

What defines life satisfaction for consumers living in poverty?

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People whose basic needs are met get more life satisfaction when they are more connected to others and when they experience greater autonomy, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*. But those who live in dire conditions have little hope of achieving such satisfaction.

"About three-fourths of the planet's population lives in nations with less than ideal material conditions, defined by low levels of marketplace abundance and lack of bargaining power necessary to access this abundance," write authors Kelly D. Martin (Colorado State University) and Ronald Paul Hill (Villanova University). According to the authors, nearly half the world's population lives in absolute [poverty](#), and the poorest 40 percent account for 5 percent of total income. More than one billion people lack access to potable water, and two billion don't have access to basic sanitation.

The authors set out to examine the relationship between [life satisfaction](#) and societal poverty. They looked at self-determination, which stems from conditions of relatedness (connection to important others) and autonomy. "We believe conditions of relatedness and autonomy are important to the poverty-life satisfaction relationship, but argue these conditions depend upon a country's existence of a baseline of goods and services necessary for survival termed consumption adequacy," the authors write.

The authors examined data from more than 77,000 consumers across 51

[developing nations](#). They found that the situation for many of the world's people is so bleak that neither relatedness nor autonomy could provide them satisfaction.

"These findings demonstrate that individuals living under extreme poverty are less likely to experience ameliorating effects associated with self-determination (relatedness and autonomy), revealing the added damage to people who already experience the worse possible material conditions," the authors write. "Our results emphasize the pervasiveness and sheer [hopelessness](#) of individuals living in extreme poverty."

More information: Kelly D. Martin and Ronald Paul Hill. "Life Satisfaction, Self-Determination, and Consumption Adequacy at the Bottom-of-the-Pyramid." *Journal of Consumer Research*: April 2012 (published online July 13, 2011).

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