

Positive psychology

What makes people happy?

Rate the above on a scale of 0-10 (0= does not bring happiness at all; 10 = brings a great deal of happiness)

- a) Being on holiday
- b) Buying luxury items
- c) Individual personal achievement
- d) Work fulfilment
- e) A good level of income
- f) Thanking others
- g) Planning a holiday
- h) Pleasurable free time activities
- i) Recognising those things you are grateful for
- j) Belief in a cause that you are engaged in
- k) Noticing what is beautiful / uplifting in the natural environment
- l) Saving for something and then purchasing it

What is positive psychology?

Developed by Martin Seligman (1980s -)

Predicated on the idea that we should focus not on what makes us unhappy, but what makes us happy.

He suggests that the alleviation of misery does not bring happiness, but rather only nothingness. It can only take you 'up to 0'.

In summary:

- We are led to believe that to be happy we need to pursue happiness, and that this means pleasure: holidays, spending money
- These things often prove unsatisfying, either because the happiness they bring is short lived, or because the reality is a letdown. Sometimes, the greatest pleasure is in the build up: anticipating something pleasurable can make us feel happy. Actually doing it does not always.

Fun activities bring happiness for their duration

Philanthropic activities have effects that last.

The deepest and longest lasting such activity is the gratitude letter

Pleasure is the 'icing on the cake' - but only if engagement and/or meaning are already present

Pillars of happiness, according to Seligman:

Engagement with something – a cause, something you believe in

Gratitude – feeling and expressing it

'Flow' – immersion in activity that is absorbing

Connectedness – feeling part of a larger group

Giving and generosity

Exercises to increase happiness

1. Breathing and accessing positive emotions

2. The gratitude diary

Also:

- express gratitude to others – benefits both the giver and the receiver.
- write gratitude letters

3. Praise what you value in others