Chapter 11
Positive Psychology in Sub-Saharan Africa

Angelina Wilson Fadiji and Marié P. Wissing

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History of Positive Psychology in Sub-Saharan Africa

Despite the evidence showing the relevance of positive psychology research for different aspects of individual and community life, few countries in sub-Saharan Africa have explored this important area of scholarly work. To provide context, in the next section we will highlight some more recent information on the historical background of sub-Saharan countries across Western, Eastern, Central and Southern Africa, taking into consideration important social, political and economic similarities between these countries.

For a broad perspective it is necessary to take into account that the Central, Eastern, Southern and Western African regions had, from a historical point of view, many phases of sun and shadow. Unknown to many in the Western world, these regions had in ancient and pre-colonial times, just as other regions in Africa, great civilizations, kingdoms, cultures, rich gold and salt mines, strong economic trade practices and great educational achievements. For example, the Ancient Ghana Kingdom, the Kingdom of Axum, the Ethiopian Empire, the Kingdom of Kongo,

A. Wilson Fadiji (✉)
Department of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa

Africa Unit for Transdisciplinary Health Research, Faculty of Health Sciences, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa
e-mail: angelina.wilsonfadiji@up.ac.za

M. P. Wissing
Africa Unit for Transdisciplinary Health Research, Faculty of Health Sciences, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa
e-mail: marie.wissing@nwu.ac.za

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Kingdom of Mapungubwe, and the Mutapa Empire all were thriving civilizations at one time. In addition, the city of Timbuktu (now a world heritage site) in the West African country Mali, established a large and one of the first universities in the world (University of Sankoré), harbouring one of the largest libraries (unfortunately to a great extent destroyed in recent years) next to Egypt's Library of Alexandria.

Political Turmoil and a Struggle for Independence

Historically, all the countries in sub-Saharan Africa, with the exception of Ethiopia, were under a range of colonial rule from the British, French, Germans, Portuguese or the Dutch. All these countries had to fight for independence, the earliest being in 1957 when Ghana gained independence from the British and provided the impetus for other African nations to struggle for independent rule and local governance (Gocking, 2005).

Historically, five phases are distinguished in South Africa; namely, (i) the pre-colonial era in which the Khoisan peoples were the first known inhabitants living in the south western African areas, and whose descendants (the Khoi and San peoples) are still part of the South African rainbow nation. Thereafter, various African groups migrated southward (today known as Nguni, Sotho–Tswana, Venda, Lemba, and Shangaan-Tsonga peoples) and settled in various areas of the now known South Africa before the European settlers came. (ii) The colonial era followed, which firstly saw Portuguese explorers, then Dutch colonization (from 1652) and thereafter from the British Empire (1795 on and off until 1910) with many wars among British, Boers, Zulus, Xhosa and others. (iii) The post-colonial era was marked by the formation of the Union of South Africa and the beginning of segregation laws and discrimination against black people. Much of the colonial and post-colonial eras was marked by violent territorial disputes and clashes of cultures between indigenous people and the European settlers. (iv) The so-called apartheid era started in 1948 and was an extension of discriminatory laws which started during the Dutch and British colonialization. The white National Party government which took power further legalized racial segregation and apartheid. (v) The post-apartheid era started in 1994 after South Africa's first democratic elections following intense negotiations among groups, and was marked by the election of the well-known president Nelson Mandela as the first president of a free South Africa, redress via the Truth and Reconciliation Committee, and the so-called rainbow nation integrating all its peoples of diverse heritages and cultures.

Kenya, the nation with one of the largest economies in East Africa, was also previously under British colonial rule and obtained independence in 1963. After independence, Kenya's economy flourished for a while and began to decline from 1991 to 1993 due to a multiplicity of factors including bad governance (van Zwanenberg & King, 1999). A similar story can be told for Uganda.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria is a modern state that emerged out of British colonial rule in the beginning of the nineteenth century. In 1914, this colony was

created through the amalgamation of the protectorates of the Northern and Southern Nigeria, the Lagos colony as well as the abolishment of the Egba Kingdom that encircled Lagos (Bourne, 2015). In 1960, Nigeria obtained independence from the British colonial masters led by Nnamdi Azikwe and under the leadership of President Tafawa Balewa (Bourne, 2015). Historically, the political climate of Nigeria has been one plagued by several upheavals including intermittent military rule and a civil war between 1967 and 1970. Just like in Nigeria, the Republic of Ghana, formerly referred to as Gold Coast, is also a western African nation that obtained independence from the British colonial masters in 1957 (Gocking, 2005). The modern day Ghana formerly comprised of the Ashanti Kingdom, coastal regions and the northern territories. After independence in 1957 and becoming a republic in 1960, Ghana came under several military regimes that seemingly crippled the economy.

Zimbabwe, formerly known as Rhodesia, was also under the colonial rule of the British. In 1953, Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), Northern Rhodesia (present day Zambia) and Nyasaland (present day Malawi) formed a federation that was dissolved after 10 years as a result of much political crisis and turmoil (Godwin & Hancock, 1993). While Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland became independent states, Southern Rhodesia remained under British rule until 1965, when they declared independence and became a republic under the governance of Ian Smith (Godwin & Hancock, 1993). This breakaway was due to pressure from the British for a black-majority rule in the country, which Ian Smith and other white Rhodesians were opposed to. Further incursions and anti-government violence led to the agreement of black-majority rule and independence as Zimbabwe in 1980.

The Botswana region was for a long time a so-called British protectorate (Bechuanaland) which was incorporated into the Cape colony in 1895 under the British government, but finally became independent as a separate country from Britain in 1966. Namibia (like South Africa) has been plagued by conflicts and several years of colonial rule. Namibia had been under German colonization (then named German South-West Africa/Deutsch-Südwestafrika) from 1884 to 1915. Then it was invaded by the Western Allies in the World War I and its administration taken over by the Union of South Africa which was then a part of the British Empire. In 1990, it became an independent country known as Namibia.

Political Climate and Economic Issues

In Eastern Africa, there was recognizable economic growth such as the case of Kenya and Uganda's economy within the period of 1991 to 2011 and this was well-above the average of most sub-Saharan countries. However, there has been a decline to due to high population growth and inflation rates (van Zwanenberg & King, 1999).

The political economy of Nigeria is currently characterized by a high level of corruption designed to solely benefit the ruling elites and impoverish the majority of

the population (Bourne, 2015; Papaioannou & Dalrymple-Smith, 2015). This perceived opportunistic position seemed to stem from the indirect rule of the colonial masters that was based on a system of oligarchy where some individuals regarded themselves as more privileged with the right to rule the rest of Nigeria. The years after independence have been characterized by high levels of corruption, political, religious and ethnic violence, poverty and lack of management of the massive endowments of natural resources (Papaioannou & Dalrymple-Smith, 2015). Despite this trend, there has also been some economic growth and infrastructural development in capital cities and the business hubs of the nation such as Lagos and Abuja.

Cocoa and gold represent the major natural resources and source of export trade in Ghana. After independence, pervasive corruption crippled efforts to continue with the trend of development during the colonial era. Ghana has been caught in a cycle of debt and currency overvaluation (Berry, 1994). By the 1980s, the economy was in an eventual state of collapse, due to a major decline in cocoa and gold production.

Also in Zimbabwe, we find that there is immense agricultural and mineral resources endowment; however, unfavorable weather conditions, low prices, poor management and violent implementation of land reforms have negatively affected the agriculture-based economy (Country Watch Inc., 2015). As a result of the land restructuring and reallocating of lands to the majority blacks, there has been a collapse of the commercial agriculture, food shortages, reliance on import and inflation (Country Watch Inc., 2015). There has also been an increase in crime, police violence and other human right abuses.

Social Life

Most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are multilingual and have a diversity of religious beliefs including Christianity, Islam and African traditional religions. The English language and Christianity were inherited from colonial masters and these have remained to date. South Africa is a multilingual state, with 11 official languages spoken across the country. A number of languages including Shona and Setswana are shared across Southern African countries. Religious composition of South Africa is similar to other countries in sub-Saharan Africa. In Eastern African countries, English and Swahili are the official languages, while in Western African countries English and French are the official languages accompanied by indigenous languages unique to each country.

Culture and the Positives of Life

Despite the above indicated histories of political strife, hardships, poverty and corruption, it is important to also recognize the richness of the varied cultures with the associated music, dance, songs, poetry and stories, the practices of caring

(*Ubuntu*—an African wisdom of how to be human), sharing and meaning-carrying religious beliefs that marked these African countries. All these countries shared a historical and more collectivist cultural orientation in which the (in) group is more important than the individual (Nwoye, 2017). Nowadays collectivist and relatively more individualist cultural orientations are found to exist side-by-side in many countries with the latter more in urban areas, whereas collectivist orientations are still more prominent in rural and poorer areas (Philips & Wong, 2017).

Conclusion

It is against the backdrop of this political, economic, social and cultural history that positive psychology has developed in Eastern, Central, Western and sub-Saharan Africa. An overview of the history shows more similarities compared to differences across countries. Differences mainly exist in specific details and intensity of political disturbances, economic decline and corruption. One major observation by scholars is that South Africa, compared to other African nations, has made recognizable strides in development, however it is has still not lived up to its fullest potential (Visser, 2005). One of the resulting impacts of the political and economic trends is poverty and a lowered quality of life of individuals.

We suspect that there are cultural and indigenous views on health and well-being with notions and constructs conveying meanings and connotations of functioning well in humans which are different from constructs and notions in the West. Therefore, we will also take note of some relevant, probably more indigenous, ideas in this review of research on positive psychology and well-being as found in this region.

Positive Psychology in South Africa

In South Africa various research groups are nowadays active in the field of positive psychology (PP). Before the larger research teams developed research on well-being, psycho-social health and relevant constructs such as salutogenesis and resilience had been conducted by Deodandus Strümpfer, and by Marié Wissing and Chrizanne van Eeden in the early 1990's. Strümpfer had been a strong leading pre-PP figure developing a focus on health and well-being in a broad sense. He coined the construct of *fortigenesis* referring to the origins of strengths (Strümpfer, 1990, 1995; Strümpfer & Wissing, 1998). Another early contributor to a focus on positive aspects was Tyrone Pretorius. He developed the Fortitude Questionnaire (Pretorius, 1998) in order to assess the extent to which a person is able to handle stress and has strength to manage such stress. It includes three subscales measuring the evaluation of self and abilities, evaluation of social support from family and evaluation of support from the community in general.

