

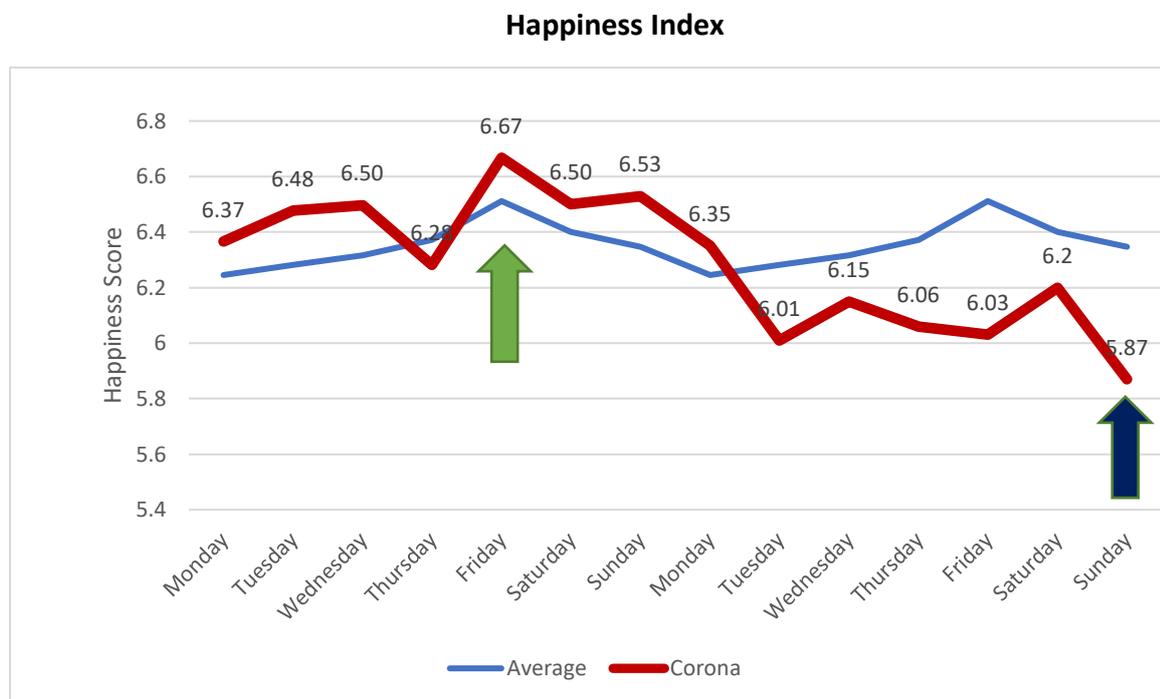
## The Happiness Index (GNH) of South Africa drops to unknown lows (COVID-19 national disaster), with *fear* being prominent

16 March 2020

The Happiness Index (Gross National Happiness) of South Africa, after a brief unexpected spike, when the first COVID-19 victim was announced on 6 March (see green arrow on graph)), dropped below averages from Tuesday 10 March. The Happiness Index remained below averages, with a *significant decrease on Sunday 15 March to 5.87* (see blue arrow on graph), after Pres. Ramaphosa announced COVID-19 a national disaster. In his announcement he imposed, among other, severe travel restrictions, limited social gatherings and the closing of schools.

These are the findings of Prof Talita Greyling (University of Johannesburg) and Dr Stephanie Rossouw (Auckland University of Technology) who in collaboration with Afstereo launched South Africa's Happiness Index in April 2019. The Happiness Index measures the sentiment levels of South Africans on a scale from zero ☹️ to 10 😊, with 5 being neutral (neither happy or unhappy).

