Economy May Have Lasting Effect on Young People's Outlook

MONDAY, Feb. 11 (HealthDay News) -- Happiness seems be a generational thing, new research suggests. Life satisfaction generally increases with age, but a person's overall level of satisfaction appears to depend on when he or she was born.

For the study, researchers analyzed data collected from several thousand Americans over a 30-year period and found that older adults had lower levels of overall life satisfaction than young and middle-aged adults.

However, when the study authors analyzed the data by birth cohorts -- groups of people born around the same time -- they discovered that life satisfaction increased with age in all groups. This trend held true even after the researchers accounted for factors such as health, sex, ethnicity and education.

The findings were released online in advance of publication in an upcoming print issue of the journal *Psychological Science*.

People born in the early part of the 20th century -- particularly those who lived through the Great Depression -- had much more difficult early lives than people born in more prosperous times, study author Angelina Sutin, a psychological scientist at Florida State University College of Medicine, noted in a journal news release.

She said this explains why older adults' overall life satisfaction was lower, even though their satisfaction increased as they aged.

Sutin conducted the study while at the U.S. National Institute on Aging.

The researchers said their findings may prove important for younger Americans trying to cope with the current poor economy.

"As young adults today enter a stagnant workforce, the challenges of high unemployment may have implications for their well-being that long outlast the period of joblessness. Economic turmoil may impede psychological, as well as financial, growth even decades after times get better," the study authors wrote.

-- Robert Preidt