In recent times groups doing research in positive psychology and its applications are mostly linked to universities from where master's degree students in multidisciplinary contexts take it further into practice. Researchers are from various professional backgrounds such as clinical, counselling, educational, organizational or general psychology. Such research groups are for example: At the University of Pretoria (UP) Liesel Ebersöhn, Irma Eloff, Linda Theron, Nomfusi Bekwa, Ronél Ferreira and others mainly focus on resilience research especially in under-resourced educational contexts. At University of South Africa (UNISA), Llewellyn van Zyl, Sanet van der Westhuizen, Frans Celliers, Rian Viviers and others are conducting research with a main focus on facets of organizational well-being and coaching. Diverse PP topics with a focus on well-being and coping are covered by researchers from the University of the Free State (UFS) by Lindi Nel, Pravani Naidoo, Henriette van den Berg, Ancel George, Magriet van Dijk and Anja Botha. At the University of Johannesburg Tharina Guse (currently based in University of Pretoria) and her team conducted well-being research especially on adolescents in the city and on PP interventions. Guse and students also conducted various interventions amongst others hypnotherapeutic interventions for fostering psychological well-being among previous victims of child sexual abuse (Guse & Fourie, 2013). Well-being research at the University of Stellenbosch by Awie Greeff and his team focused specifically on families. Solomon (Oupa) Makola at the Central University of Technology (CUT) in Welkom studied the experience of meaning and well-being, especially in student groups. The first large research groups in positive psychology in South Africa were established at the North-West University (NWU) in Potchefstroom by clinical, counselling, organizational and educational psychologists of whom also worked in multi- and transdisciplinary teams with other health professionals. Well-being researchers from the NWU include Ian Rothmann, Jaco Pienaar, Marius Stander, Marié Wissing, Chrizanne van Eeden, Q. Michael Temane, Itumeleng Khumalo (now at UFS), Lusilda Schutte, Johan Potgieter, Karel Botha, Sammy Thekiso, Tertia Oosthuizen, Alida Nienaber, Vera Roos, Doret Kirsten, Shingarai Chigeza (now at UP), and initially also Linda Theron (now at UP) together with many other colleagues and students. Research projects focused on the nature, measurement and enhancement of psychosocial well-being in individuals, groups, community, organizational and biopsychosocial health contexts, urban and rural areas; or focused on self-regulation, recreation, intergenerational relations, etc., and covered all developmental life phases. Karel Botha is in particular known for his research together with student teams on self-regulation. Validation of many measures for use in the African contexts is also a strong focus especially by Wissing, Khumalo, Schutte and Temane.

Positive Psychology in Kenya

Positive psychology research in Kenya has taken on a slower pace compared to South Africa but similar to other sub-Saharan African countries. As a result of the

HIV pandemic, most mental health research has been directed at understanding coping strategies, self-efficacy, self-esteem and experience of support among HIV patients and their care-givers. References to psychological well-being and mental health were actually measured as symptoms of psychological distress, depression and anxiety. However, pockets of positive psychology research have been identified such as the work on meaningfulness (Goodman et al., 2017) and other contributions by Selvam (2015), which we discuss in-depth in later sections.

Positive Psychology in Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe (just like the case of Kenya), most of the research on positive psychology has been related to HIV/AIDS orphans and the resources available for them to cope with this stressor. There has been minimal research conceptualising well-being from a positive psychology perspective with only pockets of sparse contributions from a few authors Eloff et al. (2008), noted that positive psychology in Zimbabwe was only implied in research and not explicit. In this paper, it was indicated that professionals in Zimbabwe were not aware of the historical development of positive psychology but were of the opinion that it is currently being practiced and was similar to the empowerment approach (Eloff et al., 2008).

Positive Psychology in Namibia

Positive psychology research in Namibia has focused largely on work-related well-being in different contexts (schools and health institutions) and three noteworthy authors are Martina Perstling, Ian Rothmann (from South Africa) and Manfred Janik. Perstling and Rothmann (2014) also reflected on the relationship between South Africa and Namibia with respect to their subjective well-being amidst the experience of similar struggles such as human rights, reconciliation and equality. Common themes of research in this context include the experience of meaning, national levels of subjective well-being, job satisfaction, engagement and employee turn-over.

Positive Psychology in Zambia

The HIV/AIDS pandemic also impacted on the research landscape in Zambia. A common research focus was the mental health of the victims of this pandemic with measurements of mental health including mostly negative indicators. It was common to find cross-cultural research with Zambia as one of the samples in a number of well-being studies (e.g., White, 2017). She argues for a relational approach towards

understanding subjective and psychological well-being using cross-cultural samples from Zambia and India. In all we could not identify any local positive psychologists but we have discussed the work of a Canadian researcher Mark Holder and colleagues, which explores religion and spirituality as ingredients for Zambian children's well-being.

Positive Psychology in Nigeria

In our attempt to identify studies on psychological well-being and positive psychology in Nigeria, we found that the term "psychological well-being" and mental health were used only loosely and were measured as an absence of psychopathology. This trend made it difficult to identify studies that explored mental health in a positive sense and not just the absence of distress. This trend points to a major research gap within this context. However, there are some studies that have explored topics such as post-traumatic growth, resilience, happiness, work engagement, social support, gender differences in subjective well-being and positive interventions, for example Chukwuorji and Ajaero (2014), Ifeagwazi et al. (2015), and Chukwuorji et al. (2017). Chukwuorj and colleagues validated the Hausa-version of the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (Chika Chukwuorji et al., 2019). A review of the landscape shows that positive psychology concepts are commonly explored in relation to other psychological constructs.

Positive Psychology in Ghana

Similar to the trends of research on positive psychology in Nigeria and other African countries, we could not identify noteworthy researchers grounded in positive psychology research who have contributed to intervention, theory and assessment in Ghana. What we found was a reference to some positive psychological indicators and their relationship with psychological distress (although the term well-being or quality of life is used). For instance, Salifu Yendork and Somhlaba (2016) determined the influence of positive psychological factors on quality of life of orphans living in orphanages. Perception of support and resilience was found to increase quality of life among orphans in Ghana. The exception to this trend of exploring psychological well-being as the absence of diseases is evident in the work by Addai et al. (2014), Wilson and Somhlaba (2016b) and Glozah (2015).

The gap in positive mental health research has been identified by Wilson and Somhlaba (2017a), who noted that although there has been general advancement in mental health promotion research in the West and some parts of sub-Saharan Africa (predominantly South Africa), such progress has not been replicated in Ghana. In this article, the authors indicated that there is still a preoccupation with research on psychopathology and a lack of understanding of positive mental health.

Positive Psychology in Tanzania

Positive psychology in Tanzania is only in its infancy and as a result we were able to identify the work of only Dr. Janvier Rugeira. The psychological well-being research landscape has mainly covered the prevalence of well-being in higher education settings. Other studies have highlighted the role of religion and spirituality in the experience of well-being. There is also evidence on the applicability of positive psychology intervention program in university settings. However, the concept of psychological well-being and positive psychology is still quite new in this context.

Major Positive Psychologists of Sub-Saharan Africa

In this section, we identify and discuss the scholarly work of major positive psychologists and groups in sub-Saharan Africa. In the Central, Eastern, Southern and Western African regions strong individual researchers in positive psychology can be identified, but many also worked in research teams, and therefore it is actually more appropriate to refer to research groups rather than only individual researchers. This is especially the case in South Africa where research on well-being started before the official announcement of positive psychology as a new area of scientific endeavor in 1998 and 2000. Not all positive psychologists identified in the various regions met the criteria of developing a novel theory, assessment tools or interventions, however they have made important contributions to research in positive psychology in their countries. Again instead of one psychologist per country, we have provided a general review of significant empirical work of two to four authors per country in order to provide a good overview of the work being carried out in sub-Saharan Africa. We have also highlighted important research that has been carried out in the region by researchers from the West. Other indigenous perspectives on functioning well that we believe may be related to notions from positive psychology research need to be explored deeper than can be presented in the current review.

Among all the countries in sub-Saharan Africa, South Africa is the country with a greater number of known positive psychologists and significant advancements in research and theory in this field. There are many noteworthy positive psychologists but because of space limitations we will only discuss the work of a few of them who have contributed to theory, research, assessment and intervention in positive psychology.

South Africa

Professor Marié P. Wissing

Biography of Professor Marié P. Wissing

Marié Wissing, obtained a Drs (doctorandus) at the Free University of Amsterdam and a DPhil at the Potchefstroom University for CHE (NWU), and lectured at various universities in South Africa as well as in Europe. She was the director of the School for Psychosocial Behavioural Sciences until 2009, and is currently a senior researcher in the Africa Unit for Trans-disciplinary Health Research (AUTHeR) of the NWU. Professionally she is a clinical psychologist with teaching experience in general psychology, clinical psychology, neuropsychology, industrial psychology and positive psychology for which she developed several curricula in South Africa. She developed with Chrizanne van Eeden the first master's degree in Positive Psychology in South Africa which is also internationally recognized. She conceptualized psychofortology (i.e. the science of psychological strengths; forté = strengths) in 1997 as a new sub-discipline in psychology in South Africa before the international development of positive psychology came to the fore. Her current research focus is on the understanding, measurement and promotion of psychosocial well-being and strengths in diverse contexts from a bio-psycho-social health perspective. Her research programme in psychofortology/positive psychology includes several funded team research projects. This research programme consists of projects building upon each other, with the current FORT 3 project focussing on the prevalence of levels of psychosocial health, its dynamics and relationships with biomarkers of (ill) health in South African social contexts, as well as in particular now exploring meaning, goals, relational well-being, positive societies and cultures of positivity with a view to further theory development in this regard. She is a National Research Foundation (NRF) rated researcher, and obtained strong funding for her research projects also benefitting students and colleagues. She is a core member of a large multi-country international Eudaimonic-Hedonic Happiness Investigation project. Wissing and a team from the NWU organised the first Positive Psychology Conference in Africa in 2006, and she acted as a committee member for the organization of several international conferences.

She is on the editorial boards of various top journals in the disciplinary field of positive psychology and to date published 13 chapters in scientific books and 95 articles in accredited peer reviewed scientific journals. She edited a book, titled *Well-being Research in South Africa*, published in an international series by Springer and a handbook on positive psychology in a South African context for students. She delivered many international and national conference presentations, including key-notes in South Africa and Europe. Many masters and doctoral students (115 in total) completed their studies under her supervision or co-supervision, and several more are in process.

Positive Psychology Contributions

One of the first theoretical contributions of Wissing was the coining of the term *psychofortology* (Wissing & Van Eeden, 1997) to indicate the development of a new scientific (sub-) discipline focusing on psychological strengths. The thrust of this paradigm is that there is a need to understand the nature, manifestations and also ways to enhance psychological well-being and facilitate the development of individual inherent capabilities (Wissing & Van Eeden, 1997). This term reflects the current focus of positive psychology research, which is the identification of strengths and positive experiences influencing psychological well-being. Psychofortology informed subsequent work on understanding the dimensions of general psychological well-being and how well-being should be measured in the South African context.

Another important theoretical contribution is the relationality-meaning model (Wissing, 2014) conceptualizing processes relating to the giving of meaning *to* life, experiencing of meaning *in* life, and values contributing to the meaning *of* life. Although this model is in its infancy, it holds much promise for understanding relationships in the context of meaning-making. The relationality-meaning model suggests that relationship is at the heart of experiencing meaningfulness in life. This model further purports that connections between people and their contexts shapes the opportunities and platforms for the experience of meaning (Wissing, 2014). This complex system of interaction allows for the understanding of meaning and relationality from an interconnectedness perspective where intrapersonal, interpersonal and community level social exchanges influence life experiences that form the basis for meaning in life.

This proposed relational-meaning model is premised on the fact that meaning in life supports and enables a relational meaning in life, which in turn provides an avenue for meaning to life through effective relational values. Different forms of relatedness, both horizontal and vertical, tend to be intricately linked together providing a relational ontology for the experience of meaning in and of life and giving meaning to life (Wissing, 2014).

