

Bapu Trust for Research on Mind and Discourse

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## **Review of an internship at Bapu Trust**

By Bart Bezemer

Social work, third year bachelor  
The Hague University, the Netherlands

In order for Dr. Davar

## **Introduction**

This report is a review of an internship I did at Bapu Trust for a five months period between February and June 2014. I did this internship together with Lisanne van Eeden, a fellow student and friend. Together we tried to find out what made people happy who were living in the slum Lohiyandar, Pune, India, by conducting a research addressing this topic.

The first time I set foot in Bapu Trust was on the 15<sup>th</sup> of February 2014. The last time I walked out of Bapu Trust was on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June 2014. This review will give you an insight of all my experiences I had between that period of time. To illustrate some experiences, I used parts out of my diary in which I wrote during my stay in India. In the written notes of my diary I address Dr. Davar by her first name, Bhargavi, since my diary is an informal format. To ensure the authentic of these parts I have not changed this.

I wish to thank Zarin Gupta for all the arrangements regarding this internship. I also want to thank Bhargavi Davar, for being a tremendous host and coordinator during this internship. All together I had a wonderful time at Bapu Trust and learned a lot about life and myself.

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## First impressions

The first time I visited Bapu Trust was in my first week of orientation in India regarding internships. With the group of students I visited a variety of potential internship places, but out of which Bapu Trust was the only one I was determined to go to. There was a number of reasons why I had a very good feeling about Bapu Trust.

After we visited all the organizations in the week of orientation, we were requested to sum up which internships appealed to us and why on paper. I will use a quote out of this paper to illustrate what I thought about Bapu Trust.

*“15-2-2014*

*The organization I have the greatest interest in is the Bapu Trust organization. Some of their core principles I value a lot in social work and suit me well at first sight. These principles are based on counseling, and include “be-friending, reach out to a person on a mental level, emotional support, increase the autonomy of another and finding a method of coping with problems.” I really hope to have the opportunity to do an internship in this organization.”*

To be more specific, I also liked the way how Bapu Trust presented itself. Dr. Davar had a leading part in this by telling us a lot and showed a lot of interest in us students as well. Besides this, we were shown some short videos that illustrated the line of work Bapu Trust did. The videos gave a very good impression about the work that Bapu Trust does and made me very enthusiastic to do my internship there.

When I went with Lisanne to Bapu Trust for the second time to talk about the possibility of an internship, I was very curious on what to expect. I had no clue what to expect, but I was hoping that we were given the task to observe how counseling was performed by a co-worker. When Dr. Davar told us she wanted us to do an internship in the slum I was happily surprised by it. It meant that we had to do a lot of research, but also meant visit the slum and talking with people living there. I was not sure what to think about the theoretical side of the research and hoped it would not include too much reading and writing, since I prefer the practical side of Social Work much more. I will use a part out of my diary to illustrate the first meeting with Dr. Davar and Bapu Trust.

*“22-2-2014*

*To me it seems that Dr. Davar is a very nice woman. She made me feel comfortable in this first week by being very cooperative and giving us a great amount of information. The information she is giving us goes beyond the research of the internship, she told us also a lot about her experiences in and- abroad the country and support us with a lot of knowledge and advice. The research project Lisanne and I will work on seems tough at first sight, I have quite a lack of reading English literature and interviewing a lot of people. I’m very satisfied with this internship and very motivated to dedicate myself to find out the meaning of happiness in the slums of Pune.”*

## The research – understanding happiness

When it was clear to Lisanne and me what was expected of us during this internship, we started with the research. To begin with we had to know what 'happiness' meant by defining it. This was much harder than I expected it to be. It was not easy to come up with a definition, since the subject is very subjective and abstract. Although this was not new information for me I was surprised by the wideness of the subject. To get a better impression of happiness, I thought of asking some people I knew about their definition of happiness. In line of this with Lisanne I decided to ask a lot of people we knew around the globe about their definition. The replies we got from our friends and family were very inspiring. The definitions of people were so wide and even contradicting, when I compared them with each other. A teacher stated for example, that his happiness was experienced in the past or future, quoting;

*"Tough question. For me happiness is always something that lies ahead or behind you. It is something you imagine in the future or something that has happened in the past. In my experience it is hard to be happy 'in the moment', to experience it then. Contrary to something that has to happen or happened. What makes me happy? Well, a lot of things, but mostly when they are brief or volatile, like a tender smile from a beloved one, or a moment of attention from someone on an unexpected moment. I have the tendency to, whenever happiness is taking too long, get bored, although definitions of others would declare me happy."*

