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Investigating the use of the PERMA theory of wellbeing in the New Zealand General Social Survey

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Abstract

In recent years governments have become increasingly interested in measuring the overall wellbeing of their populations. This is a significant shift away from the traditional focus on economic metrics. With the development of its General Social Survey, the New Zealand government has followed this trend. A popular wellbeing measure used by many, including in the New Zealand General Social Survey, is the single satisfaction with life question. There are challenges with relying on life satisfaction to measuring subjective wellbeing. This research investigates the use of Martin Seligman's PERMA theory of wellbeing as a potential alternative for the life satisfaction question, as it provides extra information about wellbeing while potentially also not losing information gained through measuring life satisfaction. It also may help understand better cross-cultural differences in wellbeing. 100 New Zealand European and New Zealand Māori participants aged 55-64 years old responded to a postal survey asking them about their wellbeing. The life satisfaction question and the questions from the PERMA theory were asked. Statistical correlation was used to analyse the data. Results indicated that PERMA questions do potentially provide an enhanced understanding of wellbeing, both within and across cultures, without losing information gained through use of the life satisfaction question. Using PERMA in a survey like the New Zealand General Social Survey could potentially provide an increased understanding of not only whether people are 'happy', but *why* they are 'happy', and how different cultures experience that 'happiness'.

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