

Lingnan University "Hong Kong Happiness Index 2008" Survey Happiness Indices Rose Against a Backdrop of Economic Downturn

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Surprisingly Hong Kong people in 2008 apparently are happier compared with the previous year, despite the Financial Market Tsunami. The overall happiness index, according to a survey conducted by the Lingnan University's Centre for Public Policy Studies (CPPS) over 20-24 October 2008 via randomized phone calls, rose to 69.3 in 2008. This is as compared to 67.2 in 2007.

The research team successfully interviewed 823 Hong Kong residents aged 21 or above. On a scale of 0 to 100, an index above 50 suggests that people are happy. An index below 50 suggests unhappiness.

The rise of the 2008 happiness index, which is statistically significant, is due mainly to the increase of happiness among households with relatively lower family incomes. People with household income below \$9,999 recorded a 4.8% increase in happiness indices. The survey data also samples a higher proportion of workers with household income below \$9,999 (18.8% in 2008 cf. 13.3% in 2007) Meanwhile, it is noted that the happiness indices for people with upper middle household income (household income \$30,000-\$39,999) recorded a significant decline (-3.1%).

The global financial crisis thus significantly and adversely affected the middle class. The happiness indices for people with monthly household income above \$40,000 showed little change. On the other hand, among the lower income groups, happiness indices rose noticeably, probably reflecting recent wage increases and the government's pro-poor handouts made in recent months in connection with the inflation relief effort. While those without jobs appeared to be more miserable than in 2007, those with jobs, with the exception of clerical workers, were mostly happier. It should be noted that the lower income groups, while happier than in 2007, remain the most unhappy group among the various income groups on average. Interestingly, however, the percentage of unhappy people is actually highest

among the highest income group (>\$40,000 personal monthly income, 12.7% as compared with 8.6% for all income groups combined).

Another interesting finding is that there is a higher percentage of unhappy people in elementary occupations(20.8%) than among the unemployed(17.4%). The percentage of unhappy persons in the entire sample is 8.1%.

The report shows that older or female respondents are the most happy. This shows the same pattern as in the earlier years and is consistent with results reported by other researchers. However, there is a sizeable number of unhappy individuals among the older population (9.2%).

Among the working population, the happiness scores for those aged 30-49 and 50 or above rose since last year, while those aged 21-29 fell. In addition, the study shows that, after isolating the income factor, people with higher education do not show higher happiness scores.

The study also found that longer working hours and unsatisfactory working environment would affect happiness indices significantly. People reporting financial stress also report low happiness scores, as expected.

"Three Happinesses" and the "Happiness Formula"

The study confirmed a theory proposed by Prof. Ho on "Three Happinesses" comprising "retrospective happiness", "happiness in process", and "prospective happiness", and his "Happiness Formula" based on Love, Insight, Fortitude, and Engagement (LIFE). Regression results showed that happiness is positively related to the extent of involvement in various activities. In particular, those who have a strong sense of purpose(Engagement) and those who care for others and report having a caring family(Love) tend to be the happiest. As for the "three happinesses", "retrospective happiness" and "happiness in process" appear to count more than "prospective happiness" Those reporting that they are happy with the way they have conducted their lives, in particular, show a significantly higher happiness index compared to others.

Launched in 2005, Lingnan University's annual Happiness Index Survey aims to study the impacts of economic, political and social factors on Hong Kong people' happiness and to provide a measurable index of happiness. It is hoped that the study will inform policy makers and the public, leading to better policies and ultimately a happier society.

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