

Call for Proposals for Special International Issue of British Journal of Guidance and Counselling

Happiness and Well-Being

Happiness and Wellbeing have become burgeoning fields of research across many fields and disciplines. Focusing on individuals there have been developments in the idea of “mindfulness” in CBT, in work and in educational settings. The idea of life satisfaction and happiness has been developed as a field of cross-national research, with a large centre for happiness studies collecting cross national indicators in the Netherlands set up by Ruut Veenhoven and several journals devoted to this field. Happiness and wellbeing indicators have been included in many cross-national surveys and in official statistical resources such as the OECD and EUROSTAT. International forums such as ISQOLS (International Society for Quality of Life Studies) has brought economists, psychologists, sociologists and public policy experts together in a common dialogue.

But what is wellbeing? Research has developed both the “hedonic” and “eudaimonic” aspects of this topic which dates back to ancient Greek philosophy. In the field of psychology there have been efforts to create more sensitive and comprehensive indicators for well-being through developing an idea of “human flourishing” in an endeavour to encompass the person’s potential in a more holistically. This also touches upon Amartya Sen’s and Martha Nussbaum’s concepts of capabilities – the possibility of achieving human fulfilment in a host of different ways.

However, wellbeing is also encouraged by social settings. Research has established that much of individual wellbeing is explained by social contexts in the workplace and in the communities and societies that surround us. Societies that are well governed and where there are high levels of social security encourage increased levels of public and individual trust which act to cement social cohesion. So there is a sense of collective wellbeing - but this also increases the possibility for individual wellbeing and empowerment.

There are many things people can do to improve their wellbeing at an individual level and the New Economics Foundation has suggested five particular ways to wellbeing: connecting with others, taking notice of one’s

environment, continuing learning, being active and doing things for others. These recommendations have been taken up by the NHS and other organisations including those concerned with mental health.

Not addressing wellbeing is costly in human and economic terms. In the UK around 15% of the population suffers from depression or anxiety, which has been estimated by economist Lord Layard (who was a key actor in starting this whole debate) to cost £17bn in lost productivity or 1.5% of gross domestic product. Most of this is not diagnosed or treated, although the cost of prescription medicines to treat these and related mental health problems is proliferating. And the UK is not even the unhappiest society – there are probably greater problems in many other countries with less stable and well-functioning social systems. We know for example that depressive indicators are more prevalent in societies in rapid transition such as some of those in Eastern Europe. Happier societies such as the Scandinavian countries or Australia may have different experiences.

Many of the issues raised apply also to Guidance and Counselling. Those with mental health problems are likely to present themselves for counselling and professionals in this field are more likely to be able to identify incipient problems that are not presented. There may be people who should seek Guidance and Counselling who turn to less benign solutions such as drugs and alcohol for dealing with their problems. These may take different forms around the world and there could also be a cultural component – in particular settings different solutions to mental health problems seem more or less acceptable or available to people.

The Special International Issue of this Journal aims to tap into these different approaches to both individual-level wellbeing and societal-level wellbeing by understanding the interactions between them. It would also aim to consider how policies, organisational approaches and training can be set in place to apply the results of this large and growing research field to improve human wellbeing across the world. One of the approaches that is particularly welcome to include in this special issue is Hubert Hermans' Dialogical Self Theory (DST) which considers the self as a 'society of mind'.

Articles should be between 3000 and 6000 words and the deadline for submissions is 1st August 2018.

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