

Pre-Intermediate / Intermediate – “Happiness depends on health and friends, not money, says new study” - (12 December, 2016)

Most human misery comes from failed relationships and physical and mental illness – not from money problems and poverty – says an important new report by a team of researchers at the London School of Economics.

Where does most human misery come from?

Where does it not come from?

Who did the research?

Eliminating depression and anxiety would reduce misery by 20%. Eliminating poverty would reduce misery by just 5%, the report said.

If you could get rid of depression and anxiety, how much would misery be reduced by?

What would only reduce misery by 5%?

Lord Richard Layard, who led the report, said that, on average, people have become no happier in the last 50 years, even though incomes have more than doubled.

What did Richard Layard do?

Is it correct that people have become no happier in the last half a century?

What has happened to incomes?

The study, called Origins of Happiness, showed that measuring people’s satisfaction with their lives should be a priority for every government. The researchers analysed data from four countries, including the US and Germany.

What was the study called?

What did the findings say should be a priority for every government?

How many countries did the researchers analyse data from?

Extra spending on reducing mental illness would pay for itself, the researchers said. The government would get back the money they spend because there would be higher employment and people would pay more tax. There would also be a reduction in National Health Service costs from fewer doctors’ visits and fewer people visiting hospital Accident and Emergency Departments.

What did the report say would “pay for itself”?

How would a government get back its investment in reducing mental illness?

How would systems of health care benefit?

“Tackling depression and anxiety would be four times more effective than tackling poverty. It would also pay for itself,” Layard said. The report supports the arguments that social and psychological factors are more important to the wellbeing of people than income levels.

*What would be four times more effective than dealing with poverty?
What is more important to wellbeing than levels of income?*

“Having a partner is as good for you as being made unemployed is bad for you,” he said. The report claims that state-run organizations, including schools, must become more focused on tackling anxiety and mental health issues.

What must state-run organizations do?

“This evidence demands a new role for the state – not ‘wealth creation’ but ‘wellbeing creation’,” Layard said. “In the past, the state has tried to deal with poverty, unemployment, education and physical health. But equally important now are domestic violence, alcoholism, depression and anxiety conditions, exam stress and much more. These should become centre stage.”

*What should be one of the new functions of the state?
What has the state traditionally done?
What are at least 3 of the areas they should focus on now?*

The economist said that children should not be judged by society just on their educational success. The report adds: “The strongest factor predicting a happy adult life is not children’s qualifications but their emotional health. There is also strong evidence that schools have a big impact on children’s emotional health. Which school a child goes to will affect their emotional wellbeing as much as it affects their exam performance.”

*What did the report say that children should not be judged on?
What is the strongest factor predicting a happy adult life?
Who has a big impact on children’s emotional health?*