

Positive psychology helps people to flourish

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People who 'flourish' are resilient and have the mental capacity needed to survive in our competitive society. They are not only happier, but they are also more productive, are less often absent from work and have a lower risk of developing mental disorders. Recently, a population study from the Trimbos Institute showed that around two-thirds of Dutch adults are currently not flourishing. Professor Bohlmeijer, professor of mental health: "The results of a nationwide experimental study conducted by the University of Twente now shows that we can achieve a lasting increase in the number of people who are flourishing by giving them a self-help course based on positive psychology." This is one of the first intervention studies worldwide in the field of 'flourishing'.

The study, which was conducted by the University of Twente, examined 275 [participants](#), none of them were flourishing. Over a period of nine weeks, 137 participants worked through a self-help book entitled [This is your life, experience the effects of positive psychology](#) (of which Professor Bohlmeijer is co-author). The participants were also able to contact a trainee psychologist by e-mail. By the end of the course, 30% of them were flourishing and 9 months after the course that figure had risen to 34%. Of the 138 people in the control group, who did not participate in the course, only 12% were flourishing at the end of the study. There was a large and significant difference of overall well-being between the two groups, with those who had received the course being much better off. The participants also had significantly fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety at the end of the study period compared with the control group. The effects of the positive psychology course lasted until at least 9 months after the end of the course.

Positive relationships

PhD student Marijke Schotanus-Dijkstra, supervisor of the study: "The course addressed many themes, such as positive emotions, using strengths and optimism. However, one interesting finding was that the theme of positive relationships seems to have contributed most to the effectiveness of the course." An important caveat of this study is that the participants were mainly higher educated. The selection of the participants and the used methods have likely contributed to this caveat. The participants were also motivated to develop themselves as individuals. Bohlmeijer: "The next step is to conduct a similar study among people with lower levels of education."

The research was based on the work of a leading researcher in [positive psychology](#) – the American sociologist Corey Keyes. He developed a classification model for well-being analogous with the classification of psychological symptoms. 'Flourishing' occurs when people experience a high level of emotional, psychological and social well-being. This means that they often experience positive emotions, they function well as individuals, and they feel connected with and have confidence in society. Keyes' research shows that flourishing is beneficial for individuals but also for society as a whole.

The results of the study will be presented at the national [Conference on Positive Psychology](#) which will take place on 15th April.

Provided by University of Twente

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