

# 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	





## 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





## 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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