

## A New Forum for Sharing Happiness and Health Research

Jolanta Burke<sup>1</sup>  and Gökmen Arslan<sup>2</sup> 

Positive psychology, which is the science of conditions, traits and experiences associated with wellbeing and other forms of optimal human functioning (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), advocates primarily for a “head-up” approach, whereby the researchers’ focus is the mind and ways in which individuals, groups and organizations can flourish. In contrast, lifestyle medicine, which is a set of evidence-based lifestyle approaches, such as a whole-food diet, regular physical activity or adequate sleep (Frates et al., 2021), focuses primarily on the body and only briefly broaches the impact of the psyche on health. Combining these two fields of evidence-based research offers a new and exciting pathway for further research in the wellbeing domain.

Recently, great strides have been made in rationalizing the aptness of this alliance. The main tenets of it focus on the application of evidence-based positive psychology approaches in healthcare (Liana et al., 2020; Lianov et al., 2019), as well as expanding positive psychology interventions to somatopsychic constructs, and adjusting them to ensure they enhance both mental and physical health (Arslan & Burke, 2021; Carson et al., 2019; Duncan et al., 2021; Dunne & Schubert, 2021; Morton, 2018). While this is a good starting point, a more integrated approach is required to fully appreciate the extent of both fields and ways, in which they can enrich research.

Positive psychology can support lifestyle medicine by refocusing the researchers’ reference point from only preventing illness to promoting a good life for individuals, groups, and organizations. Additionally, lifestyle medicine can be particularly useful for positive psychology researchers and practitioners by expanding its measurements beyond psychological tests and assessing the behavioral, physical, and physiological outcomes of flourishing. Notably, research relating to the nexus between wellbeing and physiology is not a recent development; many studies have linked the body and mind when exploring wellbeing. For example, positive emotions have been linked with cardiac vagal tone (Kok & Fredrickson, 2010), resistance to illness (Cohen et al., 2006), longevity (Fernández-Ballesteros & Sánchez-Izquierdo, 2019; Xu & Roberts, 2010), and broader visual attention (Wadlinger & Isaacowitz, 2006). Additionally, concepts such as optimism have been found to be associated with prevention of death from cancer, heart disease, stroke, respiratory disease and infection (Kim et al., 2017). However, additional studies are required, which will help both clinical and non-clinical population embrace the body and mind contribution to flourishing. We hope that the *Journal of Happiness and Health* will provide a forum for researchers and practitioners to debate some of these advancements.

Whilst health is often understood by clinicians as the absence of illness, the World Health Organisation’s definition expands health away from deficit and towards “a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing” (WHO, 1948). This perspective is aligned with positive psychology which promotes models of wellbeing that are perceived as the presence of elements that act as “protective padding” against bad times and illness (Burke, 2021). They include PERMA, which stands for positive affect, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment (Seligman, 2011); Mental Health Continuum, comprising of emotional, psychological and social wellbeing (Keyes, 2002); and positive appraisal (positive emotions and life satisfaction), positive characteristics (emotional stability, vitality, optimism, resilience, self-esteem), and positive functioning (engagement, competence, meaning, positive relationship; Huppert & So, 2013). In the current journal, we welcome articles that discuss wellbeing from a non-

<sup>1</sup>Centre for Positive Psychology and Health, RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences, Ireland.  
**Contact:** [jolantaburke@rcsi.ie](mailto:jolantaburke@rcsi.ie)

<sup>2</sup>Department of Psychological Counseling and Guidance, Burdur Mehmet Akif Ersoy University, Burdur, Turkey.  
**Contact:** [garslan@mehmetakif.edu.tr](mailto:garslan@mehmetakif.edu.tr)

deficit or balanced deficit and non-deficit perspectives.

Whilst some developments have been made to advance the link between body and mind in the context of flourishing, further research is required to explore it in more detail. This may include assessments of positive assets in both clinical and non-clinical populations, physiological and behavioral evaluation of positive psychology interventions, as well as broadening the range of interventions that enhance psychological wellbeing to include physical and physiological indicators of flourishing. Furthermore, the current journal welcomes research relevant to healthcare professionals, but it does not limit it to the healthcare environment, as we invite a wider community of coaches, consultants, educators and other practitioners who integrate positive lifestyle choices in the workplace, education, and community to contribute to the wellbeing and health debate.

