

Study: Secret to Being Happy Includes Good Mental Health and Healthy Relationship Status

By: Isabelle Z., *Natural News*



Many people devote their lives to pursuits they believe will help them feel happy, whether it's financial security, career success or cultivating family relationships. Some of us think that if only we could just snag that promotion, ace that exam or buy the latest smartphone, we'd finally feel good. If you fall into this category, you might want to take a look at a new study out of the London School of Economics. Researchers there found that material wealth actually does not have much of an effect on a person's overall level of happiness.

The study looked at responses from more than 200,000 people from the UK, US, Australia and Germany to questions about the elements of their lifestyle that impact their happiness the most. They found that the biggest influence by a wide margin was mental health; anxiety and depression were behind 20 percent of the variations in people's satisfaction with their lives. Another factor that had a significant effect on happiness was having a partner.

Income, on the other hand, only accounted for just shy of 2 percent of the overall variance. The researchers explained that people evaluate their income against the norm in their area, which is why overall income increases do not have much effect on the population's overall happiness. In the four countries studied, average happiness has not risen since the records began, even though the living standards in these places have improved significantly.

Eliminating depression and anxiety

In fact, the researchers calculated that eliminating anxiety and depression would actually curb people's misery by 20 percent, whereas increasing everyone's income to at least the 20th

percentile of the nation's average income would only reduce misery by 5 percent. While getting rid of anxiety and depression entirely is not possible, there are some steps people can take to help control these feelings.

Yoga is one good way for people to cope with depression and anxiety. Exercise can also help reduce the symptoms of depression. Eliminating unhealthy food from your diet is another good approach, with studies finding that people who eat fried food, fast food and commercial baked goods have a 51 percent higher likelihood of developing depression when compared to those who do not eat such foods. Other hidden toxins in these foods could also adversely impact mental health.

These are much better options than antidepressants, which carry many undesirable side effects that range from nuisances like headaches to serious issues like an increased risk of suicide. Most of them have also been shown to work no better than a placebo, which means natural remedies are not only safer than these drugs, but also tend to be more effective.

How childhood experiences impact adult happiness

The researchers also examined how a person's experiences as a child impacted their happiness as an adult. They found that emotional health as a child played a far bigger role than the financial resources of a child's family. As a matter of fact, this was the biggest determinant of one's well-being as they get older. Schools had a big effect on the emotional health of children as well.

They also discovered that it was not economic growth but the general population's life satisfaction that was the single strongest predictor of European election outcomes since the '70s. The authors hope that these results will influence policymakers to focus on what they feel really matters, which is people's happiness.

Study author Lord Richard Layard said, "In the past, the state has successively taken on poverty, unemployment, education and physical health. But equally important now are domestic violence, alcoholism, depression and anxiety conditions, alienated youth, exam-mania and much else. These should become center stage."

Sources include:

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