

# Measuring Well-Being & Progress of Societies: *Conceptualizing & Assessing Social Relations*

David Chan  
Professor of Psychology  
Director, Behavioural Sciences Institute  
Singapore Management University

*Asia Pacific Conference on  
Measuring Well-Being and Fostering the Progress of Societies  
5-6 December 2011*

**BSI@SMU. Do not reproduce, circulate or cite without permission.**

# Overview

- Subjective Well-Being (SWB)
- Conceptualizing & Assessing  
Social Relations & Subjective Well-Being

# Concept of Subjective Well-Being

# Subjective Well-Being

- SWB = Individuals' evaluations and experiences (think and feel) of their lives.
- SWB as the core of well-being.
- SWB is multidimensional – major components:
  - *Life Satisfaction (Cognitive)*
    - *General Life Satisfaction*
    - *Domain-Specific Satisfaction e.g. family, work*
  - *Life Happiness (Emotion)*
    - *Positive Emotions*
    - *Negative Emotions*

# National Accounts of Well-Being

1. “Objective” social-economic indicators (GDP, HDI) are relevant but they do not capture many things that are important in life.
2. Objective indicators alone are not adequate as aggregate measures of citizens’ well-being. They are inadequate because ...

*partially valid – insufficient because they capture aspects related to but not the core of well-being.*

*partially invalid – may be misleading because they reflect aspects of a nation that are distinct from well-being.*

# National Accounts of Well-Being

## 3. “Objective” vs. “Subjective”

Validity of measurement is not a property that belongs to the indicator.  
It's about “use”:

- *measuring what we intend to measure.*

- *accuracy of inferences we draw from the scores on the indicator.*

## 4. Scientific measurement of SWB.

# Why Care about SWB?

1. Major part of an individual's well-being is "subjective" - how the individual thinks and feels about quality of life.
2. Hence, SWB considers full range of experienced quality of life. Does not pre-determine/assume what is important and what is not.
3. SWB is correlated with (predictive of) the individual's thoughts, emotions and behaviors.
4. SWB is clearly important in diverse domains.
5. SWB clearly important at all levels of analysis.

# Some Established Correlates of SWB

1. Meeting basic needs
2. Health
3. Longevity
4. Good progress towards long-term goals
5. *Stable Society*
6. *Trust in others*
7. *Volunteering*
8. *Kindness*
9. *Positive social relationships*



# Conceptualizing & Assessing Social Relations & SWB

# Conceptualizing Social Relations

- Levels of Analysis (e.g., ind, dyad, gp, org, nation)
- Actual vs. Perceived Social Relations
- Global vs. Specific Content
- Dimensionality
- Structures (e.g., social networks)
- Processes (e.g., mechanisms of social support)
- Changes over Time
- Culture and Social Relations

# Assessing Social Relations

- Reliability & Validity
- Psychometric Factor Models  
(e.g. Reflective vs. Formative Models)
- Inter-Construct relationships
  - Bivariate relationship
  - Relative importance
  - Incremental validity
  - Mediation
  - Moderator/Interaction
- Measurement Invariance & Multiple-Group Analyses
- Changes over Time & Longitudinal Modeling

# Emerging Issues & Challenges in Social Relations & SWB

- Changing Demographics
  - Ageing
  - Generational Differences
  - Cultural Diversity
  - Inter-Group Relations & Segmented Approach
- Internet
  - Connectivity & Immediacy
  - Massive & Rapidly Changing Information
  - Collective Movements
  - Differences in Dynamics (Online vs. Face-to-Face)
  - Virtual teams
  - Friends, Dating, Nature of “Close” Social Relations
  - Social Compact between People & Government

# SWB, Social Relations & Public Policy

- SWB measures needed to complement objective socio-economic indicators of well-being & progress.
- Better conceptualization and assessment of SWB/Social Relations.
- Global measures of SWB/Social Relations useful but domain-specific measures and segmented approach most informative for policy debates, formulation and implementation.
- Importance of context-sensitive research to understand culture universalism vs. culture specificity in SWB/Social Relations.
- Need for segmented approach to public policies.

# Conclusion

- SWB/Social Relations are important as ends in itself and means to other positive ends.
- Evidence-based interventions to increase SWB/Social Relations can be effective at individual, dyad, group, organizational and national levels.

*Thank You*