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Making people happy is the best crime prevention: Towards happy-making Criminology

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Introduction

I will present some ideas, findings and experiences that I hope may serve as a reminder, an inspiration, motivation or simply encouragement for European criminologists to explore new spaces, by going a bit further towards more promising alternatives that may be beneficial for both offenders and victims (actual and potential), that is, for all people around the globe, for all of us. I will focus on happiness and its potential for crime prevention.

Research on happiness

The last decade saw an increase in research on happiness, understood as a subjective perception of well-being, and it seems it is finding its place in criminology research as well. In economic and social surveys, happiness is often operationalized as overall satisfaction with life (for example, the German Socio-Economic Panel, Eurobarometer, the Gallup World Poll; see Fray and Stutzer, 2002, 2005; OECD, 2013a; Davis and Hinks, 2010).[1]

In the OECD Better Life Index, life satisfaction is measured through the number of positive and negative experiences people have in one average day. Moreover, the OECD has produced *Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-Being* (2013a),[2] which accept a broad and inclusive definition. In particular, happiness relates to good mental health functioning, including concepts such as interest, engagement and meaning, as well as satisfaction and affective states. Diener, a leading scholar in happiness studies from a psychological perspective, defines it as an umbrella term encompassing 'different valuations people make regarding their lives, the events happening to them, their bodies and minds, and the circumstances they live' (Diener, 2006, quoted in OECD, 2013a: 29).

Australia has been revealed as the world's happiest industrialized nation for the third year running of the OECD Better Life Index (2013b), based on criteria including satisfaction, work–life balance, income and housing. The report showed that Australians feel 'a strong sense of community and high levels of civic participation, with 94% of people feeling like they knew someone to rely on should they need help' (OECD, 2013b).

In April 2012, the Earth Institute of Columbia University published the first-ever *World Happiness Report* for the United Nations Conference on Happiness (Helliwell et al., 2012). The report represents one of the first major attempts to develop a standard

system for determining happiness in the different nations of the world.
What is common to all surveys on happiness is that they ask people how they *feel*, not how they seem to others or about some objective indicators of that feeling (Helliwell and Wang, 2012). This is similar to Jock Young's argument in *The Exclusive Society* (1999) about perceptions of relative deprivation. The concept of relative deprivation is about people feeling unhappy because they perceive themselves to have less than others.

However, surveys that have looked at the causes of (un)happiness suggest that material well-being is not the most important factor in happiness. Factors such as unemployment, health and personality exert strong influences. For example, women and non-white populations, which are in a disadvantaged economic position compared with men and white people, tend to report higher level of happiness (Fray and Stutzer, 2005). Also, it has been found that national income per capita has a very small impact on subjective well-being, whereas the psychological impact of unemployment is huge (Fray and Stutzer, 2002; Helliwell et al., 2012). Interestingly, some research that explored the impact of social inequality on happiness suggests that social inequality has a large and significant negative impact for Europeans but not for Americans (Alestina et al., quoted in Fray and Stutzer, 2002: 412).

The American Declaration of Independence more than 200 years ago stated that the pursuit of happiness is an inalienable right of every citizen. Although no democratic state would challenge this right, it is not so common even these days that systematic efforts are made to achieve this goal.

The exception is the small Asian country Bhutan, where in 1972 Gross National Happiness (GNH) was declared to be more important than Gross National Product (GNP). Moreover, the 2008 Constitution of Bhutan directs the state 'to promote those conditions that will enable the pursuit of Gross National Happiness' (Article 9). It seems that Bhutan is the only country in the world to measure the happiness of its citizens on a regular basis and with an explicit policy goal. The authorities measure the GNH of the population using a sophisticated survey instrument. It aims to show that quality of life cannot be measured by a country's gross domestic product and therefore Bhutan should move forward by prioritizing Buddhist spiritual values rather than simply its economy. GNH measures 'the quality of a country in a more holistic way than GNP and believes that the beneficial development of human society takes place when material and spiritual development occurs side by side to complement and reinforce each other' (Ura et al., 2012: 111).

