

# Lingnan University's Survey on Hong Kong Happiness Index 2007 Happiness Declines under Economic Recovery

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A survey on Hong Kong Happiness Index conducted by Lingnan University's Centre for Public Studies (CPPS) shows that Hong Kong people in 2007 are less happy than they were in 2006.

The survey has recorded a 4.8% decrease in the overall happiness index from 70.6 in 2006 to 67.2 in 2007. The declining happiness index goes against the general expectation that happiness index will increase under ongoing economic recovery.



The survey was conducted via randomized phone calls in June this year by CPPS. The research team has successfully interviewed 816 Hong Kong residents aged 18 or above. On a scale of happiness index from 0 to 100, people who have a happiness index above 50 are considered "happy" while those below 50 are considered "unhappy".

The decline of the overall 2007 happiness index was mainly brought about by a significant fall in the level of happiness among families with relatively lower household incomes. Whereas the happiness index of families with monthly household income of more than \$30,000 is similar to last year's.

Some international studies suggest that there is a strong relationship between individuals' happiness levels and their relative social status. When people find that they cannot be benefited from the economic growth while others are enjoying large capital gains in the stock market or salary increments, their degree of happiness would decrease.

In terms of occupations, the happiness indices of managerial-level workers and administrators are almost the same as that of last year. However, an obvious decline can be found among the elementary workers and the unemployed. The index of housewives does not record a decline

probably due to their relatively small social life circle and lower chance to interact with other people, which will bring about less comparison among housewives in terms of their social status and thus less change in their happiness index.

This is the first time for CPPS to include people who aged between 18 and 21 in the study sample. The report shows that this group of respondents has a higher level of happiness than those who are senior; female and the elderly respondents are of the happiest groups while those aged between 30 and 59 are of the least happy group. This result resembles with results obtained elsewhere that the happiness index shows a U-shape profile over the life cycle, that is, happiness index first falls in the middle stage of life and then increases at the later stage.

Apart from factors like age, gender and education, CPPS finds that other factors which affect the level of happiness include "spiritual practice", "doing exercises tendency", "health condition" and "smoking habit". This 2007 study shows that, after controlling for differences in incomes, people with higher education level are still happier than others. However, people with university level are less happy when they are unemployed.

The analysis also indicates that people's life goals change over ages. In general, younger people put a higher value on "financial success" and "career success" as their life goals; on the contrary older people prefer having "harmonious relationship with family" and "peace of mind". However, it cannot be defined if the new generation has different values or if they share similar values which however change over the life cycle.

With reference to the surveys on happiness index conducted by CPPS over the past three years, Hong Kong people are found continuously worrying if their lives can be sustained after retirement and if they can afford proper health care whenever necessary. The research centre has also found that Hong Kong people generally put higher value on relationship within family as well as their children's education. Besides, Hong Kong people pay much attention to civic liberties. Compared with last year, Hong Kong people have put a higher value on universal suffrage this year.

Prof HO Lok-sang, Director of CPPS, said the report has shown that "the major factors of

unhappiness of Hong Kong people are unemployment, worries over medical spending, and retirement concerns. Policies relieving these worries will help promoting happiness and bring harmony to society."

Launched in 2005, Lingnan University's annual Happiness Index Survey aims to study the economic, political and social impacts on Hong Kong people's happiness and to provide a measurable index of happiness. It is hoped that the study will lay a foundation for better public policies.

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