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ACTIVITY 1.2
Happiness Index

Concept

Beginning in 2011, the United Nations has recognized happiness as a component of global well-being, publishing the results in the first Happiness Report in 2012. Students will investigate the six variables used to measure happiness, determine the strengths and limitations of the World Happiness Index, and consider variables for well-being in their own lives.

Units it could embed into

Social psychology, psychology of emotions, research methods

Learning Targets

1. Examine the six variables used by the United Nations to measure a country's happiness.
2. Analyze the validity and reliability used to measure happiness.
3. Look at international differences in happiness and determine the happiness strengths and limitations in your country.

Materials

Handout 1.2, Internet access for research

Time

20-30 minutes; however, this activity could prompt excellent conversation and may extend beyond that time.

Instructions

- Students may work on this activity independently, but a group effort would offer better conversation and analysis.
- Provide students access to the Handout 1.2. Invite students to consider how to measure the well-being of a nation. It may be beneficial to have a conversation about other factors that are used to rank how well a country is doing in comparison to others- gross national product (GNP), happy planet index (HPI), etc. For more information about these measures, review Andester's article on "GDP Alternatives: 7 Ways to Measure a Country's Wealth" on Ethical.net (2019).
- Students will review the "Statistical Appendix for Chapter 2 of the World Happiness Report 2020" (Helliwell et al., 2020). Then they will identify and describe the tools used to measure the six variables used to determine a country's ranking in the Happiness Index.
- Students will analyze the top 20 happiest counties for the year 2020.
- In step 4 on the handout, students will look at the variables for the index and examine the role these variables play in their own lives. After students answer the questions on the handout, encourage a group or class discussion.

Extension activities

- In groups or individually, students research a country on the 20 happiest countries list and report on the norms of the society that lead to a higher happiness score.
- In groups or individually, students analyze Hofstede's cultural dimensions (2011). Examine the intersection of the cultural dimensions and the variables used for the happiness index. Students can write an essay on the similarities, differences, strengths, and limitations for the descriptors.

References

Andester, N. (2019, June 10). GDP Alternatives: 7 Ways to Measure a Country's Wealth. *Ethical.net.* https://ethical.net/politics/gdp-alternatives-7-ways-to-measure-countries-wealth/

Helliwell, J.F., Huang, H., Wang, S. & Norton, M.(2020) *Statistical Appendix for Chapter 2 of the World Happiness Report 2020.* https://happiness-report.s3.amazonaws.com/2020/WHR20_Ch2_Statistical_Appendix.pdf

Hofstede, G. (2011). *Dimensionalizing Cultures: The Hofstede Model in Context. Online Readings in Psychology and Culture, Unit 2.* http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/orpc/vol2/iss1/8

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HANDOUT 1.2

The Happiness Index

"The pursuit of happiness" - U.S. Constitution

Learning Targets

1. Examine the six variables used by the United Nations to measure a country's happiness.
2. Analyze the validity and reliability used to measure happiness.
3. Look at international differences in happiness and determine the happiness strengths and limitations in your country.

Step 1: You might remember from civics classes that countries may use their GNP (gross national product) to determine their total financial value and to measure how well a nation is doing. The United Nations wanted to consider another metric- the well-being of a nation. How would you measure a country's happiness? Think about what variables you might measure and the methods you would use to gather your data. Record some of your ideas below.

Since 2011, the United Nations has invited countries to participate in gathering data in an effort to measure national happiness. The World Happiness Index measures well-being through six variables: money (spending power), health and life expectancy, social support (having someone to count on), freedom to make life choices, freedom from corruption, and generosity. As students of psychology, let's analyze these variables, determine if they are good qualifiers for happiness, and consider variables for happiness in your own life.

Step 2: Look over the "Statistical Appendix for Chapter 2 of the World Happiness Report 2020." Section 1 of the appendix explains how the six variables of well-being are measured. Identify and describe the tools used to measure the six variables used to determine a country's ranking in the Happiness Index.

Money & spending power

Health & life expectancy

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Social support

Freedom to make life decisions

Freedom from corruption

Generosity

Step 3: Using the World Happiness website, review the top 20 happiest counties for the year 2020 and answer the following questions.

What is the ranking of the country that you live in?

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What are some similarities between countries in the top 10?

What assumptions might you make about the countries on this list? What might be said about the norms in their societies and/or culture?

Step 4: Go back to step 2 and look over the variables used for ranking happiness.

Which variables are most important to you? Explain why you selected these variables.

Which variable is least evident in your life? Does this reflect your social group, school, or the culture of your country?

Would you like to increase the presence of one of these variables in your life? What strategies could you take to do so?