Interestingly, happiness research also suggests that the relationship between happiness and various aspects of people's lives is often in reverse, so that happiness is dependent on them but may also influence them (for example, the question is raised: 'Does happiness cause [married] people to be happier, or are happy people more likely to get married?' (Fray and Stutzer, 2005: 213). Similarly, researchers have found a link between political instability and happiness: people in stable democracies such as Switzerland, Norway and Denmark expressed high life satisfaction, in contrast to countries that faced terrorist attacks and unrests, such as the Dominican Republic.
But the question remains: Are people in politically unstable countries unhappy because of political instability or do unhappy people resort to demonstrations, strikes and terrorist attacks? (Fray and Stutzer, 2005: 221). The impact of terrorism on life satisfaction is also found in the surveys conducted in France in the period between 1973 and 1998 (Fray and Stutzer, 2005: 222). Similar correlations and questions can be also explored regarding happiness and crime/victimization relationship in more general terms.

Happiness and crime/victimization surveys

At the 2012 annual conference of the European Society of Criminology in Bilbao, Silvia Staubli, Martin Killias and Bruno Frey, all from University of Zurich, presented the findings of the 2011 Swiss Crime Victimization Survey related to the correlation between happiness and victimization experiences. The also drew our attention to the lack of research on happiness and crime within criminology. We had a chance to learn about the innovations made in both national and international crime (victim) surveys by including a question about people's overall satisfaction with life, that is, happiness (first introduced in 2005 in the European Crime and Safety Survey – Van Dijk et al., 2005). A similar question is included in the new International Self-Report Delinquency questionnaire as well.

I was inspired to explore further existing research and practical programmes that connect crime and victimization with happiness. I was fascinated by the findings: the available research suggests that happy people are less likely to commit crimes, and also that happy people are less likely to be victimized. In addition, many programmes have been developed to make people who have already committed crimes happy.
Existing research on happiness and crime may be classified into three main groups of happiness and crime relationships:
1. *Happiness and victimization/fear of crime*
a. the impact of fear of crime and victimization on happiness
b. the impact of happiness on vulnerability, i.e. do happy people become victims less often than unhappy people and why?
2. Happiness and offending (for example: Do happy people commit crimes, or do people commit crimes in order to achieve happiness?
3. The impact of penalties/incarceration on happiness and desistance from crime (for example: Do penalties, including incarceration, affect offenders' happiness and does making people happy through prison programmes reduce their risk of reoffending?)

For all three groups of research on the crime–happiness relationship, the common denominator is the finding that happiness may be a powerful factor in the prevention of crime and victimization.
The fascinating example is again Bhutan, where the 2010 GNH survey, carried out on representative sample, showed that a large majority of the Bhutanese population are happy (of whom 41 percent are extremely happy), and only 4 percent reported being victimized by crime in previous 12 months. Other sources also indicate that the crime rate in Bhutan is extremely low.[3] These findings suggest a negative correlation between crime/victimization and happiness. Most research on fear of crime and victimization that included happiness as a dependent variable also found a negative correlation between happiness, on the one hand, and own/other people's victimization and fear of crime, on the other (Powdthavee, 2005; Moller, 2005; Davis and Hinks, 2010). The 2011 Swiss Crime Victimization Survey revealed that victimization had a negative influence on the life satisfaction of victims of domestic and sexual violence in particular (Staubli and Killias, 2012).

I wonder if there is any significant impact of unhappiness on people's vulnerability to become crime victims? I did not come across any research which dealt with this correlation, although I think it may be quite a useful finding for crime and victimization prevention. Actually, this means that we should also look other way around and explore the reverse relationship, looking for the response to questions such as: Are people vulnerable because they are not happy, or are they unhappy because they are vulnerable?

At the 2011 American Sociological Association Annual Meeting in Las Vegas, Bill McCarthy and Teresa Casey presented the paper 'Get happy! Positive emotion, depression and juvenile crime'. The authors used 1995 and 1996 data from nearly 15,000 seventh- to ninth-grade students in the federally funded National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, the largest, most comprehensive survey of adolescents ever undertaken. Their research found that happier adolescents are less likely to report involvement in crime or drug use.[4] Based on these findings, some experts, such as Lucy McCarraher and Annabel Shaw, also raised the issue of the unhappiness of youth as a possible factor that caused riots in London several years ago.
Further evidence for the importance of emotional well-being for crime prevention is offered by the evaluation of The Way to Happiness Foundation campaigns.[5] After distribution of *Way to Happiness* booklets and related training of police officers and military, a noticeable drop in crime occurred in countries such as Canada, Columbia, the USA, Guyana, Israel/Palestine, Congo and South Africa.[6]