A friend of mine stated that she experienced happiness every day, saying,

*"On one side, for me, it is a "state of mind", but on the other side it's in all those moments in which I experience joy without a special reason. I am happy with my life and with myself. I love life. As well during my stay in Holland, as formerly in Poland. I try to be thankful every day for everything faith is giving me, so actually I do not have a clue what happiness is, but I'm sure it is with me and I experience it every day."*

When I read more and more literature about happiness and the subjects related to it, it became clearer to me what happiness was all about. At sometimes it was hard though. I had to find out what a lot of words meant and how theories in literature were related to each other. Since a lot of information was new to me and the subject is very abstract, I liked reading about it very much. Several philosophers had their piece in literature, which made me curious about the opportunities for usage in our own research. I wondered how the philosophers and writers came up with their visions and how we could apply it in our research. I could have dwelled on this for a very long time, but because our research cannot be too philosophical, Lisanne stopped me from doing that. This made me realize that Lisanne and I are a good team due to our differences in our characters. Lisanne is much more rational than I am and puts me back on the right track when I lost it at times.

I had some doubts about the set-up of our research. We were requested to read and gather information about happiness to begin with. After that, we were suppose to put this information into the first parts of our 'design'. This was all very new for me and I wasn't sure if we were doing it right. Because we just started on this project we wanted to make a good impression, but were not sure how our first concept would be received at Babu Trust. We were glad when Dr. Davar reacted positive on our concept and complimented us about it. I remember that this compliment meant a lot, it made me proud. I use a part out of my diary to illustrate this period.

“2-3-2014 This week I spent a lot of time on my laptop and in books. I had to do this because for Bapu Trust I have to read and know a lot of ‘happiness’, since this is the key-subject in our research. Eventually we summed up a lot of definitions and put all our findings into paper which we send to Bhargavi. Honestly, I wasn’t sure about the quality of the paper, because in Holland were not used to read and write a lot in English. Fortunately, Bhargavi reacted very gratefully on the paper and gave us a compliment regarding with going into the depth with our research.”

### **Knowing how things work at Bapu Trust**

After a period of time it became a habit to work for Bapu Trust. I was used to communicate with Dr. Davar by mail or phone, and visiting the office started to feel natural as well. Consulting with Dr. Davar felt also different after some time, it felt less formal to me after some weeks. At a given point I became to realize in what way Dr. Davar was guiding us and letting us create something of our own, although she was directing it. In other words; it felt like we were adapting the style of a researcher with having the Bapu Trust philosophy in mind.

During my stay in India I noticed how people behaved differently compared to my country. For example, they behave less direct or less assertive. I will elaborate this example with a note from my diary while working for Bapu Trust.

“8-3-2014

Bhargavi was quite satisfied with the concept so far and suggested that we could start interviewing some of her co-workers. By doing this, we will gather a lot of information about the slums and it will help us to prepare ourselves for the visits. During the consult with Bhargavi I noticed that she seemed reserved with being critical, but this changed after I asked her more and more about feedback. I experienced this in similar forms with others as well. To me it seems that the people in India will become more critical if you ask them to be, I assume that by this you allow them openly to be ‘rude’ which they won’t be otherwise.”

### **Testing interviews – surprising outcomes**

In the middle of March our holiday started, and Lisanne and I wanted to be finished with the literature research by then. This was a good time to finish this part as well, because all the reading and writing made me a bit bored. As I stated before, I prefer the practical side of work more than the theoretical side. I was awaiting and looking forward to visit the slum. Before doing so, we had to ‘test’ our interview questions and interview style before putting it into practice. To do so, we held an in-depth interview with co-workers Almas and Dharma. These interviews led to some interesting findings. We noticed that some of our questions were good, others were not good, and some elements were missing. Next to do this I noticed a striking element in the results of both interviews; the simplicity of happiness.

The reason for this research originated out of the curiosity by Bapu Trust about happiness in the Lohianagar slum. People allegedly there have so little, yet, a lot of people express to be happy. With

this knowledge I assumed that happiness was experienced in a simple form, but I did not expect to hear this in such pure words that were spoken by Almas and Dharma during the interviews.

This experience was the first of many enlightening moments I had about happiness during the internship. It made me think a lot about the subject in general and my own life. I will use a note from my diary to describe my experience.

