

Investigating the Role of Character Strengths Use and Well-Being Across Cultures

This research project focuses on understanding how using specific character strengths contributes to well-being and whether there can also be unintended negative effects. Character strengths are positive personality traits that help people thrive, foster meaningful relationships, and support their communities. We are studying three particular strengths: spirituality, orientation to promote good, and delayed gratification.

- Spirituality involves a sense of purpose and connection to something greater, whether through secular or religious means.
- Orientation to promote good refers to acting in ways that benefit others, driven by kindness and moral integrity.
- Delayed gratification is the ability to resist immediate temptations to achieve meaningful long-term goals.

While these strengths are widely recognized as enhancing well-being, emerging evidence suggests that their excessive or unbalanced use may sometimes harm emotional health.

Why is this study important?

Most previous studies on character strengths focus on single countries, often in Western contexts, and use data collected at one point in time. This limits our understanding of how these strengths work across different cultures and over time. To address this, we will analyze data from over 200,000 people in 22 diverse countries, including Argentina, Australia, Brazil, China, Egypt, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria, the Philippines, Poland, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Tanzania, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States. This will provide a global perspective and allow us to explore how character strengths affect well-being in different cultural and social contexts.

We aim to answer four key questions:

1. How do these three character strengths influence well-being outcomes?
2. What mechanisms explain their effects on well-being?
3. Are there two-way relationships, where well-being also affects how people use these strengths?
4. What factors influence the use of these character strengths?

We expect that the effects of character strengths will vary across countries and cultures. For instance, using these character strengths might have stronger positive effects in some places, while in others, the negative effects of overusing them might be more noticeable.

This study will provide new insights into how character strengths help people live happier and healthier lives. It will also identify situations where these strengths might lead to stress or harm if used excessively. By examining well-being comprehensively—spanning psychological, social, physical, and financial aspects—we hope to offer guidance for individuals, policymakers, and organizations on how to foster strengths in ways that promote balanced, sustainable well-being worldwide.