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Edited by Wilis Srisayekti
(Coordinator)



FACULTY OF PSYCHOLOGY
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National indicators of subjective well-being and human development index

ABSTRACT

The Human Development Index (HDI) which looks beyond GDP to a broader definition of well-being provides a composite measure of three dimensions of human development: living a long and healthy life, being educated and having a decent standard of living. Subjective indicators of well-being are already a significant component of monitoring important domains such as health-related quality of life. Subjective well-being measures may be used as input in discussions about national policies, and they can also be helpful to business leaders, as well as to government officials at the local and regional levels (Diener, 2005). Measures of subjective well-being can be useful in assessing the need for certain policies, and in measuring the outcomes of policy interventions. Consideration of these indicators is particularly warranted due to the growing evidence that subjective well-being is a desirable goal for nations in that it produces beneficial societal outcomes (Lyubomirsky, King & Diener, in press) whereas depression and prolonged negative states tend to produce undesirable societal outcomes. Policy makers should be interested in subjective well-being not only because of its inherent value to citizens, but also because individual subjective well-being can have positive spillover benefits for the society as a whole. Indonesia needs National Indicators of Subjective wellbeing more than HDI measurement because not only measure objective condition but also subjective condition Indonesian people.

Keywords: Subjective well-being, Human Development Index, National Indicators of subjective well-being.

Introduction

As nations grow wealthy, differences in well-being are less frequently due to differences in income, and more frequently due to other factors such as social relationships, enjoyment at work, feelings of security and belonging, the lack of serious stressors, and possessing meaningful long-term values and goals. Monitoring well-being at a national level will alert the citizenry to important information beyond economic growth that should help guide policy.

The Human Development Report has published the human development index (HDI) each year since 1990 which looks beyond GDP to a broader definition of well-being. The HDI provides a composite measure of three dimensions of human development: living a long and healthy life measured by life expectancy, being educated (measured by adult literacy and gross enrolment in education) and having a decent standard of living (measured by purchasing power parity, PPP, income). Those nations should establish regular assessments of well-being to complement the economic indicators (e.g., GDP/Gross Domestic Product, savings rates, consumer confidence) and social indicators (e.g., crime rates, longevity, rates of infant mortality).

Over the past decades there have been periodic national and international surveys of subjective well-being, including assessments of life satisfaction, but these measures have not been used systematically by policy makers. Diener and Seligman (2004) argued that policy makers should be informed by national measures of well-being because economic and social indicators can omit much of what is important, and can even mislead us about much of what we value. There has been a serious disconnect over the years between the increase in economic variables such as per capita income, and the lack of growth in life satisfaction, as well as increasing rates of depression. This paper will review the importance of using measurements of the National Indicators of subjective well being to complete the HDI.

Subjective Well-Being And Human Development Index

The Human Development Report (HDR) report represented a temporary peak of the expansion of new development paradigms throughout the 20th century, shifting the focus of development away from the purely monetary focus on the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The origins of this movement can be traced back as far as 1954, when the "Report on International Definition and Measurement of Standards and Levels of Living" proposed twelve components in order to provide a comprehensive picture of standards of living and thus of poverty, wealth and development (Noorbakhsh, 1998). During the 1960s and 1970s, an increase in depletion of resources and environmental degradation brought about the so-called social indicator movement in its search for alternative measures that would provide a more comprehensive understanding of human well-being (Noorbakhsh, 1998).

After the 1980s when structural adjustment programs—despite growing poverty and inequality—brought the economy back onto the centre stage of development, UNDP reacted by integrating dimensions of human well-being which do not necessarily figure in income-related variables (Sen, 1999). By looking at some of the most fundamental aspects

of people's lives and opportunities the HDI provides a much more complete picture of a country's development than other indicators, such as GDP per capita.

Concerning the measurement of poverty, wealth and development, UNDP's main indicator, the Human Development Index (HDI), reflects the same Weltanschauung. This indicator reflects the mathematical average of three human development dimensions (UNDP, 2005) and is presented on a scale from zero to one, one being the perfect state of human development. One dimension is the decency of the living standard measured through the GDP per capita. A second dimension is health, measured in terms of life expectancy at birth. The third dimension is education, calculated through adult literacy— for two thirds—and the average school enrolment of adults above 25 years—for one third. This composition mirrors UNDP's arbitrary perspective on poverty, wealth and development (Schimmel, 2007).

