



Editorial

Taking Positive Psychology to Task on Real Life

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The traditional focus of positive psychology on individual happiness, character strengths, and resilience has served us well. But the world now demands more. As we step into 2025, we navigate an increasingly complex world marked by the growing effects of climate change, deepening social inequality, political polarization, as well as regional war. To address the wellbeing of individuals, systemic challenges need our attention and new applications of positive psychology must be found. Our standard individual level interventions are no match for the scale required; novel solutions are required. And while there are too many issues to name; here are a few I'm focusing on this year. I hope you develop your own list and drive your efforts towards resolving what's on it.

Climate Change. The 1.5°C temperature increase target is out of range (Lamboll et al., 2023; World Meteorological Organization, 2024). Projections set the rise at 2°C with expected outcomes; yet the MENA region is set to experience temperatures of at least 4°C higher by 2050 given increasing greenhouse gas emissions (Wehrey & Fawal, 2022). Beyond the health, economic, political and social consequences of climate change are also its impacts to mental health and subjective wellbeing (e.g., Cianconi et al., 2020; Crandon et al., 2022; Martin, 2024). From depression, anxiety and suicide, PTSD, substance use to worsened mental health conditions (i.e., schizophrenia), new forms of climate-related distress are growing, i.e., ecoanxiety, ecological grief, solastalgia. Harnessing subjective wellbeing as a buffer against ongoing climate-related distress, mobilizing psychosocial resources to deal with acute climate crises like flash floods and fires, as well as upskilling individuals to take part in collective action must be the focus of any intervention.

Youth mental health. In light of climate change and economic insecurity, young people continue to need support and specialized attention. Critically, youth is the age at which psychological distress peaks, with 50% of mental issues emerging before the age of 18 and 75% emerging by the age of 25 (Colizzi et al., 2020; Solmi et al., 2022). University-age students fare no better; distress levels rise upon entry and remain elevated, making them one of the most overlooked groups of all (Auerbach et al., 2018). Poor wellbeing in teaching faculty is as much of an issue (Hammoudi Halat et al., 2023). Positive psychology can offer much towards the development of wellbeing via emotional literacy through curriculum development and the strengthening of community and social capital versus the standard and often ineffective awareness raising for individuals alone (Abelson et al., 2022; du Toit et al., 2022; Filia et al., 2021; Hellström & Beckman, 2021).



People in war. The WHO World Mental Health (Kessler et al., 2017) showed that 4.3% of traumatised persons living in 24 nations had uniquely experienced more than seven traumas. In contrast, Altawil et al. (2023) revealed that 100% of Palestinians had been exposed to at least 20 traumatic events in their lifetimes alone. The widespread degree of distress is reflected in the fact that PTSD in Palestinians has been renamed Chronic Traumatic Stress Disorder (CTSD; Bdier et al., 2024). As war continues in the region as well as abroad, treatments that are culturally embedded i.e., sumoud and resistance, as well as trauma informed, and which investigate the links between positive constructs, i.e., resilience, positive emotions, social relationships and collective action on the ability to heal from with trauma will be key (Veronese et al., 2025). As cumulative, inherited and vicarious trauma spreads, positive psychology must confront this reality and expand our tools and means of thinking to meet this growing challenge.

Practitioners, researchers, and policy advisors must find ways for people to live their lives, make an economic living, function in cohesive and safe societies and be psychologically well in the face of war, climate change, recessions and major political changes and their global consequences. Solutions for how to exist, while still enjoying our lives and each other, must be our mission in positive psychology. The key lies in learning to be pragmatic realists, resisting cynicism while maintaining belief in goodness (Zaki, 2024). It is also to remain hopeful when distress is high and focus on what can be done. Most of all, it is to be less fearful and more trusting of the human condition. The call for greater attention to real world issues and practical relevance has been made by notable positive psychology researchers, i.e., Steger (2024), and is growing by the day. Let this be your invitation to join us. By being more creative in our research, experimenting more broadly with our applications, and asking bolder questions, we can harness hope, self-efficacy, courage, as well as the capacity for pleasure, meaning and mutual trust.

