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### **HAPPINESS INDEX 2014**

The Behavioural and Communication Research Division of the Bureau of Market Research (BMR) at the University of South Africa (Unisa) recently released the latest happiness index involving almost 3 500 graduates in South Africa. According to Prof Pierre Joubert (BMR Professor) the 2014 BMR survey shows that graduates are mostly satisfied with life, albeit at a marginally lower level than in 2013. In fact, graduates generally experience happiness with most spheres of life while their perceived standing in society improved significantly in 2014. However, they reported lower levels of being in control of their own lives due to an increased awareness of environmental factors. Generational differences were again evident in 2014 with the older generation expressing higher levels of subjective happiness, internal drive (locus of control) and standing in society, while less stress was also evident amongst this generation.

With regard to the Satisfaction with Life (SWL) as one component of measuring happiness, the 2014 BMR findings revealed that 61.4% of graduates can be classified as satisfied with life, compared to 64.4% during 2013. While no significant difference in gender could be determined, the 2014 findings indicated a marginally lower SWL index among females. In addition, significant generational differences manifested with an overall decrease among Millennials and Baby Boomers since 2012 when the BMR initiated the first happiness index study for graduates. In comparison, Baby Boomers displayed little difference between 2012 and 2014 while an increase is noticeable among Silent Generation graduates.

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Regarding the general mood of graduates, the BMR study also revealed that a positive mood state could be attributed to 76.4% of graduates in 2014, up from 2013 (72.9%), but the same as in 2012 (76.4%). Whereas more graduates expressed happiness with work life, fewer graduates expressed happiness with their health, spiritual life and social life. With only a third of graduates conceding happiness with their financial position, it is evident that the financial life sphere of graduates remains the lowest rated field.

Turning to intra gender differences, Ms Jacolize Poalses (BMR Researcher) indicated that approximately 10% fewer females expressed happiness in community life, work life, creative life, physical and psychological life, intimate relationships, intellectual stimulation and parental life in 2014 when compared to 2013. Between 5% and 10% more males expressed happiness in their work life while the same number expressed less happiness in their social life, spiritual life and parental life. An age dynamic was again evident in 2014 with the greater proportion of the older generations (Silent Generation and Baby Boomers) feeling happier than Generation X and the Millennials. Given their age and declining commitment to formal work, it can be assumed that the older generations feel a greater sense of accomplishment or acceptance when looking retrospectively at their life journey. According to the BMR, a positive mood state is evident among 76.4% of graduates in 2014, up from 2013 (72.9%), but the same as in 2012 (76.4%).

It is particularly noteworthy that 62% of graduates indicated that they are unhappy with the political climate, while 54.9% were unhappy with the economic climate in South Africa. Only 5.8% expressed happiness with the political climate and 7.8% were happy with the economic climate in the country. The overall psychological wellness score of graduates decreased somewhat, indicating an increase in psychological stress from 2012 to 2014. In particular, graduates reported experiencing somewhat higher strain, finding it increasingly difficult to make decisions and overcome difficulties in 2014.

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Prof Pierre Joubert is of the opinion that the BMR findings provide additional support for positive psychological theories purporting that positive emotions, moods and feelings all contribute to broaden positive habitual modes of thinking, acting and ultimately achieving. The insights obtained from the BMR research also reiterate the pivotal role that education should play for the betterment of all citizens and specifically higher education.

**The Happiness Index for 2014** (Research Report no 451) was compiled by Prof Pierre Joubert and Ms Jacolize Poalses (Researcher) from the Bureau of Market Research. The report presents a detailed model, well aligned with international research insights, of various happiness antecedents.

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