

Study: Happiness Seems To Increase With Age, Linked To Birth Year

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People who are worried about getting older can at least count on being happier as they age, according to a new study in the journal [Psychological Science](#).

In the study, a group of American researchers found self-reported feelings of well-being tend to increase with age. They also discovered a person's sense of well-being can be shaped by the year he or she was born, also known as their "birth cohort."

The researchers, led by [Florida State University College of Medicine](#) psychological scientist Angelina R. Sutin, predicted people belonging to the same birth cohort may have shared common experiences that shape their sense of happiness or optimism. For example, individuals who had lived through the Great Depression may have a different sense of optimism than folks who did not.

Sutin and her colleagues culled data from two different studies, NIH's *Baltimore Longitudinal Study of Aging* ([BLSA](#)) and the CDC's *National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey* ([NHANES](#)). The two studies contained information from several thousand people over a 30-year period, including the participants' self-reported sense of well-being.

An initial analysis of the data showed older adults had lower levels of well-being than younger and middle-aged people. However, when the team factored a person's birth cohort into account, they found life satisfaction tended to increase over the course of the participants' lifetimes. This cohort-factored trend remained consistent even after other factors like health, sex, ethnicity, and education were taken into account.

The findings suggest as people within the same birth cohort age, they have an increased sense of well-being. Sutin noted the oldest participants in the study, those born between 1885 and 1925, appeared to have lower levels of well-being compared to people born more recently. However, this hides the fact the oldest cohort actually trends the same as all the other cohorts.

The team theorized the oldest cohort had lived through the difficult economic times of the 1930s and this experience had negatively impacted their sense of well-being. Therefore, the more prosperous times and experiences of the other birth cohorts resulted in higher self-reported levels of happiness.

In their report, the researchers correlated these findings to today's current economic malaise.

"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," [they wrote](#).

Several other studies and surveys have been warning about the psychological impact of the so-called "Great Recession". A report in March 2010 from the [Population Reference Bureau](#) showed about 70 percent of Americans over the age of 40 felt they had been affected by the economic crisis.

Some have taken a 'glass-half-full' view of the situation, saying the economic downturn will bring people together and away from materialistic pursuits. While that may be true, the findings of this latest study would seem to contradict this rosy view over the long term.

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