Happiness and responses to crime and victimization

Of course we are all familiar with the fact that convicted individuals are not very happy, and that penalties, particularly imprisonment, do not make them feel better about themselves and others. Not surprisingly, research findings suggest that prison and, in particular, post-prison life make them much unhappier than they were before (Bronsteen, et al., 2008). They tend to commit new crimes and return to prison again and again. However, although happiness is not a new topic in rehabilitation theory (see, for example, Warren, 1983), exploring the factors and rehabilitation programmes (in and out of prison) that influence people to stop committing crimes by enhancing their overall subjective well-being has not attracted much interest within criminology (Ronel and Elisha, 2011). Quite surprisingly, not many studies on supporting crime victims deal with the well-being of victims in a holistic way either. Victim support theory, although slowly increasing its interest in post-traumatic growth, victim agency and resiliency (under the influence of positive psychology), remains too oriented towards the technical aspects of help for victims and insufficiently interested in activating victims' inner potential for improving their subjective well-being after victimization.

In terms of criminological theory, most interest in exploring and enhancing the subjective well-being of offenders and victims has so far been shown by criminologists oriented to peacemaking criminology and restorative justice (Quinney, 2002; Pepinski, 2006; Sullivan and Tift, 2001), by those dealing with desistance theories (Maruna, 2001), the sociology of acceptance (Bogdan and Taylor, quoted by Ronel and Elisha, 2011: 311) and the Good Lives Model of offender rehabilitation (Ward et al., 2012), as well as by those studying factors of resiliency and protection (Ronel and Elisha, 2011: 307) .

Recently, positive criminology, an innovative concept that emphasizes the integration and social inclusion factors that are positively experienced by groups and individuals involved in crime and deviance (Ronel and Toren, 2012), was introduced as a combination of different theories, approaches and models. There is an emerging perspective called *positive victimology*, which shares the same integrative and inclusive approach as positive criminology in the sense that both have their foundation in positive psychology (Ronel and Toren, 2012). The positive criminology and victimology perspective is in particular explored by the Israeli criminologist Natti Ronel. It is interesting to note too the existence of the Happiness and Crime Research group at Arial University in Israel, led by the well-known criminologist and victimologist Sara Ban-David.

During recent decades, a variety of therapy and rehabilitation programmes have been developed, both in prisons and within the community. These programmes include: occupational, religious and educational rehabilitation, individual and group therapy, including 12 Steps programme/self-help groups (Ronel and Elisha, 2011),[7] re-entry and desistance planning circles for inmates and their families, which promote resilience (Walker and Greening, 2011; Walker, 2010), Criminon (meaning 'no crime') workshops, courses and programmes in jails, prisons, parole and probation offices, and courthouses, and re-entry facilities, as well as training for correctional officers and programme personnel in 35 countries and pilot re-entry programmes in a women's prison in Serbia (opi et al., 2012). Some of programmes are based on or include elements of spirituality and Eastern philosophy such as yoga, meditation, breathing techniques (for example, Prison SMART), vipassana meditation courses based on the teaching of Goenka (Ronel et al., 2013), and my piloting of *yoga nidra* in a women's prison in Serbia (Nikolic-Ristanovic, 2013).

The theories and programmes mentioned here tend to contribute more or less directly to desistance and reintegration of offenders by increasing their happiness and promoting processes of positive change that help to reduce recidivism rates (Ronel and Elisha, 2011). Some of the programmes, such as Prison SMART, approach prisoners from the viewpoint that 'inside every culprit there is a victim crying for help'. According to the founder of the programme, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, if we heal the victim, we will 'eliminate crime from the planet'.[8]

There is also an increasing number of programmes offered to crime victims that have the goal of empowering them and making them happier. These programmes include in particular yoga, meditation, breathing techniques and similar approaches. These programmes have been successfully used in working with victims of torture (Franklin, 2001), trafficking in women (Nikolic-Ristanovic, 2013) and war rapes (programme in Rwanda supported by the UN – Stampler, 2011), as well as with victims of domestic and sexual violence.[9]

