

Can (and should) happiness be a policy goal?

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How does an individual's happiness level reflect societal conditions? A new article out today in the first issue of *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences (PIBBS)* finds that similar to how GDP measures the effectiveness of economic policies, happiness can and should be used to evaluate the effectiveness of social policies.

Authors Shigehiro Oishi and Ed Diener examined research evaluating the effectiveness of policy related to [unemployment rate](#), tax rate, child care, and environmental issues to determine if it's possible to study how this policy affects individuals' [psychological well-being](#). They found that the research does indeed illustrate the degree of suffering among people in different types of difficult circumstances. For example, recent research has found that people with severe disabilities are roughly two times less satisfied with their lives than those who are merely unemployed. The researchers concluded that such findings can and should help prioritize policy-related welfare programs and regulations.

The researchers wrote, "Self-reported well-being can be used to evaluate whether a specific policy had an impact on population at large. For instance, did a change in an education policy (e.g., No Child Left Behind Act of 2001) increase stress among parents? Self-reported well-being data will provide an answer to such a question."

The researchers wrote that periodically recording (e.g., monthly, quarterly) citizens' well-being will allow policymakers and researchers to test whether a certain policy had an intended effect and whether a society is making progress toward its ideal.

"We believe that an ideal society is a society where citizens feel happy, feel satisfied, and find their lives to be meaningful."

Provided by SAGE Publications

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