*"16-3-2014*

*During the interviews with the co-workers of Bapu Trust, the outcomes of their happiness amazed me. They talked very simple about happiness and said that they experience happiness all day long. Basically they live in the moment and are happy in that moment, they don't think about what happened or what can happen. It sounded beautiful and so easy. It reminded me of a movement in the western world, led by well known writers as Eckhart Tolle or Paulo Coelho. In western societies this approach is supported by mindfulness and self-help programs. Although there are similarities, somehow the way the co-workers talked about it made it more genuine for me to believe. They also stated that a close circle of friends and family is needed for this. Perhaps that's something we are losing in the Western world."*



### **First interviews and tools**

In the last two weeks before the holiday started, we had to develop a tool that we could use during the research. This tool would help us to process the answers in our data format. It took us a while to develop the tool, because we had to think about a way to process the outcomes from the interviews very efficiently. The idea of the tool was to line up the answers in a structural set up, so it would be easy to have an overview to collect data from.

I was happy when we were finished with this, because we had put a lot of effort in it. In the duration of making the tool, amongst other things, we spend a lot of time on the computer. This made me realize at some point that I had almost reached my maximum with that. I sensed this as I needed more breaks during work and had slightly trouble in concentrating on my work. I realized once more that this part of the research is not my cup of tea. After some feedback of Dr. Davar, Lisanne and I thought we came up with a tool we could work with. We were now ready to go to the slum for the first interviews.

The first time I walked through the slum was an overwhelming experience. There was so much to see! It felt like we crawled somewhere through a hole and were suddenly emerged in Wonderland, far away from the rest of the city. Of course it was not at all good and prosperous in the slum, but I was surprised to see so much activity and liveliness in the streets. The first interview I did went well, but I thought of things that could be improved. Actually, the first interview was sort of a pilot interview for me, I realized later on.



*“22-3-2014*

*After we developed the tool, we went off for the slums on Friday. Just walking there was really nice and I hoped that the people we were visiting lived very far away.*

*There is so much going on around you and the neighborhood felt very good. By this I mean that lots of people were looking at me, but in their eyes there was only curiosity and jollity. The people we had interviewed were very warm and open to us. Interviewing them is easy via Radhika, but I would like to improve my skills on this. I'm making a list with points I have to keep in mind during an interview, this list includes aspects such as: be aware of my body attitude (straight back and if possible with crossed legs on the ground), smile often, ask as long as it takes until I get a useful answer, watch the volume of my voice and so forth. I also want to reflect on the techniques (open questions, giving examples etc.) I use in a conversation.”*

### **Difficult times**

After the holidays, we went on with the research in the middle of April. With the help of Lisanne's sister, we discovered that we had to adjust the structure of our research. The research seemed to exist out of two parts; the theories about happiness that we had found in literature, and the outcomes of the data that we were about to collect from the interviews. We found out that these two parts were not enough in coherence, the parts were just there without a clear correlation. Because of that we reckoned it would be impossible to write a proper analysis, conclusion and recommendation.

We started to change the structure of the report and related each subject with at least one other subject. Next to this we added more information in the report regarding the main question and sub-questions. We did this to give these topics more body and made it easier to relate them to the outcomes in the data. Following on this, we changed our tool and set up a new tool in excel. By using this tool it was much easier to process our data and relate the outcomes from an interview with the literature of happiness.

This all was a lot of work and meant spending a lot of time on the laptop. In this period of time it was also hard to schedule a meeting with Dr. Davar, or visit the slum to do interviews with a co-worker. I felt my motivation for the research was decreasing during this period and something needed to be changed.

*“19-4-2014*

*I spend some time on the research and noticed that I lose the dedication I felt in the beginning for the research. The research is becoming something I do not feel so much affiliation with anymore, since it's means writing a lot of words. Mostly not my words, but words from books. There for I also lose some motivation to start working on it. I think I feel this because we don't go out so much in the field and it's hard to get a meeting with Bhargavi. I know that I should not be focusing on the negative sides, but it bugs me that we are not so much in the field than the others are.”*





Reading back these words from my diary, I realize now that it was not just the research that was bugging me. When I was on holiday I traveled much in the country and felt very free. Back in Pune I had some trouble adjusting myself back into to the life as an intern again, no matter what the work would have been. Next to this, the atmosphere in the group of students whom I lived with had changed in a negative sense. This also might have influenced my attitude regarding the research.

Moreover, I should have told Dr. Davar that I was having trouble with not being in the field that much. I did not do this because it seemed hard for Bapu Trust to set up visits in the slum at that time. Maybe there was nothing that could have been changed about the situation, but if I had informed Dr. Davar sooner she could have take note of it.

