

Measuring Wellbeing and Mapping the Gaps

Prepared for the HSRC Flagship Study on Poverty and Inequality
A public conversation in partnership with the University of the Western Cape

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What Is Wellbeing And How Can It Be Measured?



Study Rationale and Aims

A **systematic review** on the ways in which 'wellbeing' has been **measured** in South Africa during the **democratic** period

Questions

- When did the research take place?
- What was the research foci of the article?
- How was wellbeing defined?
- What was the profile of the research sample?
- How has wellbeing been measured?



Systematic Review Search Terms

Wellbeing terms (AND)

Happiness
 Quality of life
 Life satisfaction
 Personal wellbeing index
 Capability/ies
 Family wellbeing
 Community wellbeing
 Collective wellbeing
 Cognitive wellbeing*
 National wellbeing
 Personal wellbeing
 Social wellbeing*
 Psychological wellbeing
 Affective wellbeing
 Relational Goods

Poverty terms (OR)

Deprivation
 Low Income
 Community context
 Impoverished
 Socioeconomic
 Disadvantaged

Inequality terms (OR)

Social comparison
 Reference group
 Social divide
 Injustice
 inequity



Criteria for Systematic Literature Review

- The literature was limited to **peer-reviewed** empirical studies (quantitative and qualitative).
- Article had to be **published between** January 1994 and December 2016.
- All included articles were in **English**
- One of the **fifteen wellbeing keywords** had to be included in the articles' **titles** and/or **abstracts** for it to be selected for review.
- The articles had to have **South Africa** as one of the primary sites of study.



Abstract and content screen results

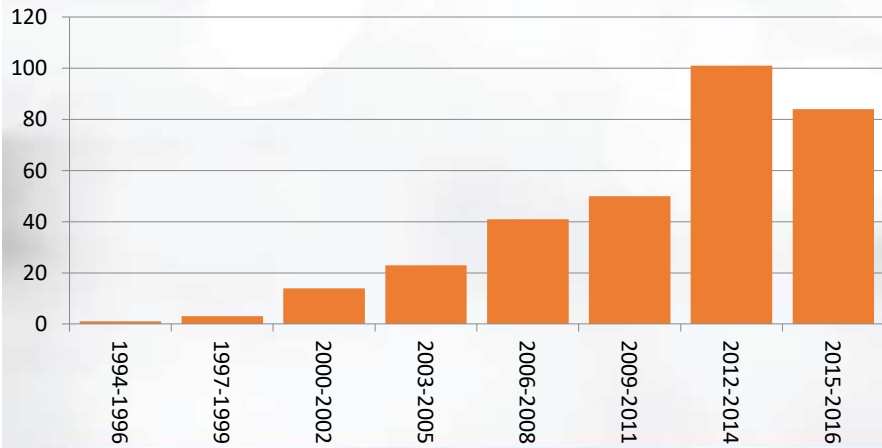
| Database | Years searched | Results of search | Results after abstract screen | Results after content screen |
|------------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| SA ePublications | 1994-2016 | 5126 | 166 | 307 articles |
| Sabinet | | 4502 | 183 | |
| Ebscohost Web | | 289 | 91 | |
| PubMed | | 218 | 33 | |
| ProQuest | | 4877 | 112 | |
| Combined | | 15012 | 585 | |



Word Cloud for Database's Accredited Peer-Reviewed Journals



Date of Publication for the Articles in Our Database



Research Foci amongst the Articles in Our Database



How Are South African Scholars Defining Wellbeing?

The term 'wellbeing' was used in a **number of ways** by different researchers.

Wellbeing is most **often portrayed** as a psychological concept and most seem to treat wellbeing as a **psychological or mental state**

Diverging views –for example **Health-Related Quality of Life** versus **Subjective Wellbeing**

So-called 'real' definitions are **dysfunctional** –Chaim Perelman



What is the Demographic Profile of the Samples Studied?

Most studies used **small random samples** of individuals.

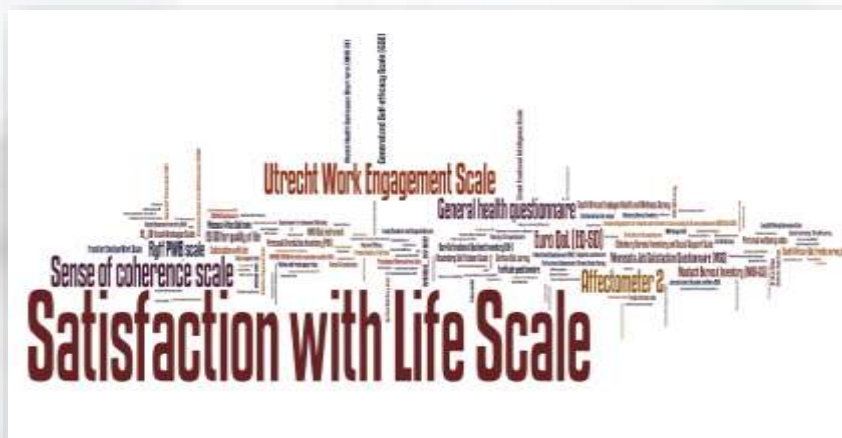
Many focused explicitly on a **specific subset of the population** – HIV/AIDS patients, school teachers, police officers etc.

Most of the studies are focused on adults although there is a **significant degree** of work on **children** (N=24) and **adolescents** (N=13).

A **significant portion** (N=56) used samples of university students.



Word Cloud of the Quantitative Research Tools Used in Our Database



Quantitative Dominance in How Wellbeing is Measured

- **Advantages** of quantitative research tools: Standardisation, reliability, and representativeness.
- **One-dimensional** measures, **multidimensional** single scale measures, or **multiple** separate measures are predominant.
- Quantitative tools rely on a **fixed 'reality of wellbeing'** -validations of what has already been **assumed** to be 'true'.
- A minority (N=40) of the articles took on a **qualitative approach**.



The Global North and the Wellbeing Measures Used

- The **dominant research instruments** used were originally developed by **Global North** scholars.
- Less than half of the studies in our dataset assessed the **reliability** and **validity** of the scales that they were using.
Problem:
 - Assumed **individualistic cultural orientation** and value systems
 - Neglected **contextual** influences
 - Disregard African **cultural traditions** and **meaning-making** systems



New and Underused Tools for Measuring Wellbeing

- Recent advances in **leveraging social media** to measure wellbeing in **real time**.
 - Methods for **capturing psychological states** through language analysis – Facebook and Twitter.
- Look at what are the wellbeing **'goals'** of South Africans
 - Work of the Wellbeing in Developing Countries (WeD) Research Programme at the University of Bath



Conclusion: Policy Recommendations



Questions and Answers

Human and Social Development

<http://www.hsrc.ac.za/en/departments/human-and-social-development>

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