

Baylor and Harvard Researchers Partner in Long-Term, Global Study of Human Flourishing

Researchers at Harvard University and Baylor University launch the largest initiative of its kind to investigate the determinants of human flourishing.

“The Global Flourishing Study” is a \$43.4 million, five-year annual study of 240,000 individuals in 22 countries across a broad range of well-being outcomes.

Social and biomedical scientists at Harvard University and Baylor University have joined forces to launch the largest initiative of its kind to investigate the factors that influence human flourishing. This \$43.4 million initiative – “The Global Flourishing Study” (GFS) – will involve a five-year study of 240,000 individuals, representing 22 countries globally, with annual data collection across a broad range of well-being outcomes. This effort includes the data collection and management expertise of Gallup and the stakeholder coordination and open science leadership of the Center for Open Science.

What does it mean to live well? To be truly healthy? To thrive? Researchers and clinicians have typically answered these questions by focusing on the presence or absence of various pathologies: disease, family dysfunction, mental illness, or criminal behavior. But such a “deficits” approach tells only so much about what makes for a life well-lived – about what it means to flourish.

“The Global Flourishing Study is exactly the type of work needed to deeply understand the interplay of key elements in human experience that help us live well, be happy, and experience a sense of meaning and purpose,” said project co-director Dr. Tyler VanderWeele, the John L. Loeb and Frances Lehman Loeb Professor of Epidemiology and Director of the [Human Flourishing Program](#) at Harvard, who has published important articles on the assessment of human flourishing in leading scientific journals such as *JAMA* and the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. “The longitudinal research design will allow us to substantially advance scientific knowledge on the determinants of human flourishing.”

Project director Dr. Byron Johnson, Distinguished Professor of the Social Sciences and Director of the [Institute for Studies of Religion](#) at Baylor, also commented on the data’s significance for better understanding the role of religion in a global context: “It’s an extraordinary opportunity for the Baylor-Harvard team to lead a panel study like this. Because our sample size is so large, we will be able to examine all of the world’s great religions and the role, if any, that they play in human flourishing.”

The panel will include individuals from Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Egypt, Germany, India, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria, the Philippines, Poland, Russia, Turkey, South Africa, Spain, Tanzania, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Over the next five-plus years, the team will analyze longitudinal data on the patterns, determinants, and social, psychological, spiritual, political, economic, and health-related constituents and causes of human flourishing. “There are several examples of probability-based, nationally representative studies that track the same respondents over time in a single country,” explained Dr. Rajesh Srinivasan, Global Research Director of the Gallup World Poll, “but few have attempted to cover multiple countries. The scope of this project is unprecedented and likely to yield valuable insights for global survey research using this type of methodology.”

Questionnaire design underwent extensive development and feedback, including months of work on question refinement, translation, cognitive testing, and piloting. That work is summarized in a [detailed report from Gallup](#).

The research team will partner with the Center for Open Science to make the data from the Global Flourishing Study an open-access resource so researchers, journalists, policymakers, and educators worldwide can probe detailed information about what makes for a flourishing life. Dr. David Mellor, Director of Policy from the Center for Open Science,

commented, “The rigor and transparency applied to its analysis will increase trust in the research that comes from this work, and will lower barriers to worldwide, equitable access to this information. We couldn't be more pleased to partner with these teams to support this process.”

Overall, the goal is to build a mature field of study around the science of human flourishing, producing research findings that will influence the direction of social and health policy. As Gallup’s CEO Jim Clifton remarked, “The Global Flourishing Study is a methodological innovation that can truly change the world – truly change how the world is led.” VanderWeele echoed these sentiments: “This is a tremendous opportunity. We are so excited to see what we, and other researchers around the globe, will learn.”

Given its scope, joint support from a consortium of funders was needed to make the Global Flourishing Study financially viable, including support from the John Templeton Foundation, the Templeton Religion Trust, the Templeton World Charity Foundation, the Fetzer Institute, the Paul Foster Family Foundation, the Wellbeing for Planet Earth Foundation, Well Being Trust, and the David & Carol Myers Foundation.

Along with Johnson and VanderWeele, members of the Baylor-Harvard team include Drs. Matt Bradshaw, Merve Balkaya-Ince, Brendan Case, Ying Chen, Alex Fogleman, Sung Joon Jang, Philip Jenkins, Thomas Kidd, Matthew T. Lee, Jeff Levin, Tim Lomas, Katelyn Long, Van Pham, Sarah Schnitker, John Ssozi, Robert Woodberry, and George Yancey.

About Baylor’s Institute for Studies of Religion

Launched in 2004, Baylor’s [Institute for Studies of Religion](#) (ISR) initiates, supports, and conducts research on religion, involving scholars and projects spanning the intellectual spectrum: history, psychology, sociology, economics, anthropology, political science, philosophy, epidemiology, theology, and religious studies. Our mandate extends to all religions, everywhere, and throughout history, and embraces the study of religious effects on prosocial behavior, family life, population health, economic development, and social conflict. While always striving for appropriate scientific objectivity, our scholars treat religion with the respect sacred matters require and deserve.

About Harvard’s Human Flourishing Program

Founded in 2016, the [Human Flourishing Program](#) at Harvard’s Institute for Quantitative Social Science aims to study and promote human flourishing, and to develop systematic approaches to the synthesis of knowledge across disciplines. The program’s research contributes to the broad question of how knowledge from the quantitative social sciences can be integrated with that of the humanities on questions of human flourishing and how best to carry out this synthesis of knowledge across disciplines. The program hopes to bring greater unity to the empirical social sciences and the humanities. The program produces research publications and sponsors educational activities, such as courses, seminars, and conferences, for the Harvard University community all aimed at bringing knowledge together across disciplines and reflecting upon how knowledge from different disciplines might form a coherent whole.

About Gallup

[Gallup](#) is a global analytics and advice firm with more than 80 years of experience measuring public opinion and human development. In the organization’s own research and in working partnerships with government, nonprofit and philanthropic organizations, Gallup develops indicators to measure key global development and social responsibility indicators over time.

About the Center for Open Science

Founded in 2013, COS is a nonprofit culture change organization with a mission to increase openness, integrity, and reproducibility of scientific research. COS pursues this mission by building communities around open science practices, supporting metascience research, and developing and maintaining free, open source software tools, including the [Open Science Framework \(OSF\)](#). Learn more at [cos.io](#).