1.1 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The primary purpose of this study is to review recent research examining the beneficial effects of religiousness, optimism and adjustment on psychological and physical well-being.

King and Napa (1998) actually investigate how much value people attach to happiness by examining its contribution to the desirability of a certain hypothetical life and compare it with the contribution wealth and the presence of meaning make to the desirability of a given life. Their results confirm the folk wisdom developed over the ages: happiness and meaning make for the good life, and their effect on the desirability of a certain life is some five to six times higher than that of wealth.

Relatedly, Diener and Oishi (2004) asked a sample of college students from different countries to rate the importance of happiness and other values on a scale from 1 to 9. Happiness came out first with a score of 8.0, slightly above health and love & affection (7.9), but well above wealth (6.8), amongst others.

SWB further matters in that it fosters good outcomes in many domains of life, e.g. in work life, relationships and health (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005).

Low SWB is also associated with general health risk and higher rates of suicide (Koivumaa-Honkanen et al., 2000 and 2001).

According to Haybron’s theory, *To be happy, then, is for one’s emotional condition to be broadly positive—involving stances of attunement, engagement, and endorsement—with negative central affective states and mood propensities only to a minor extent* (2008, p. 147; emphasis in original).

One confronts the world in a different way from the unhappy (2008, p. 139).

Fred Feldman endorses the view that what ultimately makes for well-being is episodic happiness:

… it is ultimately only happiness that determines welfare. On this view, the welfare value that a person enjoys or suffers at a time is directly proportional to her level of happiness
at that time; the amount of welfare that a person enjoys or suffers during an interval is proportional to the amount of happiness that she has during that interval; the welfare value of a person’s life as a whole is proportional to the amount of happiness in her life as a whole. More succinctly: welfare tracks happiness (Feldman 2010, p. 169).

Happiness in the Personal Attribute Sense as a Proxy for Well-Being, if one is happy in the personal attribute sense, then one takes greater pleasure in things, is more perceptive, is more optimistic, is more outgoing and friendly, takes chances more often, and is slower and less likely to become anxious, fearful, angry, or despondent (Haybron 2008, p. 139). According to Haybron’s particular theory of the deep nature of this property, “To be happy… is for one’s emotional condition to be broadly positive—involving stances of attunement, engagement, and endorsement—with negative central affective states and mood propensities only to a minor extent” (Haybron 2008, p. 147).

A person who has a high level of satisfaction with their life, and who experiences a greater positive affect and little or less negative affect, would be deemed to have a high level of SWB [or in simpler terms, be very happy. The concept of SWB falls within the ‘hedonic’ perspective that defines well-being or happiness as being fundamentally about maximising pleasure and avoiding or minimizing pain.

When psychologists measure SWB, they are measuring how people think and feel about their lives. The three components of SWB, life satisfaction, positive affect and negative affect, are independent factors that should be measured and studied separately (Andrews & Withey, 1976, Lucas et al., 1996).


The previous study reveals a positive relationship between religiousness, and subjective well-being and thus, they reinforce the need for further research on the association between specific aspects of religiosity and well-being.

What is the strength and direction of the relation between religion and subjective well-being in adulthood? It is found that religion was significantly, positively related to subjective well-being. The relation between religion and subjective well-being is
stronger for samples of older than younger adults. The relation is stronger for samples of females than males.

Findings suggest that the beneficent effects of religious attendance and private devotion reported in previous studies are primarily indirect, resulting from their respective roles in strengthening religious belief systems. The positive influence of religious certainty on well-being, however, is direct and substantial: individuals with strong religious faith report higher levels of life satisfaction, greater personal happiness, and fewer negative psychosocial consequences of traumatic life events.

It seems reasonable to assume that if people believe religion provides a sense of direction and purpose in life, they will feel more optimistic about the future. In fact, this is one reason why Peterson (2000) argued that, "Religion lends itself particularly well to big optimism because of its certainty".

Similarly, Seligman (1990) maintained that religious meaning enhances feelings of optimism by helping people see that their lives will follow a specific and beneficial plan that has been devised by God (Seligman, 1990).

Dr Peter Kaldor, the report’s principal author, said the results suggest that, in some important areas, those with a more secular outlook have lower levels of wellbeing than those with a spiritual orientation.

"Those with a spiritual orientation tend to score higher on many of the wellbeing measures included in the study. They tend to have a greater sense of purpose in life, a greater openness to personal growth, and more optimism about life", he said.