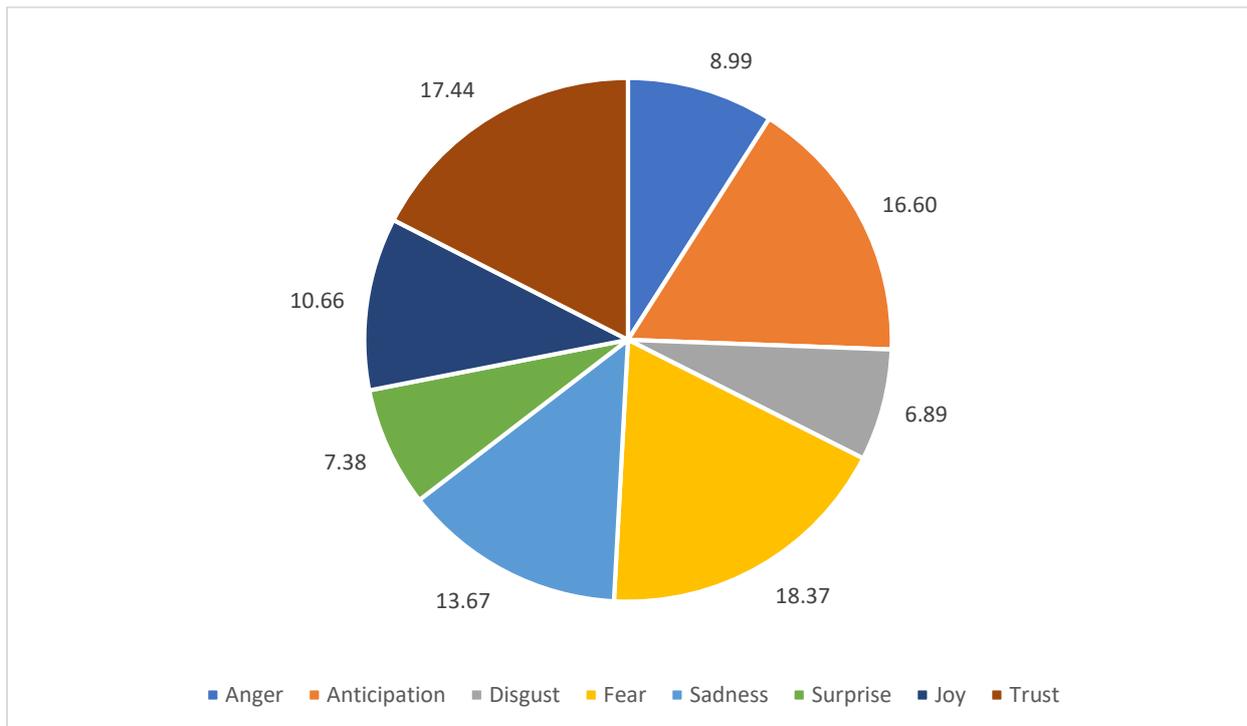
According to the team, the levels of happiness dropped to unknown lows, comparable only to the lows recorded in September 2019, with the Xenophobia attacks.



The team **expanded their analyses and now also analyse the emotions** of South Africans. In their analyses they differentiate between eight emotions, which are captured in the text of Tweets, namely *joy, anticipation, trust, disgust, anger, surprise, fear and sadness*.

The strongest emotion measured, related to COVID-19, is *fear* (18.37%) (see the graph below), which is realistic considering the threat that the virus holds, not only to people's health, but also to their economic position, as markets plunge and retrenchments are announced. Interesting to see that the next highest measured emotion is *trust*. The Tweets reflect that people *trust* the situation to improve over time. These Tweets have a strong religious undertone, furthermore it seems that people trust or distrust (the negative of trust), the actions government has put into place, to curb the pandemic. The third highest emotion is *anticipation*, thus uncertainty about the future.

**Emotions of South Africans related to COVID-19**



The significant decrease in the Happiness Index in the wake of COVID-19 and the strong emotion of fear measured from Tweets are an indication that South Africans are taking the pandemic seriously. We *trust* that if South Africans are disciplined and follow the announced measures to curb COVID-19, it is possible to turn around the outbreak in the country.

**Prof Talita Greyling ([talitag@uj.ac.za](mailto:talitag@uj.ac.za))**

*Wellbeing Economist, University of Johannesburg, Board of directors International Society of Quality of Life Studies, Co-editor Journal of Happiness Studies.*

**Dr Stephanie Rossouw ([stephanie.rossouw@aut.ac.nz](mailto:stephanie.rossouw@aut.ac.nz))**

*Wellbeing Economist, Auckland University of Technology, Vice-President Finance for International Society of Quality of Life Studies, Editor Journal of Happiness Studies.*

**Technical Support by AFSTEREO.**