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Research Report

SOEP-IS 2014 - Integration of the Flourishing Scale: Positive personal development following major life events

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Judith Mangelsdorf and Ralf Schwarzer

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SOEP-IS 2014 – Integration of the flourishing scale – Positive personal development following major life events

Module Title in SOEP Documentation: Flourishing Scale

Judith Mangelsdorf and Ralf Schwarzer

Integration of the Flourishing Scale into the SOEP-Innovative Sample

Positive personal development following major life events

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Research rationale. What makes life worth living? An increasing body of research aims to investigate positive development across the life span. While earlier life span studies focused primarily on research questions, addressing health and longevity (e.g., Börsch-Supan et al., 2005), the topic of successful and good ageing becomes more and more important in an ageing population.

At the same time, first attempts are made to compare countries and districts not exclusively by data such as gross domestic product (GDP) or life expectancy, but by well-being measures, such as gross domestic happiness (GDH; DiTella & MacCulloch, 2005). One reason for this trend is the Easterlin paradox, which describes the missing link between income and happiness in developed countries (Easterlin, 1974). While many life circumstances, including income, health, and education, improved in the last decades, happiness showed no simultaneous long-term increase (Easterlin, 1974). At the same time, the prevalence rates of major depression has increased drastically despite the ongoing improvement of life circumstances in western countries. These findings highlight the importance of including well-being measures into panel studies that aim to investigate societies' critical developments.

Our special research interest lies in investigating the impact of major life events not only on personal happiness, but peoples' ability to thrive as a result of trauma and emotional peak experiences. Research on post-traumatic growth (PTG; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996) has shown that a number of people experiences beneficial outcomes and thrive[1] after threatening experiences, such as suffering from a severe disease, unemployment, or bereavement. However, most research on PTG is cross-sectional and relies on measures of perceived growth. These insufficient, often criticized methodological approaches, are chosen because of the unpredictability of most major life events. The SOEP-IS data could provide the opportunity to gather pre- and post-test data on the negative and positive impact of major changes in life on psychological well-being.

Therefore, we suggest to integrate the Flourishing Scale (Diener et al., 2010) as an additional SOEP-IS measure. The eight-item Flourishing scale was created to measure social-psychological prosperity (Diener et al., 2010). It aims to capture major aspects of positive

[1] The terminology thriving or flourishing refers to an improvement of different domains of psychological well-being, including meaning in life, engagement, social relationships, positive emotions, accomplishments, autonomy competence, self-acceptance (Ryff, 1989; Seligman, 2012)

personal development in a brief questionnaire, allowing researchers to investigate trends in well-being exceeding the scope of constructs, such as happiness or life-satisfaction.

Innovation. The SOEP covers two constructs related to psychological and subjective well-being, namely life satisfaction and positive affect. While life satisfaction is an important aspect of well-being, measures often show insufficient reliability outcomes (Krueger & Schkade, 2009). The personal judgment of one's life in general can be influenced by fluctuating factors such as mood (Schwarz et al., 1987) and situational circumstances. Meanwhile, the Flourishing Scale (FS) showed a Cronbach`s alpha of .87 and temporal stability of .71 (Diener et. al., 2010).

Life-satisfaction and positive affect have been used as a proxy for happiness in research based on SOEP data (Schimmak, 2008; Headeya, Muffels, and Wagner). However, this approach has its limitations: while happiness can be understood as being satisfied with one's life, changes in life-satisfaction cannot automatically be interpreted as changes in psychological well-being or personal development. Furthermore, research on psychological well-being has highlighted the fact, that happiness is more than positive affect or life-satisfaction (Ryff, 1989).

Moreover, an increasing body of research supports the idea of using single-item instead of multiple-item measures to capture a variety of domains simultaneously (Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2007). The Flourishing Scale covers 8 different dimensions of psychological and subjective well-being with a single item each. It measures areas such as purpose in life, supportive relationships, engagement, feeling of competence and mastery, self-esteem, & optimism (Silva & Caetano, 2011).

Including the Flourishing scale into the SOEP-IS would enable researchers to measure the impact of major life events and other variables of the SOEP not only on satisfaction but improvement or impairment of critical psychological domains associated with psychological and physiological health, well-being and happiness.

Sample Size & Type of sample. Our Study aims to investigate major life events with high emotional valence and strong impact on peoples' lives. Since these events are rare and need to happen between two measurement time points to provide pre- and post-test data, the largest sample size available is needed. Therefore, we suggest to include the Flourishing Scale for all participating subjects (full sample).

Mode of data collection. The Flourishing Scale is an 8-item questionnaire, which can be filled in as a paper and pencil or computer based measure or can be asked during an interview. There are no additional measurements needed.

Time. The Flourishing Scale is a brief measure capturing each of its dimensions with only one item. The expected time to answer the questions is 1 minute or less.

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FLOURISHING Skala

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Sie finden unten 8 Aussagen, denen Sie in unterschiedlichem Maß zustimmen können. Bitte geben Sie für jede Aussage Ihre Zustimmung auf der Skala von 1 bis 7 an, indem Sie jeweils einen Wert zwischen 1 und 7 eintragen.

7 – stimme vollständig zu
6 – stimme zu
5 – stimme eher zu
4 – weder - noch
3 – stimme eher nicht zu
2 – stimme nicht zu
1 – stimme überhaupt nicht zu

____ Ich führe ein sinnerfülltes und bedeutsames Leben.

____ Meine sozialen Beziehungen sind unterstützend und bereichernd.

____ Ich bin engagiert und interessiert bei meinem täglichen Tun.

____ Ich trage aktiv zum Glück und Wohlbefinden anderer bei.

____ Bei Tätigkeiten, die mir wichtig sind, bin ich kompetent und handlungsfähig.

____ Ich bin ein guter Mensch und führe ein gutes Leben.

____ Ich sehe optimistisch in meine Zukunft.

____ Andere Menschen respektieren mich.

Auswertung:
Addieren Sie die Zahlenwerte (von 1-7) für alle 8 Antworten. Das Ergebnis kann zwischen 8 (niedrigstmögliches Ergebnis) bis 56 (höchstmögliches Ergebnis) variieren. Ein hoher Wert bedeutet, dass die Person über viele psychologische Ressourcen und Stärken verfügt.