In this period of time we wanted to meet with Dr. Davar during the research, but bad luck was upon us. We had to reschedule some meetings because the dates didn't work out for any of us. Although Dr. Davar was by far more hit by unfortunate. When we scheduled a new meeting she had a severe accident and had burnt her leg. Regardless, she invited us nonetheless to come over at her house for a meeting. I was very pleased when I heard that Dr. Davar was so cooperative with and towards us. Since it took us quite some time to finally meet up, Dr. Davar suggested to use Skype as an optional form to meet. I wished we had thought about that before because it was a very simple and good alternative for both parties.

### **Thirty interviews**

By the end of April we started doing a lot of interviews in the slum. We had completed the new version of the report, developed a new tool and we had set up a codebook to collect data. While rounding up those things, we discussed a lot of concept versions with Dr. Davar and she guided us very well in this.

We aimed to complete thirty interviews in five weeks and we had a tight schedule in doing this. Dr. Davar predicted that we could face trouble along the way with our codebook due to this, and she was right.

*"3-5-2014*

*As Bhargavi had predicted, we had some trouble during the process of our data in the codebook. A problem that occurred is that an answer doesn't always match the theories in literature. We felt we had some small gaps in our codebook and we started working on that. Last week I was annoyed because of all the theoretical work for our research, but in this occasion I don't mind it that much. I find it challenging to fill up the gaps in our codebook by trying to find the right aspects in literature."*



During the interviewing in the slum, we saw so many things and met a great variety of people. Some of them inspired me, touched me, amazed me, and what more. It was a great experience and something I will never forget. Most of my favorite interviews were the in depth interviews. In these interviews I could ask more open questions and did not have to think about the time. During these

interviews I could ask more (private) questions and I had the feeling the people talked more because they could speak freely.

An important aspect in this also might have been the fact that these type of interviews were held in a private situation. People were able to speak their mind without any limitations. During all thirty interviews we held in the slum, it occurred to me that some people seem to withheld their opinion about some matters. Most of the time we held these interviews, there were family and/or friends in the room as well. I think that this had some effect on the answers of some participants. Once this withholding of information, or pretending to be happy, was explained by a women during an interview, it led me to the famous theory of 'Masked happiness'.

During the interviews we held in May, we had weekly briefings with Dr. Davar. Next to this we had a lot of contact with her by e-mail. I was very happy with this, because we needed her frequently and her feedback was very helpful for us. She took our questions and suggestions very seriously, which was a very nice experience. For example, we had at some point our doubts about the way participants were picked for interviewing. We noticed that the co-workers approached people on the street and asked them to do an interview with us. Although this method could have worked out fine, we were not always happy with the results. When we shared this with Dr. Davar, she responded very quickly and made sure that the next people we interviewed were of great contribution to the research.

After the thirty interviews in the slum we went on with the final part of the research.

### **The final part of the research**

To end this research we had to collect all the data, draw conclusions and provide recommendations. This was a bit of work, but we were prepared for that, and knowing that we were given enough time and support by Bapu Trust to complete this last stage. Again, Dr. Davar was of great support in this. I can't state enough how nice it felt to have Dr. Davar watching over our shoulder and to know that we could rely on her in any given situation. In the end we succeeded in finishing the final parts and we were proud of the result.

Besides all this, we asked Dr. Davar if it was possible to participate and/or help in other activities as well. She suggested us some sessions of workshops that we could attend.

### **Workshops and other activities**

I enjoyed a totally different line of work that was performed by Bapu Trust with the sessions of the workshops. These sessions had a lot to do with relaxation and that was also the effect it had on me. I liked to see how the participants behaved during each session, and I found the group a delightful composition of people. To be part of the group myself was something I enjoyed, there were a lot of moments that brought a smile on my face. And, as I stated before, it was very relaxing to take part in these exercises. It was a moment in the week were my mind came at ease for a little hour. Every session we attended was conducted by Kavita, which she did great. The way she managed the group with a lot of empowerment and warmth was a wonderful example of a professional social worker.

Besides the workshops, Dr. Davar arranged other activities we could take part of during our internship. We attended some visits in Pune where spiritual healing took place, this was very interesting.

*"1-5-2014*

*On Saturday Bhargavi invited Lisanne and me to a staff meeting of Bapu Trust. There was a well known professor attending, whom is doing a research about spiritual healing. With some of the staff members and the professor we went to see some places where spiritual healing took place, or where spiritual people worked. During this trip we saw the sacrifice of a goat, loads of people worshipping a small temple and women screaming because they were in contact with other spirits. All together, it was quite an impressive day and I am Bhargavi very thankful for it."*



We also attended a workshop with pregnant women whom were suffering of stress or depression. It was shocking to see how young some women were there, but most interesting to see how they communicated with each other. Not much was said in words, but their faces showed a mixture of emotions.