### Acknowledgements

We wish to thank Kelly-Ann Allen, PhD, (Monash University) for their time and consultation when writing this editorial.

### ORCID

Jolanta Burke  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2209-782X>  
Gökmen Arslan  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9427-1554>

Published Online: September 1, 2021

### References

- Arslan, G., & Burke, J. (2021). Positive education to promote flourishing in students returning to school after COVID-19 closure. *Journal of School and Educational Psychology*, 1(1), 1–5.
- Burke, J. (2021). *The ultimate guide to implementing wellbeing programmes for school*. Routledge.
- Carson, S., Cook, A., Peabody, S., Scheinbaum, S., & Williamson, L. (2019). The Impact of Positive Psychology on Behavioral Change and Healthy Lifestyle Choices. In J. M. Rippe (Ed.), *Lifestyle Medicine* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Cohen, S., Alper, C. M., Doyle, W. J., Treanor, J. J., & Turner, R. B. (2006). Positive Emotional Style Predicts Resistance to Illness After Experimental Exposure to Rhinovirus or Influenza A Virus. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 68(6), 809-815. <https://doi.org/10.1097/01.psy.0000245867.92364.3c>
- Duncan, A. R., Jaini, P. A., & Hellman, C. M. (2021). Positive Psychology and Hope as Lifestyle Medicine Modalities in the Therapeutic Encounter: A Narrative Review. *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine*, 15, 6-13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1559827620908255>
- Dunne, P. J., & Schubert, C. (2021). Editorial: New mind-body interventions that balance human psychoneuroimmunology. *Frontiers in Psychology: Health Psychology*, 12, 706584. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.706584>
- Fernández-Ballesteros, R., & Sánchez-Izquierdo, M. (2019). Are psycho-behavioral factors accounting for longevity? *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02516>
- Frates, B., Bonnet, J. P., Joseph, R., & Peterson, J. A. (2021). *Lifestyle medicine handbook: An introduction to the power of healthy habits*. Healthy Learning.
- Huppert, F. A., & So, T. T. C. (2013). Flourishing across Europe: Application of a new conceptual framework for defining well-being. *Social Indicators Research*, 110(3), 837-861.
- Keyes, C. L. M. (2002). The mental health continuum: From languishing to flourishing in life. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 43(2), 207-222. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3090197>
- Kim, E. S., Hagan, K. A., Grodstein, F., DeMeo, D. L., De Vivo, I., & Kubzansky, L. D. (2017). Optimism and cause-specific mortality: A prospective cohort study. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 185(1), 21-29. <https://doi.org/10.1093/aje/kww182>
- Kok, B. E., & Fredrickson, B. L. (2010). Upward spirals of the heart: Autonomic flexibility, as indexed by vagal tone, reciprocally and prospectively predicts positive emotions and social connectedness. *Biological*

- Psychology*, 85(3), 432-436. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biopsycho.2010.09.005>
- Lianov, L. S., Barron, G. C., Fredrickson, B. L., Hashmi, S., Klemes, A., Krishnaswami, J., . . . Winter, S. J. (2020). Positive psychology in health care: Defining key stakeholders and their roles. *Translational Behavioral Medicine*, 10(3), 637-647. <https://doi.org/10.1093/tbm/ibz150>
- Lianov, L. S., Fredrickson, B. L., Barron, C., Krishnaswami, J., & Wallace, A. (2019). Positive psychology in lifestyle medicine and health care: Strategies for implementation. *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine*, 13(5). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1559827619838992>
- Morton, D. P. (2018). Combining lifestyle medicine and positive psychology to improve mental health and emotional well-being. *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine*, 12(5), 370-374. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1559827618766482>
- Seligman, M. E. P. (2011). *Flourish: a visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. New York: Atria.
- Seligman, M. E. P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 5-14. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.5>
- Wadlinger, H. A., & Isaacowitz, D. M. (2006). Positive mood broadens visual attention to positive stimuli. *Motivation & Emotion*, 30(1), 87-99. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-006-9021-1>
- Xu, J., & Roberts, R. E. (2010). The power of positive emotions: It's a matter of life or death—Subjective well-being and longevity over 28 years in a general population. *Health Psychology*, 29(1), 9-19. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0016767>