

Life satisfaction represents people's subjective evaluation of their satisfaction with life as a whole. Life satisfaction is associated with good family relationships, health, living conditions and wealth as well as confidence in governance in the broader society.

People in OECD countries are more satisfied with their life than those in the Asia/Pacific region (Figure 8.1, Panel A). On a scale of 1 to 10, life satisfaction scores are 1 point higher on average across the OECD than across the Asia/Pacific region. Australians and New Zealanders have the highest satisfaction of the countries observed, averaging at a score of 7 out of 10; while Cambodians, Nepalese and Sri Lankans had the lowest life-satisfaction scores.

On average across the Asia/Pacific region and the OECD, life satisfaction has not changed markedly since the beginning of the global crisis (Figure 8.1, Panel B). However, it appears that life satisfaction has further declined in those countries where it was already low, as in Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Armenia, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, India and Lao PDR. Life satisfaction increased in about half of the countries since 2006/08, and the increase appeared most pronounced in Thailand and Korea.

Life satisfaction scores are broadly similar for men and women (Figure 8.2). On average, women in the Asia/Pacific region and OECD countries are more satisfied with life than men, but only slightly (less than one-tenth of a percentage point).

People in wealthy countries tend to be more satisfied with life than those in less wealthy countries (Figure 8.3). They appear to have a higher life satisfaction than what might have been expected on the basis of their average income, but, results for Australia, New Zealand and Singapore on the one hand, and Nepal and Cambodia on the other, clearly illustrate the relationship between average life satisfaction and prosperity.

Data and measurement

Data on life satisfaction has been taken from the Gallup World Poll. The Gallup World Poll is conducted in more than 150 countries around the world based on a common questionnaire, translated into the predominant languages of each country. With few exceptions, all samples are probability based and nationally representative of the resident population aged 15 years and over in the entire country, including rural areas. While this ensures a high degree of comparability across countries, results may be affected by sampling and non-sampling error, and variation in response rates. Hence, results should be interpreted with care. These probability surveys are valid within a statistical margin of error, also called a 95% confidence interval. This means that if the survey is conducted 100 times using the exact same procedures, the margin of error would include the "true value" in 95 out of 100 surveys. Sample sizes vary across countries from 1 000 to 4 000, and as the surveys use a clustered sample design the margin of error varies by question. The margin of error declines with increasing sample size: with a sample size of 1 000, the margin of error at a 95% confidence interval is $0.98/\sqrt{\text{sample size}}$ or 3%, with a sample size of 4 000, this is 1.5%. To minimize the effect of annual fluctuations in responses related to small sample sizes, results are averaged over a three-year period, or two-year period in case of missing data. If only one observation in a three-year period is available this finding is not reported.

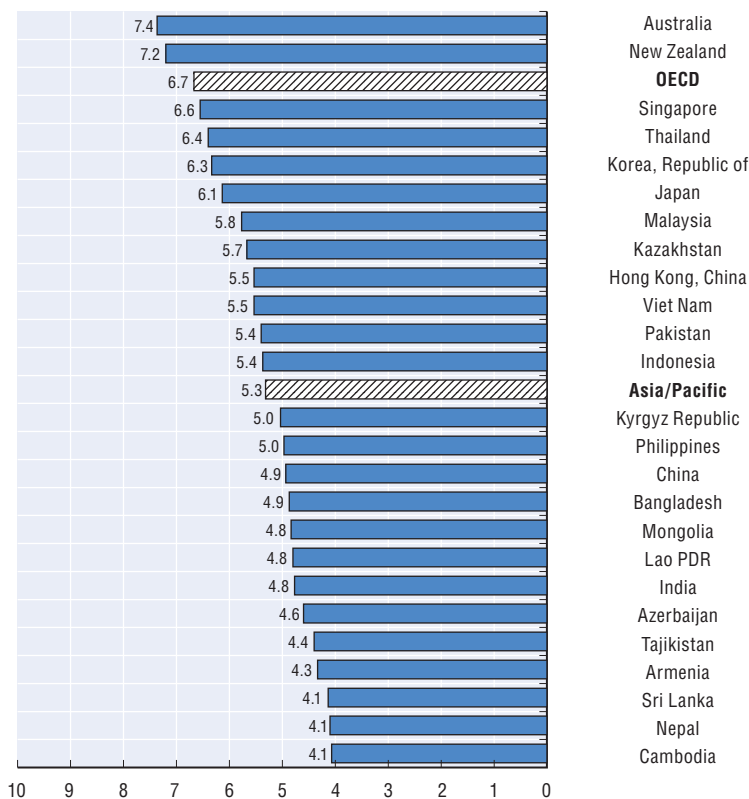
The Gallup World Poll asked respondents to: "Imagine an eleven-rung ladder where the bottom (0) represents the worst possible life for you and the top (10) represents the best possible life for you. On which step of the ladder do you feel you personally stand at the present time?" The main indicator used in this section is the average country score. Data are also shown by gender and broad age groups.

