Assessing Subjective Well-Being
The Seity Well-Being Check-In

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Précis

Well-being is an important consideration in many applied settings. Numerous options exist for assessing well-being, including measures that determine satisfaction with life and measures of affect. However, measures of an individual's psychological well-being (PWB) are particularly useful. Most PWB measures are poorly suited to daily administration and so cannot be used to identify short-term changes in well-being. An exception is Seity's Well-Being Check-In, which is completed online or using an app that presents four simple questions. Users answer each question by selecting one of five smiley-face emojis corresponding their level of well-being. Each response can be considered individually, and regular completion by users enables practitioners to look for changes in any of the four well-being indicators across time. The four responses can also be combined into a single, overall measure of well-being. This overall measure correlates well with an established PWB measure in both student and adult samples.

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"Just living isn't enough," said the butterfly, "One must have sunshine, freedom and a little flower."
– Hans Christian Anderson, The Butterfly

Well-being is an important consideration when creating policies and evaluating outcomes (LaPlaca et al., 2013), but there is no widely accepted definition of the construct. Objective well-being, which is often used to assess population groups, includes criteria such as health, job opportunities, and access to valued resources. Subjective well-being (SWB) is an area of more interest to psychologists, and reflects how people assesses their own welfare. Just as there is no agreed-upon definition of SWB (Dodge et al., 2012), there is no universally accepted method for measuring it (Huppert, 2017).

Research on SWB rarely focuses on the needs of applied professionals, such as physicians, counselors, and educators. These settings benefit from a rapid, user-friendly measure of well-being that can set the stage for more effective communication about personal needs. This measure should be internally consistent and yield estimates of SWB that correlate positively with those obtained from longer, more complex SWB assessment tools. The ideal measure would be unidimensional (yield a single score) to allow for easy scoring and reporting. It should also be a "state" measure that is appropriate for frequent – even daily – use.

This report reviews a number of commonly used SWB measures, including tools that assess life satisfaction, affect, and psychological well-being. Of particular interest is a novel tool, the *Seity Well-Being Check-In*, which promises to fill the gaps left by other SWB measures.

Life Satisfaction Measures

Life satisfaction surveys ask people to rate their lives holistically, most often without a stated time frame. Users are asked to average or otherwise summate perceptions about life in responding to each item. Life satisfaction measures such as the *Satisfaction With Life Scale* (Diener et al., 1985) have been used to examine population differences and assess the effects of interventions designed to improve lives. However, these surveys are of minimal help to professionals who need a quick and easy read on how a person is doing *today.* Even though the scales are relatively short, life satisfaction measures require cognitive evaluations that take time and concentration. They may also be vulnerable to biases, such a wanting to impress the evaluator. Last – and most important for many applications – they are not designed to be used on a frequent basis and so are inappropriate for detecting sudden changes in well-being.

One exception may be the Cantril Self Anchoring Scale, also known as Cantril's ladder (Cantril, 1965). Users are encouraged to see their lives through the lens of a ladder, and to assign the top and bottom rungs of the ladder to the best and worst possible lives they can imagine, respectively. Users then indicate their life satisfaction by identifying the rung on which they presently live. The visual nature of this task makes it easy to complete and the approach could

be adopted to assess daily changes in well-being, although this has not yet been tested.

Affect Measures

Questionnaires that measure affect allow people to rate their emotional states directly, typically using a fixed set of positive and negative emotions and a time frame between 1 and 4 weeks. Examples include the *Positive and Negative Affect Schedule* (Watson et al., 1988) and the *Scale of Positive and Negative Experience* (Diener et al., 2010). The response window for affect surveys could be shortened, but they are not designed to capture momentary changes in well-being; they are better suited to providing insight into the user's recent emotional state.

Psychological Well-Being (PWB) Measures

Another trend in well-being assessment takes a positive approach by asking people to match themselves to standards that represent optimal functioning. PWB measures are strength-based, asking people how strongly or how often they have positive perceptions of themselves. The *Flourishing Scale* (Diener et al., 2010) and the *Brief Inventory of Thriving* (Su et al., 2014) present indicators of PWB to which people respond using an agreement scale. These indicators capture the user's self-perceived success in areas such as relationships, self-esteem, purpose, and optimism. These surveys are short and easy to complete but have high test-retest reliability, suggesting they measure enduring traits and are less suitable for picking up short-term changes in well-being.

The *PERMA-Profiler* (Butler & Kern, 2016), another PWB measure, emanated from the positive psychology movement. Unlike the Flourishing Scale and the Brief Inventory of Thriving, which are unidimensional, the PERMA-Profiler yields five scores – one for each of the five pillars of well-being identified by Seligman (2018): positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning in life, and accomplishments. Recent research (Bartholomaeus, 2020) suggests the five pillars actually comprise a single, unified factor, so the five scores can be combined into a single value. Even so, the PERMA-Profiler is relatively lengthy, utilizes a complex response scale, and generates results that are difficult to summarize for quick feedback in an applied setting.

Many items in the PERMA-Profiler ask users about "the past week," rendering the tool impractical for regular use as a check on day-to-day well-being. However, an adaptation suitable for daily use has been recently developed (Heshmati et al., 2020; Heshmati et al., 2021). It presents 15 items reworded from the PERMA-Profiler, to which responses are made using a 100-point sliding scale. Heshmati's adaption measures momentary states of well-being, but the number of questions it asks and the extended response scale it uses may increase the cognitive load placed on users, increasing the time required to complete it.

The Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (*SWEMWBS*; Tennant et al., 2007), another PWB scale, is generally used to evaluate mental-health initiatives. A set of questions ask users how often they experience positive perceptions of themselves, including both feeling good ("I've been feeling cheerful") and functioning well ("I've been interested in new things").

Responses are sensitive to change (Shah et al., 2021), making the SWEMWBS suitable for short-term assessment of well-being. Scoring responses to the SWEMWBS can be complicated, but an option exists to simply add the responses to yield a measure suitable for use in applied settings.

Seity's Well-Being Check-In

The *Seity Well-Being Check-In* is a novel PWB measure that promises to fill the gap left by existing approaches. Seity's tool is ideal for use in medical, educational, and counseling settings. It is short, easy to complete, and suitable for frequent – even daily – use.

The Seity Well-Being Check-In asks users to access an app or website to answer four questions:

1. How's your energy today?
2. How's your direction today?
3. How's your belonging today?
4. How's your joy today?

Responses to each question are made by selecting one of five smiley-face emojis. The four responses can be examined separately or combined into a single score.

The Seity PWB measure is ideal for users because it is short and requires minimal cognitive effort. For the practitioner, the measure provides immediate feedback on who is doing exceptionally well on a given day, and who is troubled, listless, or in crisis. Furthermore, since the measure is designed for daily completion, practitioners can look for changes across time that might reveal important information about the person completing the check-ins.

Preliminary scientific research has established the validity of the Seity Well-Being Check-In. Total scores from the Seity measure have correlations with SWEMWBS scores ranging from .73 to .79 in a sample of college students, and are as high as .88 in a sample of older adults who also have college experience.

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