How do people perceive their everyday wellbeing? Relevance for public health research and policy

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Background: Wellbeing is a rapidly growing area of interest but its variable nature and complexity as a human experience has made the notion of wellbeing difficult to define. The study explores wellbeing as a whole experience in everyday ways with the purpose of delineating specific dimensions and emphases. This experiential and existential perspective can offer new understandings for conceptualisations of subjective and objective wellbeing.

Methods: Qualitative phenomenological approach with a purposive sample of six participants drawn from professional services and academic staff at a Higher Education Institution (HEI) in England. Open-ended in-depth phenomenological interviews were undertaken. These were transcribed and analysed using phenomenological descriptive method.

Results: Several distinct emphases emerged from participant descriptions about their individual understanding of wellbeing that highlight the multidimensional nature of wellbeing and points to some distinct emphases. These included human connection, the impacts of being with others on wellbeing, relationship with pets, access to natural environments and having a purpose and meaning in life. In the context of wellbeing and working in an HEI, the physical environment, teamwork, workload and stress were all described as contributors to wellbeing.

Conclusions: Wellbeing is understood as a multidimensional experience with personal dimensions that seem to be very important. These new insights about the complexity of the human experience of wellbeing go beyond perceptions that wellbeing is merely the absence of illness. Better understanding of wellbeing as an everyday experience that can inform public health policy and interventions has potential to improve health and its perception in populations.

Key messages:
The complexity of wellbeing requires appropriate methods for its measurement at different ages, ethnic groups, genders and contexts to further new understandings which can inform public health.

New perspectives of wellbeing highlight the problem of defining wellbeing as only the absence of illness and point to the need to understand what wellbeing is in the context of long term conditions.