Instead of a conclusion: Towards happy-making criminology

It seems that there is a large space beyond punitiveness, which we as criminologists must investigate in order to move forward. Exploring the space beyond punitiveness opens hope in the areas of the social and the individual that are not yet researched enough, and may be used as an alternative and in combination with traditional punitive measures. To quote Israeli positive criminologists Ronel and Elisha, 'the concentration of traditional criminology on the negative aspects of the causes of deviance and their implications preclude a broader, more balanced view of the human offender's experience' (Ronel and Elisha, 2011: 319). Moreover, it tends to ignore cases where offenders or individuals at risk, either by themselves or with the help of others, have succeeded in refraining or desisting from crime over time. 'A one-dimensional view inevitably reduces the repertoire of responses, knowledge and insight, not only of those involved in the field but also of the offenders themselves, because it does not leave much room for optimism and change' (Ronel and Elisha, 2011: 319).
I strongly believe that making people happy is the best crime prevention and, thus, the best response to crime – at least, for those who can still change and become happier. This is why I want to conclude with a recognition of the efforts made so far in that direction, as well as with a call for further development of an emerging area of criminological research and practice that I suggest should be named happy-making criminology.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1. In *OECD Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-being* (OECD, 2013a) it is mentioned

that measuring subjective well-being is incorrectly conflated with measuring happiness. However, in the surveys on subjective well-being, including the OECD Best Life Index, subjective well-being is actually understood in almost the same way as the concepts of happiness in the others. Furthermore, subjective well-being, as a psychological concept, is defined as an attitude consisting of the two basic aspects of cognition and affect. 'Affect' is the label attached to moods and emotions. Affect reflects people's instant evaluation of the events that occur in their lives. The cognitive component refers to the rational or the intellectual aspects of subjective well-being. It is usually assessed with the measure of satisfaction. It has been shown that pleasant affect, unpleasant affect and life satisfaction are separable constructs (Lucas, Diener and Suh, 2006, quoted in Fray and Stutzer, 2005). In happiness-related surveys/literature the terms 'happiness' and 'subjective well-being' are mostly used interchangeably. Moreover, surveys such as the European Social Survey, which measure both life satisfaction and happiness, come to similar country rankings for both (Helliwell and Wang, 2012).

2. The *OECD Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-being* were released on 20 March 2013. They represent the first attempt to provide international recommendations on collecting, publishing and analysing subjective well-being data, for which there is now widespread acknowledgement that measuring subjective well-being is an essential part of measuring quality of life alongside other social and economic dimensions. Also see the OECD website 'Measuring Well-being and Progress: Research and development projects', at http://www.oecd.org/statistics/measuringwellbeingandprogressresearchanddevelopmentprojects.htm (accessed 1 May 2014).

3. See the country analysis of Bhutan in Ambekar et al. (2005), at http://www.unodc.org/pdf/india/publications/south_Asia_Regional_Profile_Sept_2005/09_bhutan.pdf (accessed 1 May 2014).

4. See 'Happiness tends to deter crime', http://psychcentral.com/news/2011/08/24/happinesstends-to-deter-crime/28877.html (accessed 1 May 2014).

5. The Way to Happiness Foundation is not-for-profit international organization, with headquarters in California (USA). The mission of The Way to Happiness Foundation International is to reverse the moral decay of society by restoring trust and honesty the world over through the publication and widespread distribution of *The Way to Happiness: A Common Sense Guide to Better Living* (TWTH). That mission is accomplished at the grassroots level, worldwide, by individuals who share the TWTH book with others and so bring about an increase in tolerance and understanding between families, friends, groups, communities, nations and mankind – creating a safer, less violent world for all (see http://www.thewaytohappiness.org/about-us.html, accessed 1 May 2014).

6. According to information presented by The Way to Happiness Foundation, over 80,000 TWTH booklets were handed out by volunteers to Olympic audiences in Vancouver city in 2010. In Columbia, 2000 police officers handed out thousands of booklets to people on the street. The whole Columbian police force has made it a mandatory requirement to implement and train their officers on the booklet's information so they can help their people in the best way possible. Campaigns run with the police and the military reduce murder rates significantly. In San Fernando Valley, Los Angeles, in 2007, 1 million TWTH books were distributed and violent crime dropped 40 percent in one month; 8 months later the crime rate was reported as its lowest in 22 years. In South Africa, after the fall of Apartheid, 1 million TWTH copies were distributed in Johannesburg and there were no riots at this historic occasion.

7. The 12 Steps programme is used in work with addiction problems, on the basis of which programmes for other problems are developed, such as domestic violence and victimization.

8. See the Prison SMART Europe website at http://www.prisonsmart.eu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=33&Itemid=29 (accessed 1 May 2014).

9. See the website of Women SAVVY (Serving Abuse Victims of Violence through Yoga), at http://womensavvy.org/ (accessed 1 May 2014).

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