

The Unity of Well-Being:

An Inquiry into the Structure of Subjective Well-Being Using the Bifactor Model

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Abstract

In homage to the life and work of Ed Diener (1946-2021), the present study assessed the dimensions of the tripartite model (positive affect, negative affect, and life satisfaction) and two additional dimensions (domain satisfaction and happiness) to investigate the structure of subjective well-being using exploratory factor analysis and the bifactor model. Specifically, we tested whether these five dimensions belong to an essentially unidimensional subjective well-being construct. Towards this goal, we used a large, previously collected dataset closely matched to the U.S. census ($N=2,000$, ages 18-65+; 52.4% female; 66.3% White; 14.9% Hispanic; 12% Black) and selected 24 items representing the five dimensions. Our results showed that all 24 items were internally consistent and highly correlated. Exploratory factor analyses revealed there were five underlying factors best characterizing the data. When fit to the bifactor model, a strong underlying general subjective well-being factor emerged. Additionally, general factor scores were highly reliable according to conventional reliability standards. A confirmatory factor analysis also supported the bifactor structure of subjective well-being. Overall, our findings suggest all 24 items from the five dimensions reflect one essentially unidimensional construct, which can be combined into a single subjective well-being score. Domain satisfaction and subjective happiness both belong to subjective well-being in the same way that the original three dimensions of life satisfaction, negative affect, and positive affect do.

Keywords: subjective well-being, happiness, positive affect, negative affect, life satisfaction, domain satisfaction