Figure note

Figure 8.3: GDP per capita is gross domestic product divided by midyear population. GDP is the sum of gross value added by all resident producers in the economy plus any product taxes and minus any subsidies not included in the value of the products. It is calculated without making deductions for depreciation of fabricated assets or for depletion and degradation of natural resources. Data are in current US dollars.

Figure 8.1. Life satisfaction and trends therein vary considerably across countries

Panel A. Average points of life satisfaction on an 11-step ladder from 0-10, 2010-12 average (↘)



Panel B. Changes in points of life satisfaction between 2006-08 and 2010-12 averages

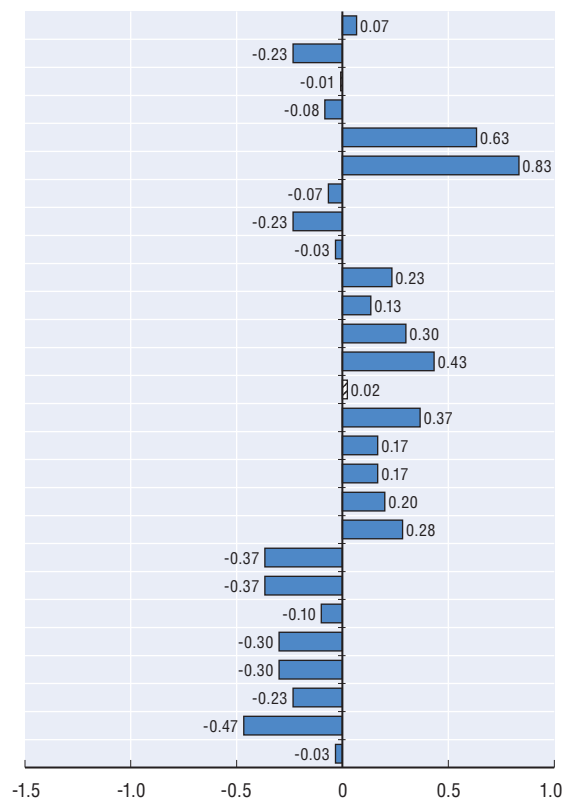


Figure 8.2. Life satisfaction seems broadly similar for men and women, 2010-12 average

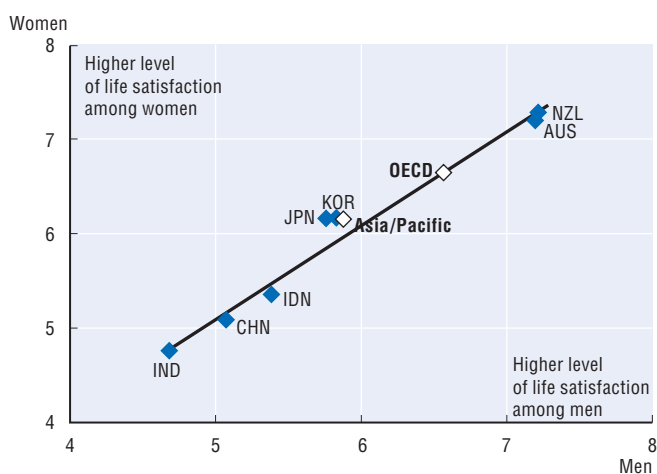
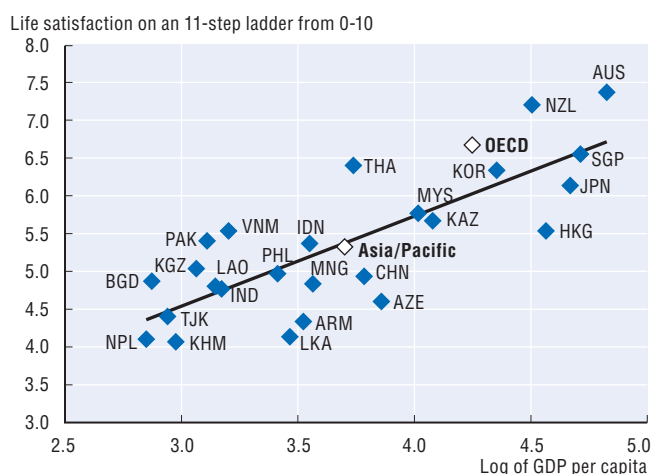
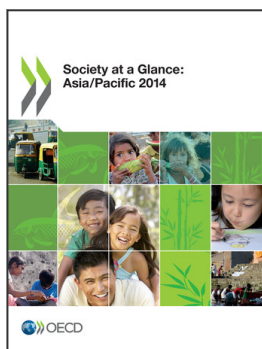


Figure 8.3. People in wealthy countries tend to be more satisfied with life than those in less wealthy countries



Source: Gallup World Poll (www.gallup.com) and World Bank, World Development Indicators.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933151173>



From:
Society at a Glance: Asia/Pacific 2014

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264220553-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD (2014), "Life satisfaction", in *Society at a Glance: Asia/Pacific 2014*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.1787/soc_aag-2014-27-en

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