

Happiness is not a slave to genes, personality

October 4 2010

Choices and behaviors influence long term happiness, despite individual genetic and personality traits, a study finds.

Bruce Headey (Melbourne University), Ruud Muffels (Tilburg University) and Gert Wagner (DIW and Technical University Berlin) analyzed data from the German Socio-Economic Panel Survey, a series of yearly interviews of adult and youth household members from 1984-2008,

The researchers found that a substantial segment of the German population has experienced long term and apparently permanent changes in happiness over the 25 year period. The authors suggest that the findings contradict popular “set point” theory, which holds that an individual’s happiness remains stable over the long term due to [personality traits](#) and genetics.

Life goals and choices, religion, partner emotional stability, work and leisure balance, social participation, and healthy lifestyle have similar or greater impact on life satisfaction than variables such as extroversion and being married or partnered, the study finds.

The analysis showed no association between partner similarity and life satisfaction, but found that people who prioritize altruistic or family goals are more satisfied with life than those who prioritize careers and material success. For women, obesity and partners who place low priority on family goals reduced [life satisfaction](#) more than being alone.

The authors predict that the study may encourage economists and governments to work to increase [happiness](#) through policy decisions.

Provided by Tilburg University

Citation: Happiness is not a slave to genes, personality (2010, October 4) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-10-happiness-slave-genes-personality.html>

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