Wissing (2014) suggests that the initial steps towards the development of this model should be the development and validation of measures of relational well-being since these are currently poorly researched. There is also the need to consider the complexities associated with the dynamics proposed in the relational meaning model. In addition, it is also necessary to explore the content of values expressed by those with high levels of meaning in life, which is likely to be linked to positive relational aspects (Wissing, 2014).

After the initial coining of the term psychofortology, new research based on the science of psychological strengths and positive psychology emerged. Some of the work of Wissing with other colleagues included testing a model of general psychological well-being in the South African context, where such research was non-existent (Wissing & Van Eeden, 2002). A second-order factor analysis of the hypothesised model revealed a relatively strong multidimensional model of general psychological well-being. The emerging model indicated affective, cognitive and

behavioural components of well-being. Other dimensions of psychological well-being included domains of life in the context of relationships, work and recreation. The dimensions of psychological well-being also reflected western descriptions of facets of well-being such as Deci and Ryan's (2000) components of Self-Determination Theory (SDT; autonomy, competence and relatedness). In addition to these facets, sense of coherence, satisfaction with life and affect-balance also emerged as important indicators of psychological well-being.

Further studies led to the conceptualization of a hierarchical model of psychosocial health. Analyses showed a higher order secondary factor named 'general psychological well-being' which was similar across individualist and collectivist contexts, and different patterns of unique primary factors for individualist and collectivist contexts in South Africa (Wissing & Temane, 2008). Among the white individualistic group, the two unique primary factors identified, were (i) intra-interpersonal well-being indicators (positive affect, sense of coherence, satisfaction with life, perceived social support, constructive thinking) and (ii) self-efficacy and behavioural readiness. Among the black collectivist sample, the first unique primary factor was labelled (i) intra-psychological well-being with affective, cognitive and conative components (Wissing & Temane, 2008), and (ii) the second unique primary factor social satisfaction which was indicated by satisfaction with life, experience of support and positive automatic expectations (Wissing & Temane, 2008). These findings represent preliminary attempts to conceptualise well-being from an African perspective. Although Western measurement tools were employed, the emerging dimensions in the factor structure provide some theoretical knowledge on how well-being is structured in this context.

Another line of novel research, which has been carried out in the South African context is the determination of the prevalence of flourishing, moderate and languishing mental health across different groups. Wissing and Temane (2013a) found that 13.9% of rural adults and 60.8% of a multicultural group of students were flourishing. In addition, 1.5% of a multicultural group of teachers and 9% urban adults were found to be languishing. Van Schalkwyk and Wissing et al. (2010) also found in a predominantly white sample ($N = 665$) of secondary school learners in South Africa that 42% were flourishing, 53% were moderately healthy and 5% were languishing.

The relationship between positive mental health and biological markers of health has also been investigated in South African samples. Mare et al. (2011) using functioning well (SOC) and feeling good measures (Affectometer 2 and Satisfaction with Life Scale), investigated the psychosocial health of participants with and without HIV/AIDS before their status was known and revealed to them. Mare et al. (2011) found that both participants from rural and urban areas who were infected with HIV scored lower on functioning well than those not diagnosed with HIV. Surprisingly, rural participants infected with HIV experienced higher levels of positive affect.

Nutritional components and indices of well-being have also shown differential patterns across rural and urban areas, implying that the relationship between nutrition, context and dimensions of psychosocial well-being is not simplistic (Thekiso

et al., 2013). In relation to this finding, life satisfaction was found to be positively associated with waist circumference and body mass index (BMI) only in urban samples.

Linked to the international study on Eudamonic Hedonic Happiness Investigation (EHHI; Delle Fave et al., 2011), Coetzee et al. (2010) found that family and spirituality as life domains were the most important sources of meaning in a multicultural South African sample. The EHHI project was aimed at exploring well-being indicators of happiness and meaningfulness in various countries using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Coetzee et al. (2010) found that flourishers and languishers differed in levels of happiness for all domains of life with the exception of health. There was a difference in family, growth, spirituality and community life domains in degree of meaning experienced by languishers and flourishers.

In collaboration with other experts in the field a new tool for measuring psychological well-being, the General Psychological Well-being Scale (GPWS) was developed (Khumalo et al., 2010). This is an 18-item scale that was developed from the findings of Wissing and Van Eeden (2002), which showed that sense of coherence, satisfaction with life and positive affect are key indicators of general psychological well-being in the South African context. This scale demonstrated good psychometric properties among a Setswana-speaking sample in South Africa (Khumalo et al., 2010). The GPWS taps into positive and negative affect, the extent to which an individual judges their life to be meaningful and comprehensible as well as their satisfaction with life. Conclusions drawn from this research include the fact that happiness and meaning (hedonic and eudemonic well-being) are different but related aspects of well-being as demonstrated in different life domains. Another crucial conclusion was that happiness and meaning are more integrated across domains of life for flourishers as compared to languishers (Khumalo et al., 2010).

Although we highlight just one new scale that has been designed for measuring well-being in the South African context, we would like to indicate that a number of other western scales measuring psychological well-being have been validated. This includes the validation of the Mental Health Continuum-Short Form (MHC-SF; Keyes et al., 2008—the MHC-SF was validated originally by Keyes, Wissing and colleagues in South Africa), Sense of Coherence Scale (SOC; Antonovsky, 1993), the Affectometer (AFM2; Kammann & Flett, 1983), and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985). The SOC, AFM2 and SWLS were initially validated in a South African context by Wissing and colleagues (cf. Wissing et al., 2008, 2010). The initial validation studies in South Africa showed that the hypothesized three-factor structure of the MHC-SF was valid in a Setswana-speaking context with acceptable levels of reliability scores (Keyes et al., 2008). The MHC-SF was also found to correlate with positive affect, generalised self-efficacy, satisfaction with life, coping strategies and sense of coherence (Keyes et al., 2008). The initial validation studies in South Africa also indicated that the SOC had acceptable reliabilities across different race groups. However, the scale showed a mediocre fit for the single-factor model (Wissing et al., 2008). Concurrent validity of the SOC Scale was also confirmed in this group. The satisfaction with life scale showed similar factorial validity and concurrent validity across both white and black

samples (Wissing et al., 2008, 2010). However, there was a poor model fit as indicated by the RMSEA index.

Other scales including the Meaning of Life Questionnaire (MLQ; Steger et al., 2006) have been found to be applicable for measuring meaning in life in the South African context. The hypothesised two-factor structure was confirmed in South African samples (Temane et al., 2014; see also Schutte et al., 2016). In addition, the six clusters in the Values-In-Action (VIA) character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) was tested and was found not to be replicated in a small ($N = 256$) African sample (Khumalo et al., 2010). Instead, these authors found an emic factor pattern consisting of three components: integrity in group context, intrapersonal and relationship strengths. In a larger study of the VIA, van Eeden et al. (2008) found that instead of the six clusters, a unidimensional and homogenous model was more applicable.

Research on the validation of psychological well-being scales in the South African context has shown that some instruments are applicable but there is a dire need for the development of new instruments that are culturally and contextually applicable. One of the recommendations of Wissing and Temane (2008) is the need for a conceptual understanding of psychological well-being from an African cultural perspective with such research being accompanied by tools to adequately capture these constructs.

In recent times validation of measurement scales in the South African and other contexts had been conducted with application of modern psychometric techniques by a team of which Wissing was part, which took scale validation to a new level. For example, validation of the MLQ by Schutte et al. (2016), the Stress Overload Scale (SOS) by Wilson et al. (2017), the MHC-SF by Schutte and Wissing (2017), and the Basic Psychological Needs Scale (BPNS) by Schutte et al. (2017).

As part of the scholarly work of Wissing, a number of intervention studies had been conducted in her research projects. For instance, interventions to promote flourishing among adolescents in Western Cape was designed and implemented against the theoretical model of Keyes (2005) and the strengths perspective (Park & Peterson, 2006) by Van Schalkwyk and Wissing (2013). Other specific needs such as a sense of purpose, positive emotions and relationships, self-confidence and coping skills were also incorporated into the design of the intervention (Van Schalkwyk & Wissing, 2013). The intervention programme was divided into ten sessions, which were translated into mundane activities that occurred in the daily life of adolescents. A quasi-experimental design was used with the control group being exposed to a generic youth programme.

Results of the study showed that the well-being intervention resulted in an increase in the number of flourishing adolescents in the experimental group as well as a decrease in languishers in this group (Van Schalkwyk & Wissing, 2013). It was suggested that although there were only few differences across groups in successive assessments, the observed differences in the experimental group was due to the potency of the intervention programme which lasted over a period of 6 months (Van Schalkwyk & Wissing, 2013). Qualitative evaluations also showed that

adolescents found the intervention to be a new and alternative approach to life by focusing on their strengths and not on all that is wrong.

Further example of intervention programmes is the combination of hypnotherapeutic and individual strengths in the promotion of psychological well-being among post-natal mothers (Guse et al., 2006). The hypnotherapeutic intervention resulted in a significant impact on mothers' psychological well-being two weeks after the intervention and subsequent follow-ups. Positive feelings towards babies, life satisfaction, sense of coherence, subjective experience of confidence, and a reduction in symptoms of depression were found to be the resultant impact of the well-being interventions (Guse et al., 2006).

A theoretically-based positive youth development programme was also developed, implemented and evaluated finding positive outcomes including hope, problem-solving efficacy and social efficacy (Brink, 2011; Brink & Wissing, 2012, 2013).

Professor Linda Theron

Biography of Professor Linda Theron

Professor Theron obtained her doctoral degree in educational psychology at the University of South Africa and is currently working at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. Linda Theron's resilience-focused research has contributed to a more profound understanding of why some South African children and young people do well in life, despite the odds being stacked against them. In particular, she is credited with flagging how sociocultural context and historical legacy shape the resilience processes of black South African youth and highlighting the complex contributions of teachers, education, and traditional African values to these processes.

In 2013, the Education Association of South Africa awarded Linda a research medal in acknowledgment of her resilience-focused research with South African youth and teachers. Further evidence of respect for her work lies in an invitation by Springer publishers for Linda to lead-edit a volume detailing how culture enables and constrains the resilience processes of young people worldwide. This volume, showcasing 17 contributions from African, North and South American, Australian, Asian, and European scholars (and their co-authors), was published in 2015. Proof of Linda's scholarship is also evident in her leadership, principal co-investigation and co-investigation of funded research projects that have leveraged R5, 362800.00 (since 2005). As a result, Linda has a track record of productive networks with high-profile resilience-focused researchers in Brazil, Canada, Colombia, China, Finland, Ireland, New Zealand, and South Africa. Her scholarship has attracted 34 masters/Ph.D. students (supervised to completion) and three postdoctoral fellows**.** Since 2005, her funded resilience projects have facilitated funding for many of their studies and directed their research foci. She has co-authored two books on resilience in the South African context.

As part of what she understands her research mandates to be, Linda has purposefully transformed research findings into curricular content, as well as user- and/or community-friendly products (e.g., resilience-supporting programmes; guidelines for teachers and educational psychologists; short-learning programmes accredited by North-West University)—these products include an activist, social change agenda. She has also documented the research methodologies that facilitated meaningful youth and community engagement.