*"22-05-2014*

*Although not much words were spread in the room - besides those from the instructor, the atmosphere felt good. The day before the session I was wondering if I would feel uncomfortable to be the only male attending the session, since the matter regards a very female topic. During the session I realized I did not feel comfortable at all. The whole scene intrigued me actually. A striking thing was that I was not observing women, because most of them were still girls. Afterwards the instructor said that the youngest girls were fifteen and sixteen. Although this is quite a shocking thing, I did not feel much shock within myself. It's how things sometime are in India I reasoned. That I reasoned like this surprised me a little. Was it hard to think like this or did it make sense? Is it a way of coping? I wonder if I would feel the same if this happened at the beginning of the internship, I reckon it would have bothered me more than it did now. Although I'm not sure".*



*A some point in the session things changed. The women were requested to make a drawing. They had to draw their baby and connect them with a line to themselves. It was very interesting to see how some women immediately started to draw and put a lot of effort in it. Some others just gazed around in the room and looked for inspiration from other drawings. Afterwards there was held a small discussion about the drawings and I noticed that the most diligent women talked enthusiastically about their unborn child as well. They seem to look forward having the baby. The women whom gazed and stared around for most of the time, were less enthusiastic in their way of talking about their expected child."*



## **Working with colleagues**

As the internship proceeded, I occasionally had more contact with the co-workers of Bapu Trust. With Kavita we had some meetings regarding our research and she was of great help with that. Next to Kavita, I had occasionally contact with Dharma regarding the interviews. I had contact with him by phone or I spoke with him in the office whenever I needed him. Dharma was always very friendly, flexible and a pleasure to work with.

Although I could not communicate that much with Almas, due to the language barrier, it was obvious that she helped us a lot in coordinating the interviews. Besides them, I regularly went with the other co-workers into the slums for the interviews. They all were most friendly and guided us well through the slums. Whenever a person was curious and approached us in the slum, I noticed and felt that the co-workers were keeping an eye on us. Additionally they tried to help us out whenever we asked or suggested something to the co-workers.

Working with Dr. Davar was always a pleasure. We had a lot of meetings in which we talked about the study and related subjects. The guidance given by Dr. Davar I appreciated more and more along the duration of the internship. This was because we needed her guidance more during the course of the study. She was always there when we needed her, and gave me the feeling that our work was much appreciated. This was important for me since I had a lot of doubts about the quality of the work we did.

I liked the feedback Dr. Davar gave me regarding the reflective reports I wrote after visiting the slum. Sometimes the feedback was encouraging and motivating, but I also remember a critical moment of feedback. This was regarding a report I wrote in an annoyed state of mind, although I was not aware of this. My emotions inflicted the objectivity of the report which Dr. Davar pointed out to me. We talked about this and she gave me some insight of which I am thankful.

Dr. Davar was actually more than a coordinator, because she showed much interest in us as a person, rather than mere interns. When we reflected on reports she guided us in this by asking about our feelings and thoughts.

## Summary

Looking back on the internship at Bapu Trust I enjoyed the internship a lot. I learnt a lot about happiness and the subjects related to it. I also learnt how to set up a small study and I figured out new ways to apply information in a report. I liked the freedom we had to be creative in setting up the report a lot. Dr. Davar let us roam around in different subjects, implement new ideas and encouraged us to be creative. During our study in Holland, I got used to more strict methods of setting up a report, but I liked this new style better.

Futhermore, I had to adjust to another culture which went quite well in my opinion. Working with the people of Bapu Trust was a pleasure and doing the interviews went also without problems. I liked being in the slum and doing interviews with people. In the slum I felt safe and there has never been a moment I did not like or enjoy in the slum.

The time I did not enjoy so much during the internship was when I had to spend much time reading and writing on the computer. After some time I realized that I should have taken precautions by dividing the work on the computer with other pursuits and I should have informed Dr. Davar about this matter.

Regarding the organization, I can mention mainly only positive things about Bapu Trust. The atmosphere at Bapu Trust was always nice and I liked going to the office for a meeting. It was nice to be greeted by the co-workers and even though some of them did not speak English, they always gave me a warm smile.

Moreover, I find Bapu Trust a very professional organization. Most of the time it was easy to set up a meeting with someone and those meetings were of great value to us. People whom we consulted with gave us feedback when we asked for it and helped us by suggesting to adjust the interviews, widen our research and pointing us to specific subjects in literature for us to use.

All together it was a wonderful time and a honor to work for Bapu Trust. Besides the study, all my experiences with Bapu Trust widened my perspective about life, learned me a lot about life and enriched my life greatly.

Thank you so much.