111)= 2,076$; $p = 0.043$).

Table 2: Comparison of total PASS results by gender.

	Men (SD) n=53	Women (SD) n=58	T-test
Total PASS	35.35 (7.72)	32.53 (6.45)	$t(97)= 2.076$; $p= 0.043$

Concerning to age, when comparing the averages between age groups (Table 3), there were statistically significant differences between young people and adults, which means that young people perceive greater well-being compared to adults ($t(111)= 2,080$; $p= 0.046$).

Table 3: Comparison of total PASS results by age.

	Young People (SD) n=59	Adults (SD) n=52	T-test
Total PASS	35.33 (7.68)	35.33 (6.41)	$t(111)= 2.080$; $p= 0.046$

With respect to the degree of satisfaction with life (Table 4), there were no statistically significant differences between participants taking into account nothing/little satisfaction, moderately satisfied, satisfied, and very satisfied ($F(4; 104) = 1.441$; $p> 0.226$).

Table 4: Comparison of PASS results by degree of satisfaction with life.

	Nothing/ Little satisfaction n=7	Moderately Satisfied n=20	Satisfied n=52	Very Satisfied n=32	ANOVA
Total PASS	34.40 (7.70)	36.70 (6.90)	33.73 (7.90)	32.19 (5.70)	$F(4; 104)=1.441$ $p= 0.226$

As for the content analysis of the study tasks, it was observed that the participants share similar and beneficial characteristics, such as empathy, honesty, and helping others. Participants identified family

members as the most significant people (100%), followed by friends (80%) and finally companion/pet animals (65%). In semistructured interviews, individuals indicated both as a positive and a negative point within the family, which in turn means that the family functions as a primary social support, while peers and friends assume themselves as a secondary social support. It was clear that the participants showed commitment and interest in carrying out the tasks proposed as a way of reflecting on their well-being and happiness.

Finally, it is possible to cite frequently used expressions: "I feel good about myself because I know that my family is always with me in good times and bad."; "I've always been a happy person because I've been able to make my dreams come true."; "Being a father fills me up, makes me feel good. Educating and being a father or mother costs and gives work, but it is completely rewarding!"

4. Discussion

The present study used the mean of the total EAPEU scale ($M=58.85$; $SD=9.18$) to demonstrate that respondents have significantly moderate levels of psychological well-being. Other investigations that also used self-report instruments, with a five-point Likert-type scale, also presented similar averages in the mid-point of the instrument responses, thus indicating that the participants of these studies also perceived well-being and happiness in a significant and positive way (Lun & Bond, 2016; Tantam, 2014).

Additionally, it was found that women perceive greater well-being than men, which is in accordance with the investigations carried out by Graham & Chattopadhyay (2013) and Helliwell and collaborators (2012). This phenomenon may be related to the social constructions underlying the consequent well-being and happiness (Lun & Bond, 2016).

Cumulatively, and as expected, it was possible to observe that young people have higher levels of well-being, values that are statistically significant when compared to adults, which is in line with the literature that shows that youth "consume" more activities pleasant and of well-being (Feldman, 2016; Graham & Chattopadhyay, 2013).

The results obtained in the present study reflect the importance of happiness and well-being in terms of mental health. However, the sample used in this investigation was small, so a greater number of participants could contribute to even more robust results. In addition, and taking into account that studies on this subject are scarce, it would be interesting to carry out new and future investigations that contemplate other variables.

4.1 Limitations

The present investigation presented some limitations. Firstly, the fact that the form was long in the perception of respondents, which may have biased the responses prepared. This limitation is assumed to be a fact to be considered given that limited the research team in its application and time consumption, since there were some refusals to respond. Although, in general, the feedback was relatively positive, even after the electronic adaptation. In addition, another limitation is related to the fact that the present sample is a convenience sample, which requires restrictions to be made regarding the conclusions at the level of generalization of the results.

5. Conclusion

Most people associate the concept of health with the absence of disease, and when an individual feels unwell, they look for a doctor in an attempt to obtain a prescription for a drug that is capable of mitigating or even reversing their situation. However, it is not just physical health that produces general well-being, but also the mental component. Every day we find mental health. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with everyday stresses, can work productively, and is able to

contribute to his or her community (WHO, 2014).

A person's mental health is therefore as important as their physical health, and mental health conditions are as real as physical illnesses. In other words, a physical fracture is treated immediately, but a fracture in the mental structure often takes time to reverse, given the most appropriate and necessary treatment. In addition, mental pain is often not understood by most people, not even by those who are the target of it, that is, despite having the potential to influence several areas of life, mental health is not very well understood and this phenomenon ends up representing a direct impact on happiness and well-being. As such, positive mental states have a direct effect on the body, that is, they contribute to the reduction of harmful physical processes.