Positive Psychology Contributions

Socio-ecological processes of resilience represent one of the important theoretical works of Professor Linda Theron. This theory highlights the environmental, contextual, social and cultural factors that come into play in the process of "forging adaptive trajectories despite adversity" (Masten, 2001; Theron et al., 2011). Theron et al. (2011) argued that most of the research on resilience had been conducted in the West and did not adequately accommodate socio-cultural factors that influence the resilience process. The socio-ecological theory of resilience provides a lens for understanding how youths manage resilience-enhancing resources within the context of reciprocating ecologies (Theron et al., 2011). These factors include personal, familial and extra-familial resources. Culture has been identified as one of the ecological interactivity that could promote resilience and foster adaptive behaviours through resources such as the extended family, religious organisations and ethnic social systems (McCubbin & McCubbin, 2005). The utility of culture as an ecological process necessary for resilience is foregrounded in the fact that experiences and behaviours are influenced by unique cultural traditions that might be endemic in resilience.

It is worth reiterating that most of Professor Theron's research has been conducted in the school context among learners and teachers in low-income and at-risk communities in South Africa. As part of her work on resilience among the youth in South Africa, Theron et al. (2011) found that relatedness was a key resilience process in the townships of South Africa. South African youth displayed relatedness through bonds with extended family members and the experience of sharing and reciprocal support. The culture of sharing, especially at school made it easier for South African youths to negotiate their basic needs. Other bonds such as interactions in religious settings also served to foster agency and a source of support.

Using qualitative methodologies, Professor Theron's research has also been targeted at unearthing contextually-relevant definitions of resilience. Theron et al. (2012) noted that based on strong spiritual, kinship, and collective beliefs and practices in Basotho context in South Africa, a resilient youth was an individual deeply connected to active support systems. These support systems, which included family, peer groups and social support services were conduits for the expression of varied practical and emotional assistance. An important finding from this study was that resilience in the South African context could be understood as a synergy between systems that worked collaboratively to provide robust support. Another

contextual definition of resilience is captured in the importance of values. These values included living positively and being respectful to God and the community (Theron et al., 2012). This conceptualisation reveals the Africentric focus on the interaction between the individual and the community (Prozesky, 2009).

Further research in the South African context has demonstrated how children engage in positive adjustment during the first grade of schooling (Kumpulainen et al., 2016). In this article, children's social ecologies were found to be critical in assisting children living in risk-filled contexts to positively adjust in school. Using a variety of data gathering techniques, key results of the study showed that quality relationships, availability of resources and expression of autonomy were characteristics of the school ecology that aided positive adjustment. Quality relationships included interactions with the extended family, teachers and the local women who cooked the food provided by the government. Support was in the form of the provision of basic needs, assisting with homework and offering emotional support (Kumpulainen et al., 2016). The social ecology of the school and the community where participants lived emphasised the crucial nature of education for the growing child. A significant aspect of the study was the use of an ecological perspective in data collection in order to explore the role of key stakeholders in facilitating the positive adjustment of the child. This study demonstrates the importance different ecological systems in fostering the well-being of children at schools.

A group intervention program referred to as the Resilient Educators (REds) was designed to promote resilience among South African educators especially those affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic (Theron, 2014). This program was targeted at enhancing empowerment among South African educators affected by the pandemic. The REds program is an interactive module comprising facts on the pandemic, the giving and receiving of support to learners from loved ones infected and affected by HIV, ways to remain psychosocially well and cope with stigma as well as how teachers could function resiliently in spite of the illness. Using a qualitative methodology, Theron (2014) aimed at changing educator's perception of the pandemic after voluntarily participating in the REds intervention program. The sample comprised 15 participants who were asked to provide symbolic drawings of the pandemic before and after the intervention.

Theron (2014) found that there was a change in educator's perceptions of the pandemic from one of vulnerability to a phenomenon that could be managed. Symbols of grief, loss and unpredictability were replaced by hope, empowerment, compassionate sadness, mastery and acceptance, and tolerance. The immediate post-test findings of positive meanings associated with the pandemic was believed to be necessary in enhancing the functioning of educators in different domains of life. A delayed post-test also revealed positive perceptions such as partnership, hope and tolerance. Theron (2014) concluded that intervention programs on resilience could move an individual from a position of vulnerability to self-empowerment and others' empowerment.

Impact of the REds intervention program is also evident in a study among ten Lesotho teachers (Wood et al., 2012). Wood et al. (2012), using narratives and symbolic drawings, found that teachers infected by HIV/AIDS after the intervention

were now able to make use of ecologically situated protective resources. In addition, teachers were now more likely to perceive themselves as agents of change and also able to form resilience-promoting attachments. The REds program has been found to be successful in a number of other studies (Theron et al., 2009, 2010) and hold much promise for increasing resilience among individuals infected with HIV/AIDS.

Professor Ian Rothmann

Biography of Professor Ian Rothmann

Professor Ian Rothmann is an industrial/organisational psychologist at the North-West University, who graduated with a Ph.D. in industrial psychology at the same university. His research journey began with the topics of stress, burnout and work engagement and has evolved towards flourishing of people in work and organisational contexts. Ian Rothman works at understanding the prospering of people at work, the antecedents and outcomes thereof and intervention programmes that could contribute to prospering of individuals and organisations. Professor Rothmann has published about 183 articles in several peer-reviewed journals and book chapters including *Positive psychology in institutional context* and *From South West Africa to Namibia: Subjective well-being twenty-one years after independence*. He is affiliated with a number of international organisations including Society of Industrial/organisational psychology, Academy of Management and the International Society for quality of Life studies. He has supervised 138 master's students and 41 doctoral students. He is a recipient of a number of research awards and recognitions for his scientific contributions to the field. Since a number of his scholarly work related to positive psychology took place in Namibia together with Dr. Martina Perstling and Dr. Manfred Janik, his positive psychology contribution is discussed in the section on Namibia under Dr. Perstling's and Dr. Janik's contribution sections."

Kenya

Professor Sahaya Selvam

Biography of Professor Sahaya Selvam

Sahaya G. Selvam is currently an associate professor and the programme leader of the master's degree in Counselling Psychology at Tangaza University College, Nairobi, Kenya. His academic preparation includes undergraduate degrees in Philosophy, Sociology, and Religious Studies, and two master's degrees in Philosophy of Religion and Psychology of Religion, and Ph.D. in Psychology from the University of London.

It was during his master's studies in psychology of religion at Heythrop College, University of London that he came in contact with positive psychology. His special area of focus revolves around the conceptualisation of character strengths in religious and cultural domains, particularly in the African context. From his academic preparations in philosophy and theology, Selvam often attempts to evaluate the psychological conceptualisation of character strengths, and critique them from philosophical and religious perspectives (see for instance, Selvam & Poulsom, 2012).

His doctoral work, also at the University of London, explored the mediating role of character strengths in a Christian-mindfulness based intervention attempting to facilitate recovery from addictive behaviour. This project involved not only a systematic literature review, but also an empirical study carried out among university students in Nairobi. On his return from London, together with his commitments in academic administration, Selvam continues to work on empirical projects. Recently he completed a study that was funded by Tangaza University College, involving some African anthropologists in a Delphi process, arriving at a list of character strengths relevant for the contemporary African youth. He hopes to develop a training manual on "character grooming" for young people in Africa. This follows his success in a life-skills training project that he had launched in East Africa prior to his studies in London.

Positive Psychology Contributions

One of the theoretical questions that his work endeavored to answer was the possibility of positive psychology being a theoretical framework for the study of religion in psychology (Selvam, 2011). In this paper, Selvam (2011) argues that in the selection of the VIA-Strengths, Peterson (2006) was of the opinion that these strengths should be readily available across cultures and religious traditions, creating the possibility to understand certain religious experiences under the umbrella of positive psychology. Selvam (2011) further proposes that cultural sensitivity that is associated with the study of religious phenomena in psychology resonates with the way positive psychological research is currently being carried out. This is because positive psychologists tend to look to other cultures and historical eras for perspectives on virtues (Haidt, 2003; Maltby & Hill, 2007).

Regarding the measurement of religious constructs Selvam (2011) intimates that the scientific rigor in positive psychology offers much possibility. For example, the inclusion of spirituality items on quantitative questionnaires. Additionally, the use of qualitative methods in cross-cultural studies in positive psychology could also be applied in the study of religious constructs in different contexts.

Another important theoretical contribution was explication of the psychology of hope from both religious and positive psychological perspectives. From a psychological perspective, Selvam and Poulsom (2012) explore hope as optimism as described in VIA-Strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004); as the interaction between agency and pathway thinking in pursuit of specific goals (Snyder, 2002); as a sense

of purpose targeted at fulfilling a higher purpose (Damon, 2008); and finally as an ultimate concern (Emmons, 1999). These ultimate concerns are rooted in religion and spirituality because they offer meaning to human strivings and provide a unifying framework for understanding the role of religion in an individual's life. Selvam and Poulsom (2012) note that the psychology of hope seems to be progressing from a purely existential perspective (optimism) towards a more religiously anchored view of hope as described by Emmons (1999).

Drawing from the psychology of hope and psychology of religion, Selvam and Poulsom (2012) argue for an interdisciplinary approach to the understanding of hope as positive psychology could avoid a reductionist approach by learning from religion. Looking at hope from a religious perspective allows positive psychology to understand hope not as naïve optimism but a future-oriented phenomenon that provides direction for action. This is an idea that resonates well with Snyder's agency and pathway thinking as well as Damon's sense of purpose. A dialogue between both perspectives would enable psychology to have a more critical perspective on hope, which could include hope-for the afterlife, which has been argued in many religious writings to include the life of the "now" (Verney, 1989).

In exploring religion and positive psychology, Selvam (2015) provides a review of scholarly work on addiction and spirituality research. The focus of this review was to identify potential mediators of the association between spirituality and recovery from addiction in terms of character strengths. Using a method of qualitative systematic review, wisdom, integrity, vitality, humility, forgiveness, kindness, love and hope emerged as character strengths mediating this relationship. Selvam (2015) noted that these strengths seemed to be supported by indigenous religious traditions and could form the basis for grouping these character strengths as a mid-level construct and as a model to be tested in the context of spirituality and addiction research. Other strengths that surprisingly failed to emerge included self-regulation, curiosity and open-mindedness. Further research is however required to understand this pattern of findings.

Moving from the Christian religion, Selvam and Collicutt (2013) explored the presence of the VIA-strengths in African traditional religions. As previously indicated, the ubiquity of character strength across cultures and traditions was a key requirement for it to be included in the VIA-strengths (Peterson, 2006). African traditional religions (ATR) have been referred to as a collection of beliefs, codes and primeval experiences of individuals in Africa in their search for the sacred and unknown (Selvam & Collicutt, 2013). These authors indicated that the African culture is intertwined with their religious expressions (cf., Mbiti, 1969). Using data set from MaryKnoll Institute for African Studies, the authors sought to determine the presence of character strengths in traditional cultural domains.

