

Pressure to feel good associated with poorer individual wellbeing in happier countries: study

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In countries with higher national happiness, citizens who perceive societal pressure to be happy report poorer wellbeing than those in

countries with lower national happiness, finds a study published in *Scientific Reports*.

Egon Dejonckheere and colleagues investigated how perceived societal pressure to be happy and not sad predicts emotional, cognitive and clinical indicators of [wellbeing](#) and how this relationship changes with countries' national [happiness](#) scores (World Happiness Index). They surveyed 7,443 individuals from 40 countries on their emotional wellbeing, satisfaction with life (cognitive wellbeing) and mood complaints (clinical wellbeing) and asked individuals to report their perception of societal expectancies to feel positive.

The authors found that societal pressure to be happy and not sad was reported across almost all countries from their sample and was significantly correlated with citizens reporting poor wellbeing, but there were variations when comparing between countries. Poor wellbeing included reduced [life satisfaction](#), experiencing fewer and less intense positive emotions and more symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress. For most wellbeing indicators, the relationship between societal pressure to be happy and poor wellbeing was almost twice as strong in countries with higher World Happiness Index scores than in countries with lower national happiness scores.

Countries included in the study that were rated as having higher happiness in the World Happiness Index included The Netherlands and Canada, while countries rated with lower happiness included Uganda and Senegal.

Egon Dejonckheere, lead author, said: "The level of happiness individuals feel pressured to achieve may be unattainable and reveal differences between an individual's emotional life and the emotions society approves of. This discrepancy between an individual and society may create a perceived failure that can trigger negative emotions. In

countries where all citizens appear to be happy, deviations from the expected norm are likely more apparent, which makes it more distressing."

The authors conclude high national happiness levels may not necessarily indicate higher wellbeing for all individuals within a country.

More information: Egon Dejonckheere, Perceiving societal pressure to be happy is linked to poor well-being, especially in happy nations, *Scientific Reports* (2022). DOI: [10.1038/s41598-021-04262-z](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-04262-z).
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