Despite its successful extension of the development perspective, UNDP remains too selective in its HDI and thus provides an arbitrary image of an ideal state of development and thus of poverty and wealth, ill-being and well-being. Certainly, the HDI as well as any other kind of externally defined indicator on well-being will never be able to avoid their partiality, incompleteness and reflection of the values of its creators. But this means, as long as people are not directly asked for their opinion, UNDP's perspective on ill- and well-being might not necessarily correspond to their subjective perception of these concepts (Schimmel, 2007).

Subjective Well-Being

The concept of well-being plays a prominent role in a number of disciplines. It appears not only in various subfields of philosophy – especially in ethics and political philosophy – but also in economics, psychology, psychiatry, public health, gerontology, and else. Incidentally, the concept of well-being is often applied to groups and nations as well as to individuals, and supposed to play as a basis for the deliberations by governments regarding public policy (Angner, 2005).

One important aspect to look at the quality of life today is subjective well-being and life satisfaction (Diener & Lucas, 2000) that crosses age, gender, ethnicity, nation and religion. Some recent research calls subjective well being with happiness, in other words subjective well being is the other alternative of happiness (Argyle, 2001). Subjective well-being scientifically understood how people assess their lives both current and previous years (Diener, Oishi & Lucas; 2003). This evaluation includes a person's emotional reaction to an event, the mood and their assessment of life satisfaction, marital satisfaction and fulfillment and job satisfaction.

Subjective well-being is so important because it is considered the ultimate goal of life. People who are happy to see the world more secure, make decisions more easily, assess job applicants better, more cooperative, and live healthier, more energetic, and more satisfying (Lyubomirsky et al., 2002; Myers, 1993). When we are happy we prefer to help others because of the experience of joy like getting money, managed to run a challenging task, remembering happy times make people more likely to give donations, sacrificing his

time and so on. Thus, subjective well-being is an umbrella term for the different valuations people make regarding their lives, the events happening to them, their bodies and minds, and the circumstances in which they live.

Although well-being and ill-being are “subjective” in the sense that they occur within a person’s experience, manifestations of subjective well-being and ill-being can be observed objectively in verbal and nonverbal behavior, actions, biology, attention, and memory. The term well-being is often used instead of subjective well-being because it avoids any suggestion that there is something arbitrary or unknowable about the concepts involved.

Policy Uses of Subjective Well-Being

There are three reasons why might policy makers want to use surveys of well-being to inform policy decisions. First, the economic measures that are the mainstay of policy decision making do not capture many of the important aspects of life, and well-being is an aspect of life that is extremely important to people but is only modestly assessed by variables such as income. Second, we now know that various forms of subjective well-being such as engagement at work, happy marriages, trust in others, and feeling that one’s life has purpose and direction are variables that predict good outcomes for the individual and society. Thus, not only is subjective well-being considered to be important by most people, but it feels good and predicts beneficial outcomes such as health and longevity. It is to the advantage of societies to monitor subjective well-being and take measures where possible to enhance it. Naturally, feelings of well-being are not sufficient in themselves to produce a good society – other characteristics are needed as well – but it is one important component (Diener & Tov, 2005).

Finally, third, the measures of well-being should capture patterns that are not fully reflected in the economic and social indicators, see Figure 1&2). If the accounts of subjective well-being reflect that crime harms well-being, or that poverty decreases well-being, the measures are useful because they validate the use of the other types of measures (see Figure 3). However, if the measures of well-being capture information that goes beyond the economic and social indicators, they are much more valuable. For example, people may not make choices in the marketplace and work arena that maximize their well-being, for example because they do not have full information or freedom. Furthermore, economic measures often do not capture important information such as the quality of trust and relationships in a community. In this case the economic indicators may not fully capture well-being, and the national accounts of subjective well-being can add valuable information (Diener & Tov, 2005).

Application of Subjective Well-Being in Human Development Index

Subjective well-being measures may be used as input in discussions about national policies, and they can also be helpful to business leaders, as well as to government officials at the local and regional levels. The indicators of subjective well-being and ill-being can be used for the evaluation of policies in many domains, including health care, public health, social

services, parks and recreation, work life, transportation, families, and the environment. In democratic societies, the indicators provide an important source of information to leaders about the well-being and concerns of the citizens (Diener, 2005).