Strengths of wisdom and knowledge, specifically love of learning and perspective emerged as key character strengths found in traditional domains of 'formation and education' and 'initiation into adulthood rites', respectively. On this finding, Selvam and Collicutt (2013) noted that the acquisition of knowledge takes place in the broader space of the whole community. Pertaining to the strength of courage, persistence, integrity and vitality emerged as key for the domain of 'elderhood and

funeral rites'. The most recurring strength was spirituality, which has been classified as transcendence strength. In almost all the cultural domains beginning from 'pregnancy', 'naming', to 'elderhood and funeral rites', there was always a form of spirituality (Selvam & Collicutt, 2013). Elderhood rites also emerged as the domain with the most character strengths stretching across all the virtues. It would seem that an elder was expected to have wisdom, courage and even be a mediator between the people and God.

Closely related to character strengths and spirituality, Selvam (2015) explored the potential of the Christian contemplative practice in reducing alcohol misuse and facilitating the character strengths of self-awareness, self-regulation, and humility. The sample included two case studies of Christians in Nairobi who exhibited addicted behavior, particularly alcohol misuse (Selvam, 2015). These individuals were trained in a Christian contemplative practice that is likened to mindfulness interventions in positive psychology. The intervention comprised the labyrinth walk, Jesus prayer and a mindful journaling.

The findings of the study showed that there was drastic reduction in the drinking pattern for one participant and a noticeable difference for the second. During the interventions, participants felt closer to God and were more drawn to Christian practices. There was also an increase in character strengths of self-awareness, responsibility, kindness, spirituality and self-regulation. From the findings of the study, Selvam (2015) proposed a three-dimensional model of spirituality that is related to Christian contemplation. This includes an inward movement to the self, upward movement towards God and outward movement towards others. Selvam (2015) suggests that these dimensions could be another form of classification of an underlying dimension of the character strengths.

Zimbabwe

Dr. Magen Mhaka-Mutepfa

Biography of Dr. Magen Mhaka-Mutepfa

Dr. Mhaka-Mutepfa completed her Ph.D. in psychology at the School of Public Health, University of Sydney, Australia focusing on the resilience of grandparents fostering orphans in Zimbabwe. She currently works at the University of Sydney, Australia and has produced a number research publications including 9 book chapters and 11 peer-reviewed articles. Her research focuses on school psychology, religion, resilience, and protective factors for well-being.

Positive Psychology Contributions

Regarding HIV/AIDS and positive psychology research, Mhaka-Mutepfa et al. (2014a) adopted a strengths perspective in exploring the health and well-being of grandmothers that provided care to orphans. They explored the role of personal resources, social resources, object resources and energy in ensuring the well-being and quality of life of grandmothers who provide care for HIV/AIDS orphans. Well-being was defined as the absence of psychopathology, presence of healthy patterns of behaviour and adequate functioning in various domains of life (Norris et al., 2008). The World Health Organisation Quality of Life-Brief version (WHOQOL-BREF) was used to assess well-being across different domains. These authors argued that it was important to know the health status of these carers who have been left with the burden of taking of the young ones amidst challenges such as aging and limited resources.

Using a sample of 241 grandmothers, Mhaka-Mutepfa et al. (2014a, 2014b) found that personal resources such as high self-esteem and mastery predicted physical health, while coping skills in addition to the other two personal assets positively impacted the mental health of grandmothers. This was because when grandmothers had a positive attitude towards care-giving they tended to view this responsibility as a challenge not a burden, which in turn fostered well-being. Mhaka-Mutepfa and colleagues (2014a, 2014b) further argued that the extent to which there was a balance between the demands of care-giving and the resources available to the grandparent determined the health of the care-giver (cf., Hughes et al., 2007). Moreover, social resources such as support from extended family, friends and religious organisations were found to be instrumental in enhancing the well-being of the care-givers. Also important was a healthy physical environment as was evident among grandmothers that lived in urban areas as compared to rural areas because of some of the opportunities that living in an urban area afforded them (Mhaka-Mutepfa et al., 2014a, 2014b). These included access to menial jobs, rental income and financial support from other children who were still alive.

In addition to exploring the impact of protective factors on health and well-being among grandparent care-givers, Mhaka-Mutepfa and her colleagues (2014a, 2014b) also explored the impact of these protective factors on resilience among this group. Age, income and personal assets were associated with higher personal competence for resilience. The acceptance of self and life component of resilience was found to be predicted by type of residence, esteem, mastery, social networks and being spiritual. Income and age emerged as a predictor of resilience because younger care-givers were able to work and effectively provide for the needs of the orphans (Mhaka-Mutepfa et al., 2014a, 2014b).

Personal assets of self-esteem, higher self-efficacy, a meaningful life, problem-solving skills and mastery were responsible for increase in resilience and the ability to cope with the stress of taking care of the grandchildren (Mhaka-Mutepfa et al., 2014a, 2014b). Moreover, support from friends, family and religious organisations were indicated as social assets that facilitated the acceptance of self and life components of resilience and overall role satisfaction. Among all the sources, family

support was found to be the most reliable form of support. Mhaka-Mutepfa et al. (2014a, 2014b) also noted that resilience was influenced by good physical health because it allowed grandparents to offer proper care-giving.

Apart from the vulnerable groups of orphans, disabled children are another group in Zimbabwe requiring extra care and support as a result of the stigma and challenges they face (Mark & Verrest, 2014). Mark and Verrest (2014) used the well-being framework by McGregor (2007) to explore the assets that care-givers of disabled children capitalised on to protect and provide for the needs of the disabled. This well-being framework emphasises the need to understand poverty from the objective and subjective circumstances of the individual as well as existing influential social structures. In this framework, well-being is understood as an interaction between the resources as well as needs and meanings attached to the achievement of goals with all these being shaped by the society (McGregor, 2007).

The sample of the study comprised 61 female care-givers of disabled children and questions ranged from characteristics of the disabled child, resources available, existing needs and strategies employed. The findings of the study showed that there was no external support for disabled children mostly as a result of Zimbabwe being a weak state that failed to cater for the socio-economic needs of disabled children (Mark & Verrest, 2014). Strategies adopted by female care-givers included reducing the effect of poverty, learning new skills that would enable them to provide medical care to the child and also training these children to be independent. When the strain of care-giving became overwhelming and burdensome, female care-givers were found to engage in faith-based acceptance of their current situation (Mark & Verrest, 2014).

Professor Elias Mpofu

Biography of Professor Elias Mpofu

Professor Mpofu is a distinguished visiting professor at the University of Johannesburg, and is a professor of rehabilitation counselling at the University of Sydney, Australia. Formerly professor of rehabilitation services at the Pennsylvania State University, he is also affiliate professor of rehabilitation psychology at the University Wisconsin-Madison, and Graduate Faculty at the University of Kentucky. He was awarded his doctoral degree at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Professor Elias Mpofu is the editor of the *Journal of Psychology in Africa* and the *Australian Journal of Rehabilitation Counselling*, and is the consulting editor of eight other journals, including *Psychological Assessment*, the flagship assessment journal of the American Psychological Association. He has authored and co-authored over 200 works the last 2 decades. Professor Mpofu's research interests coalesce around community-oriented services;—their design, implementation and evaluation in local and international community settings.

Positive Psychology Contributions

A relatively old study by Mpofu (1999) focussed on the effect of modernity on subjective well-being among college students in Zimbabwe. We included this study because it is the only study in Zimbabwe that we were able to identify that has explored subjective well-being from a positive psychology perspective. In exploring subjective well-being, the findings of this study showed that college students were more satisfied with the domains of family, friends, self and food but not so much with recreation and finances (Mpofu, 1999). There was also a higher frequency of positive emotions of affection, joy and pride as compared to negative emotions of anger and fear. Mpofu (1999) indicated that as a result of modernity, college students felt that there was a need to be more emotionally expressive, which was juxtaposed with the cultural expectation of experiencing or expressing less positive emotions. The influence of modernity seemed to be effectively managed against traditional values such as limited emotional expressiveness. Mpofu (1999) also found that younger Zimbabwean college students who were more modern in their outlook experienced greater satisfaction with lives, noting that their personal world views were aligned with the current modern world views. On gender differences, female college students were found to have higher levels of satisfaction with life in comparison with their male counterparts (Mpofu, 1999). One explanation offered for these findings was the current political climate of affirmative action that offered females more opportunities for advancement. This was accompanied by social privileges now open to female that could have influenced their judgements of satisfaction with life.

Namibia

Mrs. Martina Perstling

Biography of Martina Perstling

Mrs. Martina Perstling graduated with a master's degree in clinical psychology at the University of Namibia. She currently works at the school of medicine of the University of Namibia as a lecturer. She has worked closely with renowned South African organisational psychologist, Professor Ian Rothmann. Some of her scholarly works include exploring the relationship between secondary traumatic stress and well-being as well as a book chapter on the subjective well-being of Namibians after the experience of apartheid.

Positive Psychology Contributions

Perstling and Rothmann (2012) provided empirical evidence on the relationship between secondary traumatic stress, psychological well-being and life satisfaction of social workers. The premise of this study is that social workers experience secondary traumatic stress through their daily interactions with victims of traumatic experiences, which could in turn impact their psychological well-being. Perstling and Rothmann (2012) therefore sought to determine whether secondary traumatic stress was related to purpose in life, environmental mastery, self-acceptance and life satisfaction.

The findings of their study showed that secondary traumatic stress was negatively related to environmental mastery, self-acceptance and life satisfaction of social workers in Namibia (Perstling & Rothmann, 2012). The results of the study also revealed that higher levels of life satisfaction were accompanied by environmental mastery, purpose in life and self-acceptance. The findings of the study reinforced the idea that psychological well-being constructs are closely related to life satisfaction (Perstling & Rothmann, 2012). In addition, these findings demonstrated that secondary traumatic stress predisposed individuals to occupational hazards that could negatively influence their psychological well-being.

Perstling and Rothmann (2014) also explored the state of Namibia with respect to Namibians' subjective well-being after the experience of apartheid. These authors indicated that the few existing studies on well-being surprisingly indicated that social workers had average scores on well-being despite surviving a post-war society with trauma issues such as poverty, HIV/AIDS and a disabled population (Perstling & Rothmann, 2012). In addition, Perstling and Rothmann (2014) indicated that research showed that students and social workers experienced almost equal levels of life satisfaction, which could imply that majority of Namibians experienced an average level of life satisfaction.

Dr. Manfred Janik

Biography of Dr. Manfred Janik

Dr. Janik obtained his doctoral degree in clinical psychology at the University of Namibia and is currently working at the same institution as a senior lecturer. His research interests include topics such as hope, life satisfaction, well-being and motivation. He has a number of published articles in the area of work-related well-being.

Positive Psychology Contributions

On work-related well-being, Janik and Rothmann (2015) explored the role of work-role fit, job enrichment, supervisor and co-worker relationship as well as

psychological meaningfulness on the intention to leave among teachers in Namibia. These authors argued that the general dissatisfaction with work tended to influence the high turn-over among teachers in Namibia. The results of their study showed that work-role fit and psychological meaningfulness had direct impact on the intention to leave, while work-role fit and job enrichment predicted psychological meaningfulness (Janik & Rothmann, 2015). In addition, psychological meaningfulness was found to mediate the relationship between intention to leave and work-role fit, indicating that meaningfulness plays a significant role in the retention of teachers (Janik & Rothmann, 2015).