In Memoriam: Honoring the “Giants” in Positive Psychology

I pay tribute to several major researchers we lost this year and who were known for their prolific scientific activity, contributions to policy and development, and personable warmth. Between them, publications and books easily number in the thousands; however, their biggest impacts were the policy and scientific advancements made through their work in academia and government alike. If you did not know their work, I have included a selection of their articles and encourage you to become familiar with them as you will continue to see their names in positive psychology and the broader field of wellbeing economics and wellbeing policy. May we continue to be inspired by their work and bring their ideas forward to help society.

Ruut Veenhoven (1942–2024). A pioneering figure, Dr. Ruut was referred to as the “godfather of happiness studies.” Known for his World Database of Happiness, which many readers have accessed over the years, his contributions remain invaluable for researchers and policymakers worldwide. His research on subjective wellbeing laid the foundation for how we measure and understand happiness at both individual and societal levels. He was a professor at the Erasmus University Rotterdam and in retirement, he was also an emeritus professor with the Erasmus Happiness Economics Research Organization. Many tributes can be found, including Bergsma’s (2024), who discusses his work in detail. Dr. Ruut’s final LinkedIn [post](#) reflects his emphasis on dignity, extending to his life as much as to his death. From it, you can also access his database.



Felicia Huppert (1946-2024). Felicia Huppert advised governments and international bodies on the measurement of wellbeing and on policies to enhance it, notably across Europe. Her research emphasized the role of mindfulness and (self) compassion in fostering lasting wellbeing not only for individuals but in schools, families and societies more broadly. Through her academic work, including six books, and public advocacy, Dr. Felicia shaped policy initiatives and contributed immensely to global wellbeing strategies. Her kindness, warmth and conscientious was evident in all her dealings. Her obituary is [here](#), followed by an academic tribute by Easton et al. (2024).

Richard Easterlin (1926-2024). Best known for his work on the "Easterlin Paradox," Dr. Richard fundamentally changed how economists and psychologists, including positive psychologists, view the relationship between income and happiness. As a professor and researcher in economics, demography, and subjective well-being, his work challenged the assumption that wealth directly correlates with greater happiness, underscoring the importance of social factors, relationships, and life satisfaction. He was also known for his work on the "Easterlin Hypothesis", where he posited that US fertility rates were influenced by relative income rather than absolute income levels. Called the "father of happiness economics," he died at the age of 98 years this month. His obituary is [here](#).

Philip Zimbardo (1933-2024). All first-year psychology students know him for his Stanford Prison Experiment, but his work in positive psychology also stood out, particularly his focus on resilience, time perspective, and heroism. While his early research focused on the darker sides of human behavior, his later years were marked by an understanding of how ordinary people rose to extraordinary acts of kindness and courage. His [Heroic Imagination Project](#) calls us all to act with greater everyday moral conviction and do the "right" thing. Time perspective, a concept showing how our views of the past, present, and future shape wellbeing, decision-making, and life satisfaction also influenced many of us to live more fully in the present, positively reminisce about the past and be hopeful for the future. Dr. Philip was known for his pioneering work in varied domains (i.e., shyness, evil, altruism, obedience to authority), as well as his leadership, media, social activism and other roles. His publications can be accessed [here](#) and his official obituary [here](#).

Where is the Sparkle?

Everyone expects to hear "Sparkly Positives" in a positive psychology editorial and a perk of being the Editor is indeed that you can write about whatever you want. For 2025, I challenge you to build your "sparkly habits". Here are my top five I've made an effort to build in recent years.

(1) Stop buying clothes or other stuff you don't need. Seriously, at present we have enough clothes in all our closets for the next six generations to wear ([Creative Salon](#), 2023).

(2) Crack one joke every time you are in a lift with strangers. Unless you're by yourself, then just take a selfie instead.

(3) Work out like you mean it. Your body is a resource, it fuels your brain, emotions and sociability levels. Don't ignore it.

(4) Always stop for pedestrians. Pedestrian dignity is the cornerstone of good cities; everyone deserves respect and safety.

(5) Socialize, network, and build your social capital every single week; this is the difference between being employed, happy, friended or not. Never float by yourself; be proactive and connect.



For too long wellbeing has been focused on what **we** get from life, but my invitation is this: what will you give in 2025 to contribute to the *wellbeing of others*?

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