According to the WHO (WHO, n.d.) being healthy implies complete mental, physical, emotional, and social well-being of the individual, regardless of race, religion, ideology, socioeconomic status or sexual orientation. Therefore, it is as necessary to treat mental pain as it is to treat physical pain.

In turn, happiness and well-being are fundamental to mental health and vice versa. Happiness and well-being directly impact our health, and there are many factors that can impact their levels, such as: genetic factors, environmental factors, financial factors, among others. At the same time, these concepts depend on other aspects, such as loving and being loved, having good social and family relationships, being healthy, and/or having a good working environment, especially enjoying what you do.

Happiness and well-being are subjective, that is, they vary from individual to individual. However, regardless of the person in question, happiness and well-being are assumed to be something that we all seek, that is, their search is permanent and incessant in the lives of each of us, which is great and capable of to motivate us every day. Despite this, we do not always have control over our happiness and well-being, so when they are disturbed, they are a great barrier to mental health.

Therefore, it is important to take care of our mental health. Treating mental health is assumed to be a task guided by great stereotypes, making the psychological state even more neglected and forgotten. However, when happiness and well-being are present, especially on a large scale, they contribute to better health globally. According to the research published in *Applied Psychology: Health and Well-Being*, happy people tend to take better care of themselves, are more concerned about their physical and mental health, and take steps towards it, such as exercising physical activity, adopting a balanced diet and achieving a good night's sleep.

In summary, and despite the obstacles mentioned above, the authors consider the present study as an important contribution to the investigation in terms of well-being and happiness, given the creativity in the construction of the therapeutic notepad allowed the elaboration of an evaluation that dictated positive and motivating results when using this tool.

5.1 *Recommendations for achieving full states of happiness and well-being*

As previously mentioned, happiness and well-being are two essential positive emotional states and are associated with balance, understanding, acceptance, and constant growth. Therefore, there is a set of activities that can be adopted as they bring well-being and connect the mind and body, making the human being able to look more at himself, thus increasing his self-esteem and self-confidence and opening up a path to an inner transformation. Some of the recommendations to be adopted are the following:

- Practice mindfulness.
- Keep a gratitude journal (be able to give thanks for everything good that happens to you in life, namely, being alive another day and being able to breathe).
- Helping other people.
- Reduce distress (try to perform activities that are pleasurable for you, for example: cooking).

- Try to get away from negative things, being able to get out of automatic mode and be more aware of what is essential to you and that makes a difference in your life, that is, be aware of your mind.
- Try to find joy in the little things in life.
- Perform exercise (practicing sport is important both physically and mentally).
- Do not isolate yourself (whenever you are feeling down, being able to share your experience as such a situation will help you to overcome your problems. Talking to other people will allow you to get a different view of your problem, or then it will make him realize that what is happening to you does not necessarily translate into a problem).
- Be optimistic, positive thinking is key.
- Maintain a healthy lifestyle (in addition to physical exercise, trying to eat well and everything variety, and a diet rich in fruits and vegetables is essential for the body to feel good).
- Organize your time (if you are aware of everything you have to do, it will be easier for you to stay well and happy and not consumed by symptoms of stress and anxiety).
- Listen to relaxing music.
- He congratulates himself on everything he has achieved, for the opportunities he has at his disposal and for the skills he has that always allow him to do more and better.
- Sleep well (in adults, sleeping around 7/8h is important to ensure general well-being).
- Look for quality of life in your workplace (more important than liking what you do is liking those who work with you, because without a good working environment it is difficult to feel good).
- Establish schedules and routines.
- Try to get to know yourself even more
- Accept your emotions (allow yourself to feel all kinds of emotions, whether positive or negative).
- Be able to forgive and move on (by forgiving you will receive untold peace and happiness).
- Take care of your image (a trip to the hairdresser/barber, for example, makes a lot of difference in the emotional spirit).

Whenever adopting these strategies, mentioned above, is not enough to improve your level of happiness and well-being, seek help from a mental health professional. Believe and internalize that you are capable of anything, but that you do not need to face your emotional challenges alone, so a psychologist or psychiatrist can help you get where you want to be.

Mental health affects our eating habits, physical activity levels, substance use behaviour, and the way we think, feel, and deal with all of life's adverse situations. Even at the political level, increasing decisive steps must be taken that promote the idea of making mental health, happiness, and well-being key priorities.

Therefore, mental health, happiness, and well-being are related and are complementary, as it is almost impossible to have one without the other, as mental balance makes us happier. We have to take care of health, not only of the body, but also of the mind.

In short, it is important to give an increasing voice to happiness and well-being these days, as this will represent the awakening of a new awareness and a virtuous cycle of behaviours that will be able to stimulate social skills (example: resilience, creativity, compassion and/or empathy), which will have an impact on the maintenance of physical, mental and emotional health.

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