Wellbeing and the Environment

Wellbeing: A Complete Reference Guide

Volume I: Wellbeing in Children and Families
Edited by Susan H. Landry and Cary L. Cooper

Volume II: Wellbeing and the Environment
Edited by Rachel Cooper, Elizabeth Burton, and Cary L. Cooper

Volume III: Work and Wellbeing
Edited by Peter Y. Chen and Cary L. Cooper

Volume IV: Wellbeing in Later Life
Edited by Thomas B. L. Kirkwood and Cary L. Cooper

Volume V: The Economics of Wellbeing
Edited by David McDaid and Cary L. Cooper

Volume VI: Interventions and Policies to Enhance Wellbeing
Edited by Felicia A. Huppert and Cary L. Cooper
Wellbeing and the Environment


Edited by Rachel Cooper, Elizabeth Burton, and Cary L. Cooper

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Journal of Organizational Behavior, and is currently Editor-in-Chief of the international scholarly journal Stress & Health. He has received honorary doctorates from a number of universities (e.g., University of Sheffield, Aston University, and Heriot-Watt University). He has been awarded honorary fellowships by the Royal College of Physicians, Royal College of Physicians of Ireland, British Psychological Society, European Academy of Occupational Health Psychology, and Institute of Occupational Safety and Health. In 2010 Professor Cooper was awarded the Lord Dearing Lifetime Achievement Award at the The Times Higher Education Awards for his distinguished contribution to higher education. He was lead scientist on the U.K. Government’s Foresight program on Mental Capital and Wellbeing, which had a major impact in the United Kingdom and Europe. Professor Cooper was Chair of the Global Agenda Council on Chronic Diseases in the World Economic Forum in 2009–2010. In 2012, HR magazine voted him the Fourth Most Influential HR Thinker. In 2001, he was awarded a CBE by the Queen for his contribution to occupational health.
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This series of six volumes explores one of the most important social issues of our times, that of how to enhance the mental wellbeing of people, whether in the developed, developing, or underdeveloped world, and across the life course from birth to old age. We know that 1 in 4–6 people in most countries in the world suffer from a common mental disorder of anxiety, depression, or stress. We also know that mental ill health costs countries billions of dollars per annum. In the United Kingdom, for example, mental health-care costs have amounted to over £77 billion per annum, the bill for sickness absence and presenteeism (people turning up to work ill or not delivering due to job stress) in the workplace is another £26 billion, and the costs of dementia will rise from £20 billion to an estimated £50 billion in 25 years’ time (Cooper, Field, Goswami, Jenkins, & Sahakian, 2009). In Germany, the leading cause of early retirement from work in 1989 was musculoskeletal disease but by 2004 it was stress and mental ill health, now representing 40% of all early retirements (German Federal Health Monitoring, 2007). In many European countries (e.g., Finland, Holland, Norway, and Switzerland) the cost of lost productive value due to lack of mental wellbeing is a significant proportion of gross domestic product (McDaid, Knapp, Medeiros, & MHEEN Group, 2008). Indeed, the costs of depression alone in the European Union were shown to be €41 billion, with €77 billion in terms of lost productivity to all the economies (Sobocki, Jonsson, Angst, & Rehnberg, 2006).

The issue of wellbeing has been around for sometime but has been brought to the fore more recently because of the global recession and economic downturn, which have made the situation worse (Antoniou & Cooper, 2013). But it was as early as 1968 that politicians began to talk about the inadequacy of gross national product as a measure of a society’s
success. In a powerful speech by Bobby Kennedy at the University of Kansas, when he was on the campaign trail for the Democratic Party nomination for U.S. President, he reflected:

But even if we act to erase material poverty, there is another greater task, it is to confront the poverty of satisfaction—purpose and dignity—that afflicts us all. Too much and for too long, we seemed to have surrendered personal excellence and community values in the mere accumulation of material things. Our gross national product, now, is over $800 billion a year, but that gross national product—if we judge the United States of America by that—that gross national product counts air pollution and cigarette advertising, and ambulances to clear our highways of carnage. It counts special locks for our doors and the jails for the people who break them. It counts the destruction of the redwood and the loss of our natural wonder in the chaotic sprawl. It counts napalm and counts nuclear warheads and armoured cars for the police to fight the riots in our cities. . . . Yet the GNP does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country, it measures everything in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.

University of Kansas, March 18, 1968,
http://www.americanswhotellthetruth.org/portraits/robert-f-kennedy

Since that time there have been numerous studies to show that the wealth of a country is not related to its happiness (Cooper & Robertson, 2013); indeed, as you earn far beyond your means you may become less happy or content. More recently, we have had politicians like former President Sarkozy of France, Prime Minister Cameron of the United Kingdom, and the King of Bhutan extoll the virtue of gross national wellbeing; that is, that the goal of a nation’s politicians should be to enhance wellbeing among its citizens, with gross national product being only one indicator of a country’s success. Indeed, Prime Minister Cameron has instituted an annual assessment of this through the U.K. Office of National Statistics which measures wellbeing among a large sample of the U.K. population, publishing the results, highlighting concerns, and ultimately considering policies to deal with them. The World Economic Forum of leading global companies, nongovernmental organizations, international bodies, and global charities now has one of its Global Agenda Councils on “mental health and wellbeing.” Happiness and wellbeing indices abound (e.g., The Happy Planet), and many countries are being compared and assessed on a range of