

Exercise walk-through

Positive Psychology ▪ 5.2

eXercise

You must be able to

- state what positive psychology studies and why it emerged
- describe **subjective well-being** 主观幸福感 and how it is measured
- explain **hedonic adaptation** 享乐适应 and the **relative** nature of comparison
- name factors reliably associated with well-being

Method — What it studies

Positive psychology studies the conditions of flourishing — well-being, strengths, meaning — rather than only disorder. It arose because psychology's evidence base had been built largely on what goes wrong.

Method — Subjective well-being

Usually measured as **life satisfaction** plus the balance of positive to negative affect, by self-report. The measure is subjective by design, which is both its point and its main methodological weakness.

Method — Hedonic adaptation and comparison

People adapt to improved circumstances, so a gain raises well-being temporarily and then fades. Judgments are also **relative**: satisfaction depends on comparison with others and with one's own past.

Method — What is associated with well-being

Close relationships, meaningful activity, health, and a degree of autonomy show reliable associations. Income is associated with well-being strongly at low levels and much more weakly once basic needs are met.

Practice 2.1 ■ 2 marks

State what subjective well-being measures.

Solution 2.1

Method: Subjective well-being

Worked steps

life satisfaction **B1** plus the balance of positive to negative affect, by self-report **B1**.

Practice 2.2 ■ 2 marks

Explain hedonic adaptation and one consequence for policy or personal planning.

Solution 2.2

Method: Hedonic adaptation and comparison

Worked steps

people adapt to improved circumstances so gains fade **B1**; so a one-off improvement raises well-being only temporarily **B1**.

Practice 2.3 ■ 1 mark

A person's satisfaction falls after their neighbours' incomes rise, though their own is unchanged.

- (a) Name the property of judgment involved.
- (b) State what this shows about well-being measures.

Solution 2.3

Worked steps

(a) relative comparison **B1**. (b) reported well-being depends on the comparison group, not only on absolute conditions **B1**.

Exam-style 3.1 ■ 1 mark

The relationship between income and well-being is

- A** strong at all levels
- B** strong at low income and much weaker once needs are met
- C** absent
- D** negative

Solution 3.1

Method: What is associated with well-being

- A strong at all levels
- B strong at low income and much weaker once needs are met** 
- C absent
- D negative

Worked steps

- B. the association is strong at low income and weakens once basic needs are met.**

Exam-style 3.2 ■ 1 mark

The main methodological weakness of subjective well-being measures is that they are

- A** too long
- B** self-reported
- C** physiological
- D** unreliable across time

Solution 3.2

Method: Subjective well-being

- A too long
- B self-reported
- C physiological
- D unreliable across time



Worked steps

- B. the measure depends on what people report about themselves.

Exam-style 3.3 ■ 1 mark

A government proposes to raise national well-being by increasing average income.

- (a) State one limitation of the proposal.
- (b) Suggest one alternative target and justify it.

Solution 3.3

Method: What is associated with well-being

Worked steps

(a) hedonic adaptation and relative comparison mean average income gains may not raise well-being much **B1**. (b) target social connection or autonomy at work **B1**, because these show reliable associations with well-being and are less subject to adaptation than income **B1**.