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## The study of life-satisfaction

**ABSTRACT** This chapter reviews the literature on life satisfaction. Six questions are considered: 1) What is the point of studying life-satisfaction? 2) What is life-satisfaction? 3) Can life-satisfaction be measured? 4) How satisfied are we? 5) What causes us to be satisfied or dissatisfied with life? 6) Can the level of life-satisfaction be increased? These questions are considered at the individual level as well as the societal level. In the concluding section a general overview is given of the work presented in this book.

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THE STUDY OF LIFE SATISFACTION

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reviews the literature on life satisfaction. The questions are considered: 1) What is the goal of studying life-satisfaction? 2) What is life-satisfaction? 3) Can life-satisfaction be measured? 4) How satisfied are we? 5) What's easy to be satisfied or dissatisfied with? 6) Can the level of life-satisfaction be increased? These questions are considered at the individual level as well as the societal level. In the concluding section a general overview is given of the work presented in this book.

1 RELEVANCE CONTEXT

The subject of life-satisfaction is part of a broader field of enquiry, commonly referred to as Quality of Life (QoL). The prime concern is that field is to develop criteria for the 'good' life. Further aims are to assess how well society for these standards and to establish what would be required to come closer to the ideal. The thrust of much of this work is to create a better society: it is part of a wider tradition in social research, that of social engineering.

1.1 Historical background

Historically, the aim of research is rooted in 18th century Enlightenment thinking. From the perspective, the purpose of existence is life itself, rather than the service of King or God. Self-satisfaction and happiness become central values. Society itself is seen as a means for providing citizens with the necessities for a good life. In the 19th century, the conviction manifested itself in the Utilitarian Creed: the best society is one which provides 'the greatest happiness for the greatest number'. In the 20th century it has inspired large scale attempts at social reform and influenced the development of the Welfare State. Efforts towards the creation of a better society manifested themselves in attacks on the evils of ignorance, illness and poverty. Consequently, progress was measured by literacy, control of epidemic diseases and the elimination of hunger. Social statistics were developed to record the extent to which progress in these areas had been achieved. Advances in the control of these social ills were followed by efforts to create well-being that means a good life for everybody, in particular a good material standard of living. The extent of progress in that area was expressed in terms of monetary gains, security of income and the degree of income-inequality. This gave rise to an abundance of social research on poverty and social-inequality, which today is still a major research tradition.

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