In a related study, Janik (2013) determined to what extent Namibian educators' work-related well-being and intention to resign were influenced by work-role fit and psychological conditions. Janik (2013) found that work engagement was determined by work-role fit, job enrichment and psychological meaningfulness. Organisational commitment was predicted by work-role fit, job enrichment, co-worker relations, supervisor support, sense of coherence, psychological meaningfulness and autonomy. In addition to work engagement as an indicator of work-related well-being, educator turnover was found to be predicted by poor work-role fit, lack of personal resources, weak sense of coherence and lack of psychological meaningfulness (Janik, 2013).

Following these findings, Janik and Rothmann (2016) determined that certain relational factors were influential in predicting psychological meaningfulness and work engagement. These factors included supervisor relations, co-worker relations and emotional exhaustion. The authors indicated that quality and trusting relationships between educators and their supervisors as well as co-workers was instrumental for psychological meaningfulness and availability as well as work engagement. Janik and Rothmann (2016) argued that the importance of relationships at work was grounded in the tendency for colleagues to form an in-group identity (cf., Capozza & Brown, 2000) with members of their group, which in turn could promote organisational success. Moreover, the care and support of co-workers have been found to stimulate meaningfulness in other research contexts (Frost et al., 2000). This is because the employee feels respected, valued and useful to the current work environment. Similar findings emerged among a sample of academics in the University of Namibia (Marques, 2013).

One of the few studies by other authors explicitly focussing on this particular cultural group is that of Martin and Cooper (2016). They studied life satisfaction specific in the Himba group in Namibia. Their findings showed that the Himba people in rural areas had significantly higher levels of life satisfaction compared to the Himbas in urban areas, and that both Himba groups had significantly higher satisfaction with life scores than a comparative (in age and gender) group from the UK. These findings are contrary to typical findings in the west that showed that more wealthy cultures tended to have higher subjective well-being than people in poorer cultures.

Zambia

Professor Mark Holder

Biography of Professor Mark Holder

Professor Holder earned his doctorate at the University of California at Berkeley and completed his postdoctoral training at the Brain Research Institute at UCLA where he conducted brain transplants to reverse impairments caused by brain injuries. Holder is now an associate professor at the University of British Columbia Okanagan, where he studies the science of happiness. He has authored more than 80 scientific publications and leads a research team that is identifying factors (e.g., spirituality and personality) that contribute to happiness in vulnerable populations including children, people living in challenging regions of the world (e.g., Zambia and Northern India), and people with personality disorders (e.g., psychopathy), emotional processing disorders (e.g., alexithymia) and acquired brain injury. His team is also investigating strategies to enhance happiness in adults through experiences with nature and changing their implicit theories of well-being.

Positive Psychology Contributions

Holder et al. (2016) arguing that cross-cultural research on religiosity and spirituality among the youth is limited, aimed at determining the relations among the dimensions of well-being (life satisfaction and happiness), spirituality and religiousness among children and adolescents in Zambia. The present study served as an extension of a study on religion among Canadian children. Holder et al. (2016) argued that Canada is becoming less and less religious while vulnerable populations such as Zambia seemed to become more religious.

Using a sample of 1293 children and adolescents in Zambia, Holder et al. (2016) found that spirituality was a strong predictor of children's life satisfaction and moderate predictor of adolescent happiness and life satisfaction. None of the demographic variables (age, gender or school grade) and religious variables emerged as strong predictors of happiness and life satisfaction especially among children. The findings of this study also demonstrated that despite social and economic challenges, children and adolescents reported high levels of happiness comparable to children in Canada.

Another study conducted by a western researcher in Zambia is that of Gaines (2014). He reported on the testing of the inner well-being model developed by the Wellbeing and Poverty Pathways Project team and tested in another developing country (White et al., 2013) in a rural Zambian context. This seven-domain, model of economic confidence, agency/participation, social connections, close relationships, physical/mental health, competence/self-worth, and values/meaning as

interlinked dimensions of inner wellbeing showed a good fit compared to a single-factor model in this group.

Nigeria

Biography of Dr. Victoria Bada

Dr. Bada is a developmental psychologist in the Department of Psychology, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria, where she has been teaching since 2011. She obtained Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology from University of Ibadan in 2002, M.Sc. in Developmental Psychology in 2006, Diploma Certificate in Primary Rational Emotive Behavioral/Cognitive Behavioral Training from Albert Ellis Institute, New York in 2011, and PhD in Developmental Psychology from University of Ibadan in 2015. She joined as a teaching Assistant at Psychology Department of University of Ibadan, offering self-less service to the Department thereby supervising and mentoring undergraduate students of the Department of Psychology. She is a member of many professional associations, among which are the Nigerian Psychological Association (NPA), Nigerian Association of Developmental Psychologists (NADP), International Society for the Study of Behavioral Development (ISSBD), and International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP). She has published in her area of research and currently has over seventeen (17) publications, mostly in the aspect of psychological well-being. She is the current editor of the departmental magazine '*The Ibadan Psychologist',* and she has served in varying administrative capacities across Departmental and University levels.

Positive Psychology Contributions

One of the studies on psychological well-being in Nigeria has focused on understanding the psychological factors that were necessary for promoting psychological well-being among the spouses of incarcerated male prisoners (Bada et al., 2013). Based on the findings from a sample of 109 female spouses, Bada et al. (2013) argued that problem-focused coping strategy was directly related to the psychological well-being of female partners of prisoners. When these partners were able to focus on how to gather resources to manage the stress they were faced with, psychological well-being was more likely to increase. A noteworthy aspect of this study is the reference to Ryff's Psychological Well-being Theory (Ryff, 1989), which is absent from most research in Nigeria. The authors used the Goldberg (1988) scale, which does not measure psychological well-being as has been theorized in positive psychology. Unfortunately, this is the pattern in most positive psychology research in Nigeria. In addition to coping strategies, perception of the availability of support emerged as important for these women. It was evident that

these women needed to receive love and care from significant others in order to lessen the effect of the absence of their loved ones.

Related to this finding, a different study among female partners of incarcerated males demonstrated that religion, social support and educational attainment were important predictors of psychological well-being (Bada, 2014). In their study, these authors noted that the presence of support from significant others helped spouses to manage the challenges of having a husband in prison. In addition to social support from significant others, the authors suggested that teachings in the Christian faith seemed to act as a protective shield for females with incarcerated partners. It is possible that faith in a higher power provided hope and strength to view their experience as a test that they could overcome. Educational attainment also emerged as a crucial determinant of psychological well-being because education seemed to facilitate a rather realistic perception of the situation as well as providing the skills to manage the difficulties posed by the absence of the husband (Bada, 2014).

Related to the importance of educational attainment for the well-being of female partners of prisoners, Bada et al. (2013) tested the impact of a psycho-education program on psychological well-being of these partners. The psycho-education program was designed to assist participants to manage stressors using dysfunctional coping and distorted beliefs training. This program enabled participants to identify their cognitive distortions and also how to positively influence their thinking regarding their current situation. Using a quasi-experimental design with 16 participants, Bada et al. (2013) found that the psycho-education was effective in improving psychological well-being among partners of incarcerated males.

Dr. Aaron Agbo

Biography of Dr. Aaron Agbo

Dr. Agbo is a lecturer at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka and his research interests include meaning and sources of happiness, validation of scales and statistics. After the mandatory national youth service popularly known as NYSC (National Youth Service Corps), he proceeded to the same university in 2007 where he obtained a Masters Degree in Experimental Psychology in 2008. He further enrolled for Doctor of Philosophy in Experimental Psychology and was awarded a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree in Experimental Psychology in 2013. He has published 6 articles in peer-reviewed journals. Some of his works relevant to positive psychology is reviewed below.

Positive Psychology Contributions

Research on a typical PP facet, namely happiness, had been conducted by Agbo and colleagues in the Nigerian collectivist context. Agbo et al. (2012) conducted a socio-cultural analysis on happiness in Nigeria, which is seemingly paradoxically

relatively high as shown in other large multi-country studies, despite the fact that poverty reigns in Nigeria. They concluded that religion plays a more important role in happiness in Nigeria, than economic, democratic and development factors. However, religion as a source of happiness is a consolatory reaction amidst hardships and does not really reflect satisfaction with life. They accentuate the difference between communion and interdependence, and argued the importance of not just lumping countries together in making conclusions about happiness and its determinants. Agbo and Ome (2016) also explored the lay conceptions of happiness and its determinants in a group of Igbo students in Eastern Nigeria. They were asked to define happiness in their own words and indicate the things they think make people happy. Analyses showed that participants defined happiness with reference to both affect and cognition, with more words referring to affect. The students defined happiness mostly with reference to the self and not with a focus on others, which is often assumed in studies conducted from a western perspective in collectivist communities. Gender differences were found and indicated that females more often express interdependent views of happiness, whereas males had a more individualist focus. The things that were regarded as mostly making people happy were participation, affection, and leisure activities.

Other studies in positive psychology in the Nigerian context is highlighted in the following paragraphs. Post-traumatic growth is another area of research that is closely related to positive psychology and has been explored in the Nigerian context. Ifeagwazi and Chukwuorji (2014) explored the relationship between religious commitment and post-traumatic growth among a sample of 478 students in Delta State Polytechnic. This study was premised on the fact that adults who had strong intrapersonal and interpersonal religious commitments, as expressed in their depth of knowledge of spiritual concepts and emotional ties with others of similar religious orientations would have inner resources necessary for post-traumatic growth (Ifeagwazi & Chukwuorji, 2014). Intrapersonal religious commitment increased post-traumatic growth because such commitments provided platforms for development that was beneficial after the experience of a traumatic event.

In relation to the findings of the importance of emotional ties derived from religious commitment, which in turn enhances post-traumatic growth, Chukwuorji et al. (2015) found that family support was key for ensuring successful ageing among the Biafra war generation. These groups of individuals were witnesses to the Nigerian civil war between 1967 and 1970 and suffered trauma from the extermination and losses associated with the war. Although successful ageing is not directly linked to psychological well-being, some of its indicators are similar to well-being such as having a positive outlook of the future and being in a pleasant mood (Chukwuorji et al., 2015). The authors indicated that adequate family support predicted successful ageing in the Biafra war generation. Interestingly, apart from benefits of mutual relationships, the well-being of the elderly seemed to also be predicated upon the provision of instrumental support for younger members of the household (Chukwuorji et al., 2015). This finding points to the importance of an interconnectedness model of interpersonal relationships where support is not only received but also given in order to facilitate well-being. The above mentioned studies

in Nigeria linked to mental health and well-being highlight the importance of relationships and religious beliefs as sources of functioning well, as is also found in many other African studies.

In a study with Nigerian undergraduate students Onyedibe et al. (2015) explored the relationship between coping, emotional intelligence and psychological well-being measured with scales developed in the West, and found the expected association between emotional intelligence and psychological well-being as measured with the Ryff scale. Ugwu et al. (2016) conducted semi-structured interviews with women at a local market in a city in South-Eastern Nigeria about their daily lives. They used an interpretative phenomenological perspective and established that work-life balance were linked to notions of good progress across roles, proper time allocation to roles, as well as harmony and/or synchrony across roles which the authors indicate to be slightly different from the popular understandings.

