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Press release

Inequality threatens our wellbeing

Poverty, unemployment and other forms of exclusion adversely affect people's wellbeing, reveals the Swiss Social Report 2016, which is published by the Swiss Centre of Expertise in the Social Sciences (FORS), with support from the Swiss National Science Foundation.

By and large, people in Switzerland are satisfied and happy and feel their lives are meaningful. If we take a closer look, however, stark differences soon become apparent. This is the conclusion reached by the Social Report 2016 (*) on wellbeing. The report is published by the Swiss Centre of Expertise in the Social Sciences (FORS) with support from the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF). It focuses on how the inhabitants of Switzerland feel about their lives. In particular, it looks at how satisfied they are with different aspects of their lives - such as work, family and leisure - and at what makes them happy and what worries them. To understand the concept of wellbeing in all its complexity, the FORS researchers had to analyse various national and international databases.

No one gets used to poverty and exclusion

The report shows that a person's wellbeing comes under serious strain when they are faced with exclusion, for instance after dropping out of the education system or the job market, or if their financial situation leads them into poverty. This is why the unemployed, the poor and those who are retired due to disability are far less happy about their lives. Though the dire circumstances in which they live can persist for years, they generally do not manage to come to terms with them.

People in Switzerland are very positive about the education system and most of them feel good about their jobs and work conditions.

Unsurprisingly, those with a higher income are more satisfied with their financial situation and spend less time worrying about it. However, all aspects of life considered, they are not more satisfied than people who do not earn quite as much.

Marriage and parenthood only a temporary boost

Those surveyed were also happy about their social environment. The immediate family plays a key role here. People who are in a relationship tend to be more satisfied, more often joyful and less often sad than singles.

Life events such as marriage or the birth of the first child increase the subjective feeling of wellbeing in the run-up to the event, but this effect often wears off quickly. Married couples enjoy greater wellbeing than divorcees or widows and widowers. By far the lowest levels of wellbeing are experienced by estranged couples - periods of transition appear to pose the biggest threat to wellbeing.

Young people feel healthy, old people enjoy more leisure time

Our satisfaction with different aspects of our lives changes over time. As people grow older they begin to worry more about their health, but tend to be more satisfied with their financial situation. Both the old and the young say they enjoy their leisure time. Middle-aged people, however, are less satisfied with their leisure time because their days are packed with work and family commitments, leaving them with very little spare time. That said, a general sense of wellbeing and of living a meaningful life has little to do with age.

The results of the Social Report on wellbeing among the people of Switzerland show that the inclusion of subjective aspects can add another facet to the analysis of inequality and enrich social reporting.

(*) Franziska Ehrler, Felix Bühlmann, Peter Farago, François Höpflinger, Dominique Joye, Pasqualina Perrig-Chiello und Christian Suter (eds). Sozialbericht 2016: Wohlbefinden. Zurich: Seismo, 324 p.

Swiss Social Report 2016 - Wellbeing

In the Social Report, the Swiss social sciences systematically document current social conditions, along with the most important changes to society in Switzerland. The report was published for the first time in 2000 and then every four years, with support from the Swiss National Science Foundation. The 2016 report focuses on the wellbeing of people in Switzerland, on how satisfied they are with various aspects of their lives and on what makes them happy and what worries them.

All data and graphs contained in the report are available at www.sozialbericht.ch

[The project in the SNSF'S research database P3](#)

Editors:

Franziska Ehrler, editor-in-chief of the Swiss Social Report at the Swiss Centre of Expertise in the Social Sciences (FORS).

Felix Bühlmann, professor of sociology at the University of Lausanne.

Peter Farago, professor emeritus at the University of Lausanne and founding director of the Swiss Centre of Expertise in the Social Sciences (FORS).

François Höpflinger, professor emeritus of sociology and member of the steering group at the Centre of Gerontology at the University of Zurich.

Dominique Joye, professor of sociology at the University of Lausanne.

Pasqualina Perrig Chiello, professor of psychology at the University of Bern.

Christian Suter, professor of sociology at the University of Neuchâtel.

Contact

Franziska Ehrler, Swiss Centre of Expertise in the Social Sciences (FORS), franziska.ehrler@fors.unil.ch

Phone: +41 79 263 42 34 / +41 21 692 37 66.

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