"Of significance, the research also suggests that those with a spiritual orientation are more likely to contribute to others, whether informally in daily life, giving money to charities or doing voluntary service with community groups. These results suggest that exploration of spirituality and wellbeing may be important to a healthy society."

Dr John Bellamy, ANGLICARE’s researcher on the study, said "While no doubt a complex question, the opposite appears to be true: religion and spirituality appear to provide some anchors for life."

A rapidly growing literature suggests that greater involvement in religion is
associated with better physical health, better mental health, and enhanced feelings of subjective well-being across the life course (Ellison, 1994; Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001; McFadden, 1995).

With respect to well-being, the potentially beneficial effects of religion have been observed with a wide range of outcomes, including life satisfaction (Ellison, 1993), happiness (Poloma & Pendleton, 1990), self-esteem (Krause, 1995), and optimism (Idler & Kasl, 1997).

Pargament (1997) observed that, "In essence, religion offers meaning in life" (p. 49).

Satisfying basic needs in life should be associated with enhanced feelings of subjective well-being (Maslow, 1971). If finding meaning in life is a basic goal of human existence, and religion helps people find meaning, it follows that religious meaning should be associated with greater subjective well-being.

Petersen and Roy (1985) found that religious salience (i.e., the importance of religion) is associated with a greater sense of general meaning in life.

As Reker (2000) points out, a general sense of meaning in life can arise from any number of sources, including personal relationships, work, hobbies, and religion.

The focus of the study is also on the importance of early optimism for adult subjective well-being (SWB). The best fitting model suggests that early optimism influences optimism at middle age, which in its turn has both a direct influence on global life satisfaction.

How one thinks about his or her life also plays a part in determining one’s SWB. In addition to extraversion, Diener et al. (1999) also found that optimism (the expectation that more good things will happen in the future than bad), internal locus of control (the belief that one has control over his or her life) and self-esteem (defined by Baumeister et al. [2003] as ‘how much value one places on themselves, their self-worth and their capabilities’) were personality traits that correlated significantly with SWB.

The theory of dispositional optimism (Scheier & Carver, 1985) states that one’s thoughts about one’s future affect one’s circumstances because by expecting to do well, one will work more effectively and persist more for the goals set, therefore being more likely to achieve those goals and consequently achieve a greater sense of SWB. However, could
it be that if one feels good about his or her life one is more likely to be more optimistic? Review focuses on research that is longitudinal or prospective in design. Potential mechanisms are also identified whereby the beneficial effects of optimism are produced, focusing in particular on how optimism may lead a person to cope more adaptively with stress.

Many studies cite a rich and fulfilling social life and a network of close social support with family and friends as being strongly correlated with SWB. A study of the happiest 10% of college students showed that those found to engage in large amounts of social activity were the happiest (Diener & Seligman, 2002).

Empirical research shows that a very happy individual is likely to be a happily married optimistic extrovert, having an active social life with a network of good social support, who feels fulfilled at work, is religious, enjoys active recreational pursuits, exercises regularly and feels they are in good health. He or she is also likely to have their basic needs met and live in a democratic country which respects civil rights and freedom of speech.

Positive Psychology has demonstrated its usefulness in studying and contributing to individual well-being. The next big challenge for this new field is to help improving the social and cultural conditions in which people live.

So, the reason Positive Psychology developed so quickly and ready to go, just like Minerva springing fully armed from the brow of Jupiter, is that it brought together so much existing knowledge from Aristotle’s concepts (Aristotle 350 BC: 1998) to the work of earlier humanistic psychologists like Maslow (1968, 1970). We had the shoulders of giants to stand on, and that’s why we could see a little bit further than perhaps they did. And in the last few years, of course, many young psychologists have added very important new empirical findings and ideas.

Plato, 25 centuries ago in "The Republic," (360 BC: 2000) wrote that the most important task for educators is to teach young people to find pleasure in the right things. He knew already that children will find things to do that promise to be enjoyable - but they may not be the right things in the sense of either the child’s
own personal development as adults, or in terms of the social order in which they live.
So one of our major task as Positive Psychologists is to help young people to get joy from helping evolution. We have to find ways to make the job of helping planetary health and diversity as enjoyable as a game, as a great adventure, something that can stir the imagination and provide a noble purpose. Instead of promising greed and selfishness, we have to find ways to make social justice and cooperation like a game that is enjoyable and challenging. And finally we have to increase the complexity of consciousness. We have to find ways to make it enjoyable to develop one’s consciousness, instead of filling the mind with passive and vicarious activities which do not build skills, character or cooperation.

This is the great challenge that awaits Positive Psychology.