

Happiness slides across Europe as speculation mounts on new UK government happiness index

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Emotional prosperity in Europe is falling, and this troubling fact needs to be faced by the European governments. That is the conclusion from a new research report from the University of Warwick which documents cross-country evidence on psychological health and mental well-being. The study, by Andrew Oswald, professor of behavioural science at Warwick Business School, draws together the latest statistical evidence from a range of social-science, science and medical journals. The study is to be published in the December issue of the *British Journal of Industrial Relations*.

It is wrong, Oswald argues, for policy-makers to continue to focus on traditional measures of growing material prosperity, because continued economic growth is pointless if people are becoming more distressed and feeling ever more pressurized.

"Fast cars and fast showers are everywhere in western society", he says, "but the data show us plainly that all is not well psychologically".

He describes research demonstrating that Scottish 15 year olds now suffer more anxiety and depression than in the 1990s, and that those young people in turn suffered more than 15 year olds a decade before them back in the 1980s. He shows, for randomly selected sample of adults, that in Britain, the Netherlands and Belgium, which are the countries in the world with the most reliable longitudinal information on

mental health, there is evidence over recent decades of steadily worsening [psychological distress](#) in the population and a decline in what he terms 'emotional prosperity'. He points to new evidence that in the UK approximately 15% of people are known to be suffering from at least one [mental disorder](#).

The demands of ever-increasing intensification of work are, the study concludes, one likely explanation. Oswald argues that in political debate the criterion of emotional prosperity should replace the increasingly outdated idea of aiming for further material prosperity.

More information: The paper "Emotional Prosperity and the Stiglitz Commission" can be downloaded at: www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/eco...eritybjirdec2010.pdf

Provided by University of Warwick

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