

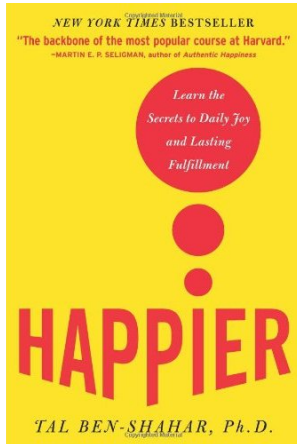
ECPP - Moskva



Study on the effects of Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar's program on happiness, with emphasis on mindfulness practice.

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The happiness program



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Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar's happiness program is presented in his book *Happier: Learn the Secrets to Daily Joy and Lasting Fulfillment*.

The program is grounded in academic research in the field of Positive Psychology. It provides practical tools and methods for building self-awareness and attaining better living.

The practices include mindfulness, expressing gratitude, setting goals, accepting one's emotions and allowing oneself to be human.

Method

The aim of the study was to determine whether or not the program will increase happiness of those who participated. Eight ordinary Icelanders were observed as they worked their way through Tal Ben Sharar's happiness program.



Four males and four females, age 23-57 years were selected on the basis of diversity in age and background.

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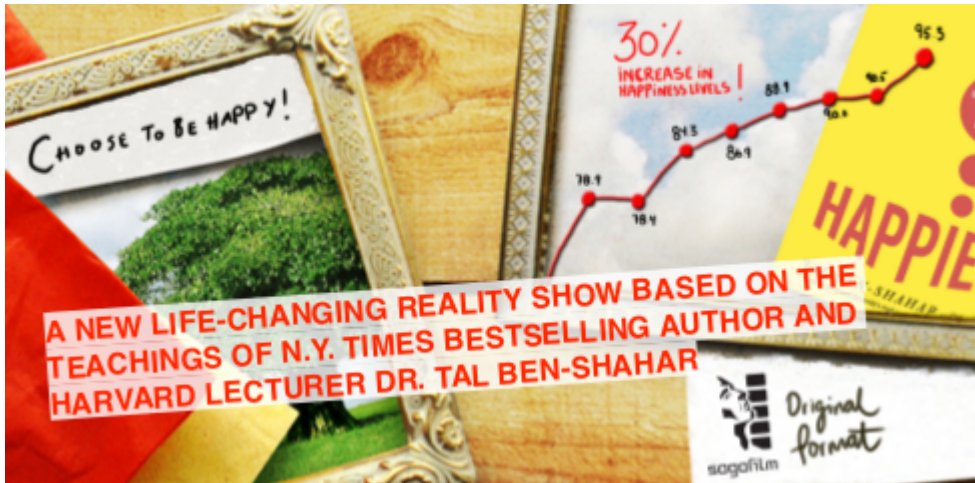
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Method

An 8 week program partly performed in front of TV cameras, where each week was devoted to a specific exercise.

A factual reality TV show



Trailer: <http://vimeo.com/30781590>

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The 8 weeks happiness program:

The group met every week for a workshop, Mindfulness meditation and sharing.

The homework consisted of daily guided Mindfulness meditations with the aid of a CD and weekly projects:

Week 1: Good habits

Week 2: Expressing gratitude

Week 3: “Map your life” (meaning, pleasure, strengths)

Week 4: Positive emotions

Week 5: Go outside the comfort zone (shame attack exercises)

Week 6: Painful emotions

Week 7: Integrity and values

Week 8: Good deeds

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Evaluating the effects of the happiness program and its lasting impact for at least six months.

Five methods of measurement employed before and after the intervention, and 6 months later:

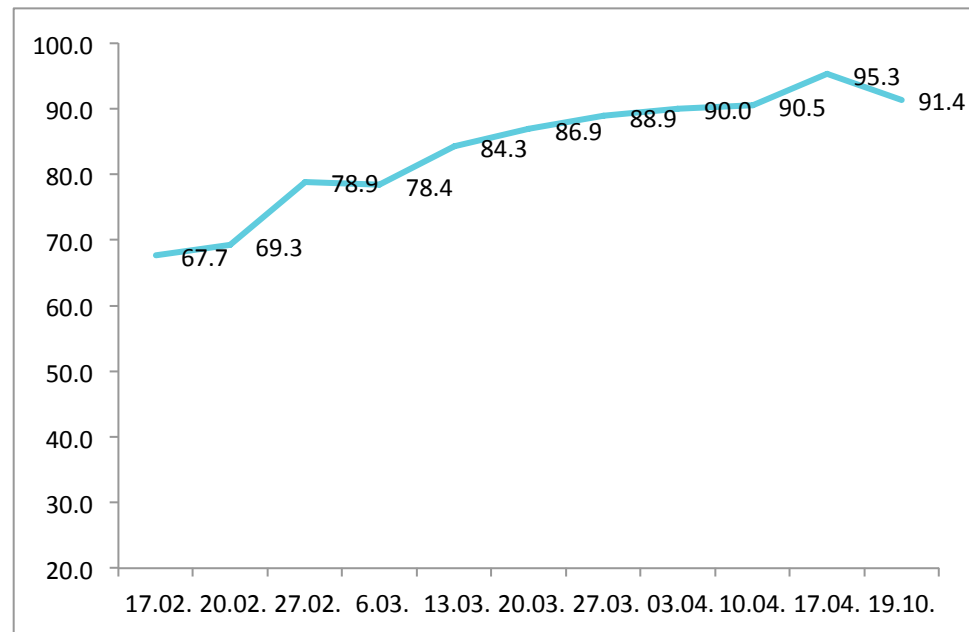
- 1) Ed Diener's Happiness Index (DHI), 8-items;
- 2) Well-Being Self-Assessment questionnaire, composed of several established happiness and well-being tests (WBSA), 40-items;
- 3) Cortisol stress-hormone clinical test;
- 4) Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), 15 items; and
- 5) Cold Water Pain Tolerance Test (CWPTT).