Measures of subjective well-being can be useful in assessing the need for certain policies, and in measuring the outcomes of policy interventions. Consideration of these indicators is particularly warranted due to the growing evidence that subjective well-being is a desirable goal for nations in that it produces beneficial societal outcomes (Lyubomirsky et al., in press), whereas depression and prolonged negative states tend to produce undesirable societal outcomes. Policy makers should be interested in subjective well-being not only because of its inherent value to citizens, but also because individuals' subjective well-being can have positive spillover benefits for the society as a whole. Similarly, policy makers should be keenly interested in alleviating misery as a goal in itself, because extremely unhappy people often function poorly (Diener, 2005). In order to be useful in policy debates, measures must have a number of properties besides being accurate and valid. In the first place, the measures must assess factors that are seen as a legitimate concern of the government. If the citizenry believes that the government should not intervene to change certain states, then the well-being measures would be fruitless because policy interventions would be unlikely to occur. For example, it might be a common belief among citizens that government action to alleviate misery is more justifiable than government actions to create feelings of fun among citizens, and in this case measures of unhappiness would be more likely to influence policy debates. If the measures might be used to create policies to increase the well-being of certain target groups, for example the elderly or disadvantaged groups, a prerequisite is that the citizenry would accept policies aimed at helping these groups.

A related requirement is that the measures should be collected in a way to address states that the government policies can influence. If policy makers have no resources or ability to intervene to increase happiness in certain areas, the well-being measures are unlikely to have much impact. In other words, the most useful measures of well-being are those that are relevant to potential policy discussions.

Conclusion

Many people feel that they would be happier if they had more income and additional material goods, and there is some mixed evidence to support this claim. Within-nation correlations generally do show small positive associations (0.15) between income and well-being, and the average reported well-being is higher in wealthy societies than in poor nations.

Furthermore, an individual might increase his or her wellbeing by gaining income relative to other people. In other words, the intuition that one will be happier with more rather than less income might be correct, but this effect occurs only at the individual level and is negated to the extent that everyone's incomes and desires increase. In addition, there have been slight trends upward in well-being in some nations (e.g., Denmark) over the past decades, but not in others (e.g., Japan).

But the effects of wealth are not large, and they are dwarfed by other influences, such as those of personality and social relationships. What might explain the pattern of findings on income and wellbeing? First, although people's material desires seem to catch up to

their incomes and cancel the benefits of higher incomes to some degree, it appears that wealthier individuals have a smaller gap between income and desires than do poor people (Stutzer, in press; van Praag & Frijters, 1999). Rising aspirations seem to nullify only about 70% of increased income (Frey & Stutzer, 2002b). Second, happy people tend to earn higher incomes than unhappy people. Finally, income might correlate with well-being insofar as basic needs are fulfilled, and this explanation is consonant with the evidence showing much stronger effects of income in poorer than in wealthier income groups.

Despite evidence linking income and well-being, economic growth seems to have topped out in its capacity to produce more well-being in developed nations. Although nations will certainly continue to pursue economic growth, in part because of the other benefits besides those that might accrue to well-being (Diener & Diener, 1995), efforts and policies to raise income in wealthy nations are unlikely to increase well-being and might even undermine factors (such as rewarding social relationships or other cherished values) that have higher leverage for producing enhanced well-being. When the sciences of economics and of well-being come face to face, they sometimes conflict. If the well-being findings simply mirrored those for income and money—with richer people invariably being much happier than poorer people—one would hardly need to measure well-being, or make policy to enhance it directly. But income, a good surrogate historically when basic needs were unmet, is now a weak surrogate for well-being in wealthy nations. What the divergence of the economics and well-being measures demonstrates is that wellbeing indicators add important information that is missed by economic indicators. Economic development will remain an important priority, but policies fostering economic development must be supplemented by policies that will have a stronger impact on well-being.

National economic measures have stronger conceptual underpinnings and are more methodologically sophisticated, since they are based on over 50 years of development and extensive government support. Although the well-being indicators have yet to be developed in the same way, the current measures do offer important insights that cannot be provided by the economic measures. Thoughtful use of the existing measures in combination with the development of improved measures will be beneficial to both private and public decision making (Diener, 2005).

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