Ghana

Dr. Angelina Wilson

Biography of Angelina Wilson

Dr. Wilson obtained her master's degree in health promotion and development at the University of Bergen, Norway. As part of her master's programme, she explored the resources for well-being among female porters living in Accra. This was followed by a Ph.D. in psychology at Stellenbosch University exploring aspects of mental health among Ghanaian adolescents in the Northern region. As part of her post-doctoral fellowship, Angelina was nominated to join the Eudaimonic Hedonic Happiness Inventory team investigating the manifestation of well-being across different cultures. Her research interest is in the area of well-being in deprived contexts among adolescents and older individuals and has published scholarly articles in peer-reviewed journals and made a number of conference presentations both locally and internationally. Dr. Wilson is currently working at the Human Sciences Research Council, South Africa, at the level of a research specialist. She is involved in a well-being project that taps into improving well-being in a context of inequality and poverty.

Positive Psychology Contributions

Using a sample of 717 adolescents from the northern region of Ghana, hope, perceptions of support and life satisfaction emerged as significant predictors of emotional well-being but not emotional distress (Wilson, 2015). The findings of the study demonstrated that even in impoverished contexts, positive experiences such as being hopeful, perceiving that support would be available when needed and

positive judgments of an individual's current life situation were necessary in facilitating well-being.

In order to provide further insights into the manifestations of positive experiences in other contexts, Wilson and Somhlaba (2016b) carried out an in-depth study of hope and life satisfaction. In a qualitative exploration of hope and life satisfaction among 18 adolescents from the northern region of Ghana, Wilson and Somhlaba (2016b) found that although hope was a personalized cognitive construct, it also had strong relational dimensions. Hope was engendered through interactions with friends, family and teachers. The authors indicated that the advice and encouragement received from these significant others enabled them to carve out a pathway and create feelings of agency from their present position of lack to the desired future. As seen in previous studies (Addai et al., 2014), religion emerged as crucial for engendering hope, because God was seen as a source to which adolescents could turn to for answers in academic and economic domains (Wilson & Somhlaba, 2016b).

In line with quantitative western research on life satisfaction for example, Danielsen et al. (2009) and Edwards and Lopez (2006), Wilson and Somhlaba (2016b) found that being connected to others and the experience of school-related support were crucial for the evaluation of the adolescent's life as satisfactory. As expected, performing well in school was also described as essential to being satisfied with life. Noteworthy from these findings is the crucial role of support, which was accompanied by the need for the provision of material resources. This finding points to the important role of context in understanding positive experiences. In a more affluent region, it is possible that the provision of material resources would not emerge as crucial for judgments of satisfaction with life as evident in the work of Sarriera et al. (2014).

As evident in previous research in the Ghanaian context (Glozah & Pevalin, 2014), social support seems to be an important construct influencing well-being of children, adolescents and adults alike. As a result, Wilson and Somhlaba (2016a) qualitatively explored the dynamics and perceptions of support among adolescents living impoverished contexts in Ghana, in order to determine how these are related to well-being. Interestingly, social support and social ties were not inherently useful in themselves but rather their utility for well-being was dependent on the quality of interactions across different networks (Wilson & Somhlaba, 2016a). These authors also noted some problematic social interactions including face-saving when seeking instrumental support. The authors argued that as much as there was a dire need for instrumental support, adolescents took cognizance of social exchanges that undermined their self-esteem and feelings of adequacy (Wilson & Somhlaba, 2016a).

Apart from indicators of psychological well-being, there is research evidence on the role of demographic variables of age, gender and religious affiliation in the relationship across well-being constructs. For instance, the mediating role of gender in the relationship between hope, perceptions of support and life satisfaction and positive mental health has been explored using a socio-cultural lens among a sample of 717 adolescents in the northern region of Ghana (Wilson & Somhlaba, 2017b). A

key finding of the present study was that there were gender differences in relationship across the constructs and with positive mental health. The authors found that hope predicted life satisfaction only among females. In addition, life satisfaction was found to be related to emotional well-being only among male adolescents. One of the key explanatory factors for the findings of this study was the socio-cultural connotations of what it means to be a male or female in the Ghanaian context. Based on previous studies in this context (cf., Buchanan, 2014), the authors intimated that the male position of privilege seemed to provide a pathway for their well-being.

A common phenomenon in the northern region was the minimal regard and investment given to girl-child education compared to males. Girls were regarded as the property of their future husband's households and as a result investment in their education was a futile effort. Moreover, school-related support was mostly targeted towards the males in the family to the detriment of females when there were limited resources (Buchanan, 2014). This position of disadvantage could have resulted in adolescent females deriving satisfaction mainly when they were able to find alternative pathways to the attainment of their goals and a confidence in their ability to achieve set goals (Wilson & Somhlaba, 2017b).

Other noteworthy findings from this study included the fact that males and Christian adolescents had higher levels of hope than females and Muslim adolescents. Males and Muslim adolescents were also found to score higher on emotional well-being than their female and Christian adolescent counterparts (Wilson & Somhlaba, 2017b). However, there were no significant age differences for hope, perceptions of support, life satisfaction, emotional well-being and distress. Given that these normative data on the indicators of positive mental health among adolescents were exploratory and the first of its kind among adolescents in the northern region, the authors strongly argued that there is a need for further research in order to fully understand the relationship between demographic variables and positive mental health in this context.

Although no new scale measuring positive psychological attributes has been developed in Ghana, there has been scale validation of important constructs that tend to predict well-being. One of which is social support. The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; Zimet et al., 1988) was validated among a sample of school-going adolescents (Wilson et al., 2016). This scale was found to have good psychometric properties. The original three-factor structure was replicated and the emerging Cronbach alpha was .81.

Other studies in positive psychology in the Ghanaian context is highlighted in the following paragraphs An indirect attempt to explore well-being in its positive sense is evident in the work of Glozah (2015), who was concerned with qualitatively exploring health and well-being among adolescents using a psychosocial perspective. The findings of the study showed that health and well-being were understood as being able to function optimally, which included feeling of mental strength, ability to take decisions and a general sense of vitality (Glozah, 2015). Other conceptualisations of health and well-being included reference to being able to engage in sporting activities and not being ill with malaria. This study contributes

to the understanding of well-being from bottom-up approach, which is currently an under-researched area in positive psychology.

A direct attempt at subjective well-being research in Ghana comes with the work of Addai et al. (2014). This study has focused on exploring the predictors of happiness and life satisfaction in this context (Addai et al., 2014). This work represents one of the few studies that have explored well-being from a positive perspective. Using the World Value Survey, these authors identified some of the important predictors of happiness and life satisfaction in the Ghanaian context. These predictors included economic, cultural, social capital and health variables. Unsurprisingly, religious variables emerged as important predictors of happiness and life satisfaction. The authors argued that religion tends to provide social support and a sense of meaning in life, which seemed to have a positive impact on happiness and subjective well-being (Addai et al., 2014). Unexpectedly, individuals at a lower socio-economic status were found to be happier than the middle and upper class. For example, individuals in the Northern region (a poorer region) were found to be happier than those in economically advanced South.

Other findings of this study showed that social capital in the form of community engagement was positively related to well-being in the Ghanaian context. Being a collectivist society, relationships form a key aspect of structure of the society. This finding has been corroborated in other studies among orphans (Salifu Yendork & Somhlaba, 2015) and adolescents (Amoah & Jørgensen, 2014; Glozah & Pevalin, 2014; Owusu et al., 2011).

On the whole, Addai et al. (2014) found that Ghanaians were less satisfied with their lives although they were happy. This finding points to a clear distinction between affective and cognitive dimensions of subjective well-being. This finding also showed that although Ghanaians are generally easy-going people, due to the economic hardships, individuals tend to be less satisfied with their life. The presence of material deprivation and crime seemed to have a rather significant impact on the life satisfaction of this Ghanaian sample.

Tanzania

Dr. Janvier Rugira

Biography of Dr. Janvier Rugira

Dr. Janvier Rugira is a lecturer in Psychology at the University of Johannesburg. His research focuses on positive psychology, cross-cultural psychology in Africa as well as the development of students' support services and well-being. Dr. Rugira's current project focuses on the contextual manifestation of well-being across different cultures. Dr. Rugira holds a master's degree in Counselling Psychology from Daystar University (KE) and a Ph.D. in Psychology from Northwest University

(Potchefstroom, South Africa). His doctoral thesis focused on the development and evaluation of a psychological well-being programme for university students.

Positive Psychology Contributions

In Tanzania we could only identify the work of Janvier Rugira. He determined the prevalence of well-being in Tanzanian students using Keyes' MHC scale (developed in the West; Rugira et al., 2013). Rugira et al. (2013) also developed a well-being program based on Ryff's (1989) theorizing on well-being. This study showed that mental health scores increased after participation in the intervention program.

Indigenous Perspectives and Positive Psychology

In Cameroon Nsamenang, although not a positive psychology researcher, has done important work on development from an African perspective that is worth mentioning because it highlights important points on functioning which resonates with the well-being framework. Nsamenang (1992, 2006) propounded the theory of social ontogenesis, which espouses that human development is closely linked to the social ecology in which the development takes place. Using impressionistic data from Nso people of Cameroon, Nsamenang (1992) argues that social–ecological contexts and cultural systems interact with biology to nurture development in children.

Social ontogenetic stages of development comprise seven stages of social selfhood. These include the period of the newborn, social priming, social apprenticing, social entrée, social internment, adulthood, old age and death. Each of these stages comes with developmental tasks that are defined by cultural expectations. In the work of Nsamenang (2006, p. 295), development is defined as the "acquisition and growth of the physical, cognitive, social and emotional competencies required to engage fully in family and society". Nsamenang (2006) argues that we do not only need other humans but we also have the social responsibility to learn from these other humans in attainment of full personhood. Self-definition cannot be achieved without reference to other communities in terms of interconnectedness and the various roles we perform in relation to others.

Some researchers suggested that collectivism as construed in Western and East Asian studies is not exactly the same in an African context. Wissing and Temane (2013b) opine also that the Africa-version of cultural collectivism is different from the Asian manifestations of collectivist orientations, and that this influences the way well-being is expressed. For example, in an African context expressions are more 'sunny' whereas in Asian contexts they are more tempered.

Future of Positive Psychology in Sub-Saharan Africa

Benefits of Positive Psychology

Even with the challenges and the seemingly delayed progress in positive psychology in Sub-Saharan Africa, current work has shown that positive psychology has benefited people in this context. There is a great potential for positive psychology to develop further in the sub-Saharan regions especially because of the 'naturalness' of *Ubuntu*, connectedness, appreciation of wisdom and spirituality in these regions. These facets may be so integral to human life that they are accepted as self-evident and not something that need to be researched from a distance. Of course, hardships, war, poverty and famine in these regions focus attention more on survival needs at the moment and with better economic and democratic developments a stronger focus on well-being aspects may be expected. But even in these circumstances the strength of relationships and connectedness fulfill a preventive and promotive function for well-being even though research on these topics may be lacking. A benefit of PP in this region, as in others in the world, is especially its non-threatening character, catching on with the best in people instead of trying to remediate what is wrong with them—while still taking cognizance of both sun and shadow in life, the positive and the negative. Research in PP also enriches the multi- and transdisciplinary understanding of health and epidemiology of health and well-being (e.g. Vorster et al., 2000).

