

The Generation X Report: Survey paints a surprisingly positive portrait

October 25 2011

They've been stereotyped as a bunch of insecure, angst-ridden, underachievers. But most members of Generation X are leading active, balanced and happy lives, according to a long-term University of Michigan survey.

"They are not bowling alone," said [political scientist](#) Jon Miller, author of The [Generation X](#) Report. "They are active in their communities, mainly satisfied with their jobs, and able to balance work, family, and leisure."

Miller directs the [Longitudinal Study](#) of American Youth at the U-M Institute for Social Research. The study, funded by the National Science Foundation since 1986, now includes responses from approximately 4,000 Gen Xers---those born between 1961 and 1981.

"The 84 million Americans in this generation between the ages of 30 and 50 are the parents of today's school-aged children," Miller said. "And over the next two or three decades, members of Generation X will lead the nation in the White House and Congress. So it's important to understand their values, history, current challenges and future goals."

The first in a new quarterly series of Generation X Reports describes how Gen Xers are faring in terms of employment and education; marriage and families; parenting; community involvement and religion; [social relationships](#); recreation and leisure; digital life; and happiness and [life satisfaction](#).

Among the many findings:

- Compared to a national sample of all [adults](#), Gen Xers are more likely to be employed and are working and commuting significantly more hours a week than the typical U.S. adult, with 70 percent spending 40 or more hours working and commuting each week.
- Two-thirds of Generation X adults are married and 71 percent have minor children at home.
- Three-quarters of the parents of elementary school children say they help their children with homework, with 43 percent providing five or more hours of homework help each week.
- Thirty percent of Generation X adults are active members of professional, business or union organizations, and one in three is an active member of a church or religious organization.
- Ninety-five percent talk on the phone at least once a week to friends or family, and 29 percent say they do so at least once a day.

"In sociologist Robert Putnam's influential book, 'Bowling Alone,' he argued that Americans were increasingly isolated socially," Miller said. "But this data indicates that Generation X members are not bowling alone.

"Although they may be less likely to join community-based luncheon clubs, they have extensive social, occupational and community networks. They are active participants in parent-teacher organizations, local youth sports clubs, book clubs and other community organizations."

In addition, Miller points out, nearly 90 percent of Generation X adults participated in at least one outdoor activity, such as hiking, swimming, boating or fishing, and 40 percent engaged in two or more recreation and

leisure activities per month.

On the cultural side, 45 percent of the Generation X adults surveyed reported attending at least one play, symphony, opera or ballet performance during the preceding year, and 13 percent said they had attended three or more cultural events during the last year.

"Generation X adults are also readers," Miller said. "Seventy-two percent read a newspaper, in print or online, at least once a week, and fully 80 percent bought and read at least one book during the last year. Nearly half said that they read six or more books in the last year."

Finally, Miller reports, Generation X adults are happy with their lives, with an average level of 7.5 on a 10-point scale in which 10 equals "very happy."

"That is not to say that some members of this generation are not struggling," Miller said. "And in future issues of the Generation X Report we will address some of the challenges many members of this group are facing."

The second Generation X Report will be issued in January 2012, on the topic of influenza. Using data collected during the 2010 influenza epidemic, the January report will explore how young adults kept abreast of the issue and what actions they eventually took to protect themselves and their families. Subsequent reports will cover food and cooking, climate, space exploration, and citizenship and voting.

More information: The Generation X Report:
bit.ly/genXreport_fall2011

Provided by University of Michigan

Citation: The Generation X Report: Survey paints a surprisingly positive portrait (2011, October 25) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-10-survey-surprisingly-positive-portrait.html>

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