

Life satisfaction

Did you know?

The *World Value Surveys* ask respondents to rank their feelings of satisfaction with their lives on a scale from 1 to 10. The surveys now cover 80 countries and use standardised questionnaires. The latest wave of surveys took place between 1999 and 2002.

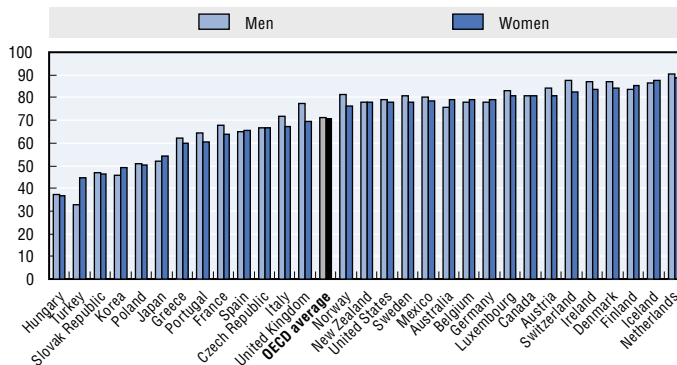
Test your prejudices. In two of these countries – United Kingdom, Turkey, Norway and Korea – women are significantly more satisfied with their lives than men. Which were they?

Answer. In Turkey and Korea, women report greater life satisfaction than men. Women report lower life satisfaction than men in the United Kingdom and Norway.

In over half of OECD countries, more than three-quarters of both men and women reported “above average” scores (7 to 10) for life satisfaction. However, the percentages were 50% or less in the four eastern European countries and in Korea and Japan.

Percentage of people who feel an above average level of satisfaction with their lives

Years between 1999 and 2002

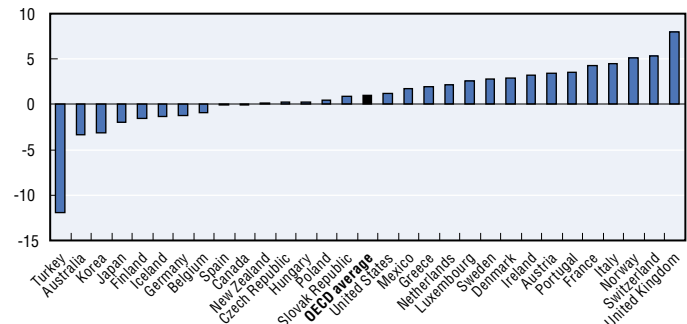


There is some correlation between life satisfaction and per capita income, though some people argue that the correlation becomes weaker when comparisons are limited to the richest countries. Over time, societies which get richer do not report greater life satisfaction.

In most countries more men than women reported feeling satisfied “above average” with their lives. The chart below shows the percentage of satisfied men minus the percentage of satisfied women. The “satisfaction gap” favours men in twenty countries. Do women tend to apply higher standards than men in assessing their life satisfaction? Or do cultural and economic factors conspire to create less satisfying lives for women in most OECD countries?

The satisfaction gap

Percentage of satisfied men minus percentage of satisfied women



Source: OECD (2005), *Society at a Glance*, OECD, Paris; EFILWIC (2003), *Quality of Life in Europe: an illustrative report*, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Dublin; World Value Surveys.

Further reading:

OECD (2005), *Society at a Glance: OECD Social Indicators*, OECD, Paris.
 OECD (2006), *Economic Policy Reforms: Going for Growth – 2006 Edition*, OECD, Paris.