



Research agenda for 2025

HLI team

February 2025





At the Happier Lives Institute, we search for the most cost-effective ways of improving global wellbeing. We are the first and only organisation that focuses on this critical topic.

In 2024, we expanded our evaluations and recommended charities. These now include:

- [Pure Earth](#)'s work to eliminate lead in cosmetics
- [Taimaka](#)'s work to reduce malnutrition
- The [Reach Up](#) parenting programme
- [NEPI](#)'s programme to reduce crime

We also published a big update to our [evaluation of psychotherapy](#).

What do we have in store for this year? Normally, we publish extended research agendas ([2023-4 agenda](#); [2021-2 agenda](#)). This year, we are providing a brief overview of our upcoming work.

Please contact us at hello@happierlivesinstitute.org if (A) you have any comments or questions, (B) you are a researcher interested in collaborating, (C) you are a decision-maker interested in research consultancy, or (D) you would like to support our work by [funding it](#).

Comparing charities in the World Happiness Report

On March 20th (World Happiness Day) we will publish [a chapter in the 2025 World Happiness Report](#). This will be the first-ever global comparison of charities by the happiness they create per dollar. We provide evidence of large differences in cost-effectiveness between charities. This implies that donors can have a far greater impact at no extra cost to themselves. The chapter is under a publishing embargo until the 20th March so we can't say any more for now.

Finding more cost-effective funding opportunities

Due to the World Happiness Report, and other outreach, we expect to be directing significantly more money towards good causes in this and subsequent years. This means comparatively less focus on refining our methods and a greater emphasis on finding excellent charities with large funding needs.

We will continue to **monitor our** [current recommendations](#) and update our analyses and any relevant information about the charities.

We will investigate new charities providing interventions we have already concluded are very cost-effective: improving mental health, reducing lead exposure, tackling malnutrition, improving parenting, and reducing crime. Specifically, we will look at:

- [Kaya Guides](#), which is scaling access to digital mental health interventions in India.
- [Parenting for Lifelong Health](#), an organisation delivering [early childhood psychosocial stimulation programmes](#).
- [Sangath's school mental health programme](#) in India.



We will also add to previous explorations of **cause areas** and start new ones, notably:

- Research into preventing **Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)** as a potential cause area.
- Study the role of **opiates for pain relief** and **psychedelic-assisted therapy for mental health** in improving wellbeing (topics we have started from earlier years).
- Support work to understand the **causal impacts of lead exposure** on wellbeing.

Given the size of the research team (3 staff with support from the Director), we don't expect to do more than this unless we find funding to expand our capacity.

Methods and fundamental work

We will continue or start work with broad applications to improving wellbeing, but not necessarily tied to individual charities. This includes

- Finishing and publishing our report describing our process for converting **mental health (MHa) to subjective wellbeing (SWB) scores**.
- Expand on our theoretical concerns with multi-armed NGOs (**MANGOs**) with an empirical illustration of the difficulties evaluating the effectiveness of large NGOs.
- Build on our [pilot](#) to test how **comparable** peoples' answers to wellbeing questionnaires are (e.g., is your 6/10 the same as my 6/10?).
- Review the potentially unique concerns related to the reliability and validity of **subjective wellbeing measurement in low- and middle-income countries** (where most of our data comes from).

Consulting work

We are also open to consulting work for funders or evaluators who want to use the wellbeing approach to assess how impactful different projects are. Contact us at hello@happierlivesinstitute.org if you are interested in tailored research to maximise your impact.

Field building and outreach

Communicating our findings to the wider public is an important part of our work in 2025. We will also lead efforts to advance the field of wellbeing impact evaluation by writing about methods and organising conferences (e.g., a special session at [ISQOLS 2025](#)) and workshops. Notably, we will be creating courses for charities who want to think of their impact in terms of wellbeing. Michael Plant (HLI Director) has started work on a book project into why and how to take happiness seriously.

If you like our research and would like it to continue, please consider [funding us](#).