Summary of results

Well-Being Self-Assessment questionnaire, composed of several established happiness and well-being tests (WBSA), 40-items;

For WBSA (range 20-100) little change was observed between the first two measurements prior to the experiment (68 and 69 respectively), and then it gradually increased until it reached about 95 after the experiment and then 93 six months later.

All subjects elevated their scores markedly. All but one maintained roughly their score after 6 months.



Group average: Well-Being Self-Assessment - WBSA (range 20-100)

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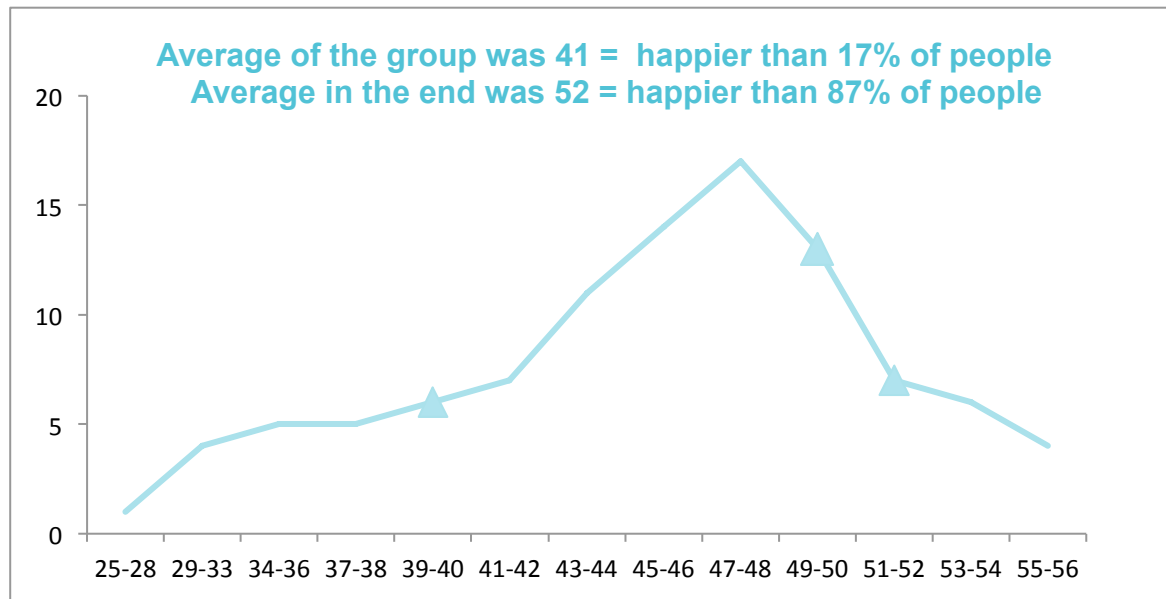
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Summary of results

Ed Diener's Happiness Index:

All subjects received higher scores after the experiment compared to before. Little change was observed in each case after 6 months. Before the experiment the average DHI (range 8-56) for the 8 people was **41**. After the experiment it was **50** and six months later **52**.



Diener's reference – scale 8 to 56 (most people around 48)

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Summary of results

Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS):

Subjects' average before the experiment was **60.3** (range 15-90), **68.1** after the experiment and **74.1** six months later.

Cold water pain tolerance test (CWPTT).

The average for the pain tolerance test in minutes was **142s**, **213s** and **261s**, before, after and at 6 months respectively.

The cortisol stress measure showed no change between before the experiment and after.

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This relatively complex intervention based on the work of Tal Ben-Shahar showed that his methods can indeed affect people's lives, i.e. make them happier and increase their mindfulness, the effect of which lasts at least a few months.

Significance

- All 8 participants showed significant changes – between 15% to 40% on the Well-Being Self-Assessment Test - on average of 30%.
- The effects of changes was significant in all measurements except the cortisol test.
- The effects/changes was maintained in 6 months after the TV program finished.



Discussion

According to interviews with participants Mindfulness and new awareness played the most important role in increased well-being and happiness. Meditating in a group, discussions and guidance brought about sincerity and compassion. Being a part of a supportive group in a trusting and loving-kindness atmosphere was a very important factor in all the other work that was done.

Different assignments brought about changes in the lives of the participants and many issues were resolved.

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