Why is Positive Psychology Late in Sub-Saharan Africa

Compared to the West, positive psychology research is lagging behind, and a worthwhile question would be why this is the case—especially in view of the nearly 'natural' inclining to be human and others-oriented. However, asking this question in the above manner presupposes that countries in sub-Saharan Africa have not made any strides in understanding the positive aspects of human nature, which is tantamount to exploring the indicators of psychological well-being. We suggest that in addition to trying to explore the reasons behind the minimal research on positive psychology in sub-Saharan Africa, we need to look at to what extent positive psychology principles have effectively opened up to theoretical understandings of well-being from the rest of the world—especially Africa.

We argue that positive psychology theories have been largely based on testing Western samples with the results being extrapolated to the rest of the globe (cf. Delle Fave et al., 2011; Henrich et al., 2010). We do however acknowledge that there has been extensive exploration of positive psychology theories in Asian contexts (Donaldson et al., 2015; Hashim, 2013). Based on the work of major positive psychologists highlighted in the preceding sections, it is clear that most research consists of western constructs being tested in Africa using a top-down approach of

presupposed hypothetical relationships across the constructs. There seems to be a paternalistic approach in the use of the principles of positive psychology that is not fully accommodating of theoretical and conceptual views from indigenous perspectives. With the case of cross-cultural studies in positive psychology (for example, Brannan et al., 2012; Schwarz et al., 2012), there is the tendency to conclude that there are cultural differences in the relationship across positive psychology constructs, however these constructs are hardly qualitatively explored to have a better understanding of what it means in the context in which it is been used. Positive psychology appears to be late in sub-Saharan Africa perhaps because psychology and positive psychology from the West had been ignorant in accommodating the uniqueness of other contexts in the theorizing of psychological and subjective well-being.

Another noteworthy issue is whether sub-Saharan Africa is actually late or if positive psychology has failed to identify other conceptualisations of psychological well-being that is unique to the African context. Has positive psychology considered other contextually-relevant indicators of well-being and mental health that are presented in other ways rather than the well-established theoretical frameworks? For instance, research on communal well-being (Amoah & Jørgensen, 2014; Wilson, 2012), maintaining trust and religion (Addai et al., 2013), and development (Nsamenang, 2006) could be explored to see how they resonate with pre-established positive psychology constructs and what impact these have on the psychological well-being of the individuals in this context. In order to conclusively say that positive psychology has delayed in this context, it would be worthwhile to explore mental/psychological well-being from the African perspective. An exploration of psychological well-being from an African perspective would explain where the seeming lacunae in research exists.

Further reflections on why positive psychology seems to be delayed in sub-Saharan has pointed to the direction of the current preoccupation with illness (Bird et al., 2010). The burden of disease, war and the concomitant challenges of lacking resources (Kleintjes et al., 2010) have resulted in researchers' and practitioners' focusing on reduction of distress without opening up to the possibility of promotion of well-being that could have resultant impact on the level of the burden of disease. Moreover, the lack of adequate evidence on the implication of understanding and promoting positive mental health (Wilson & Somhlaba, 2017a, 2017b) has resulted in little or no investment on this area of research.

The Way Forward

Clearly there is a lot to be done in positive psychology research in the sub-Saharan African region. One of the areas requiring attention is the development of theories of psychological well-being that are contextually relevant. Such theories should not only test preexisting constructs of well-being but should also take into account the African tradition and cultural perspectives that might play a role in the experience of

well-being. Actually, much more research should be conducted in sub-Saharan regions, but also across the world, on the role of culture in psychosocial well-being and experienced quality of life, especially with a qualitative bottom-up approach. Such studies will contribute to a deeper scientific understanding of well-being and the dynamics involved, but may also inform public policy at national levels that can pave the way for application and promotion of psychosocial health and well-being.

Based on evidence from existing research in this region, we suggest that it is necessary to take into consideration the socio-ecological context in which such theories would be employed. Key considerations include the interactions across systems in an ecological context, cultural underpinnings of interrelations, and meanings and social constructions of functioning and well-being. Other transient ecological conditions include political climates, economic issues and values across the life span.

Also pertaining to theory development, there would be a need for a bottom-up approach to research. More qualitative studies targeted at exploring what mental/psychological well-being means in the African context is crucial to developing contextually-relevant theories. The bottom-up approach would also aid in unearthing cultural values that might not be captured when using a top-down approach to theory development.

Given the lacunae in research on novel assessment tools, we suggest that this is another area of priority. In order to ensure the validity of new theories that would be developed using a bottom-up approach, psychological instruments must be created and tested. It is possible that some of the existing western scales could be relevant to measuring psychological well-being but these must be validated in the African context. For most of the research carried out in the countries across the region, there is the tendency to use preexisting tools without determining their psychometric strength for measuring the specified construct in the present context. In validating preexisting tools, consideration must also be given to language and translation issues that might affect the applicability of the scale in the current context.

Among all the relevant constructs that emerged as related to mental health, religion and social support seemed to cut across most studies. Future positive psychology research in sub-Saharan Africa could explore even further what about religion makes it so critical for psychological well-being. Questions on religiosity, spirituality and religious processes and how they interact with different aspects of well-being could be explored. Positive psychology could also consider what forms of theories could emerge from a study of religion with a positive lens. Can there be a theoretical framework of religion and positive psychology? Further distinctions between spirituality and religion is also required in the context of research in Africa.

Only pockets of intervention research were identified among the work of major positive psychologists in the region. There is therefore a dire need for research demonstrating that positive psychology interventions do work. However, the designs of these interventions should be grounded in theories that have been tested and are found to be relevant to the African context. As much as we do encourage the use of well-defined and pre-established intervention programs from the West, these need to

be adapted to the needs and cultural values of the African context. Information on what psychological well-being means in this context should guide the design of interventions and choice of methods for implementing such interventions. The corporation and participation of stakeholders in the design and implementation of interventions must be duly considered.

In order to encourage a complementary approach to the promotion of mental health, which includes not only the reduction of risk factors but also the enhancement of positive experiences, evidence of "what works is necessary". Such evidence could also ensure the attention of policy-makers towards investing in large scale research on understanding and promoting the psychological well-being of the population.

Conclusion

In summary, there is already rich evidence of positive psychology research in the context of sub-Saharan Africa. There are some well-developed pockets of research, especially in South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya and Ghana, but also smaller units and individuals working in this field elsewhere in Africa, some mostly applying western constructs in these African contexts rather than exploring indigenous understandings of well-being. There is also some evidence of research on well-being without reference to specific constructs or theories from traditional western PP, and some differences with findings from western contexts highlighted. The important role of culture in understandings of well-being is now starting to emerge, especially in some Nigerian studies. Another trend that was found while reviewing existing studies was the use of outcome measures that do not capture mental health and psychological well-being from a functioning well or positive psychological theoretical perspective, indicating that well-being and mental health is currently still often conceptualized in research as the absence of illness rather than the presence of positive aspects.

Some of the studies revealed that the current political and economic climate has implications for subjective well-being. For example, in Zimbabwe the failure of the government to support disabled children increased the burden on their care-givers with a resultant negative impact on well-being. In addition, policies that support female empowerment in Zimbabwe seemed to have implication for their subjective well-being. However, we find a contradictory trend in Zambia, where children and adolescents had high levels of happiness despite the economic situation in Zambia. This finding is similar to some observations in Nigeria, and was replicated in Ghana using the World Value Survey but we must indicate that the life satisfaction of Ghanaians was characterized as rather low. In Namibia also, despite the aftermath of the apartheid the nation seemed to be experiencing average levels of satisfaction with life as seen in the sample of social workers and college students.

In the above sections we also refer to several studies conducted by western psychologists in small or large multi-country studies on aspects of well-being in several African countries. These studies were mostly conducted with measures

developed in the West and mostly refer to subjective well-being in terms of affect and satisfaction with life. On the one hand, these studies are part of globalization and they are informative of psychosocial well-being in these countries. However, on the other hand, the question can be asked if this is a new form of (academic) colonization in the cases where African scholars are not included as major role players and co-authors, and when contextual and cultural factors apart from basic socio-demographic factors are not taken into account. Time will tell.

Resource Page for Readers

Name of Researcher	University Affiliation	City and country	E-mail Address
Prof Marie Wissing	North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus	Potchefstroom, South Africa	Marie.wissing@nwu.ac.za
Prof Linda Theron	University of Pretoria	Pretoria, South Africa	Linda.theron@nwu.ac.za
Prof Ian Rothmann	North-West University, Vaal Triangle Campus	Vaal Triangle, South Africa	ian@ianrothmann.com
Prof Tharina Guse	University of Pretoria, South Africa	Johannesburg, South Africa	tharina.guse@up.ac.za
Prof Itumeleng Khumalo	University of the Free State, South Africa	Vaal Triangle, South Africa	KhumaloIP@ufs.ac.za
Dr Lusilda Schutte	North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus, South Africa	Potchefstroom, South Africa	Lusilda.schutte@nwu.ac.za
Dr. Janvier Rugira	University of Johannesburg, South Africa (originally from Tanzania)	Johannesburg, South Africa	jrugira@uj.ac.za
Dr. Magen Mhaka-Mutepfa	University of Sydney (originally from Zimbabwe)	Sydney, Australia	Mmut7422@sydney.edu.au
Prof Elias Mpofu	University of Sydney (originally from Zimbabwe)	Sydney, Australia	Elias.mpofu@sydney.edu.au
Dr. Manfred Janik	University of Namibia	Namibia	mjanik@unam.na
Dr. Aaron Agbo	University of Nsukka, Nigeria	Nsukka, Nigeria	adibeaaron@yahoo.com
Dr. Victoria Bada	University of Ibadan, Nigeria	Ibadan, Nigeria	oluwabukolabada@gmail.com
Dr. Franklin Glozah	University of Ghana	Accra, Ghana	Franklin.glozah@ug.edu, gh
Dr. Angelina Wilson Fadiji	University of Pretoria (originally from Ghana)	Pretoria South Africa	angelina.wilsonfadiji@up.ac.za
Dr. Salifu Yendork	University of Ghana	Accra, Ghana	joanasalifu@gmail.com

Positive Psychology Organizations/Groups in Sub-Saharan Africa Region

Organization	Chair	Institutional Affiliation
South African Psychology Association (SAPPA)	Professor Tharina Guse	University of Pretoria tharina.guse@up.ac.za
African Network of Positive Psychology (ANPP)	Prof Khumalo, Itumeleng & co-chair Dr. Angelina Wilson Fadiji	University of the Free State KhumaloIP@ufs.ac.za University of Pretoria angelina.wilsonfadiji@up.ac.za
North-West University Research Group, Potchefstroom Campus South Africa	Prof Marie Wissing	Marie.wissing@nwu.ac.za
North-West University Optentia Research Group, Vaal Triangle Campus, South Africa	Prof Ian Rothmaan	ian@ianrothmann.com

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