

## MONEY MIGHT BE UNRELATED TO HAPPINESS, SAYS NEW STUDY

Research suggests overlooked Indigenous people with low or no income may be happiest of all

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A new study has found that we may be overlooking the truly happiest people in the world because they're rarely included in the figures. In global happiness rankings such as the World Happiness Report (WHR), scientists tend to observe a correlation between high levels of life satisfaction and high income. However, these polls often do not distinguish small-scale Indigenous and local societies from whole nations. In some of these communities, money plays a small role in everyday life.



In fact, the new study suggests that not all happiness is money-related. Instead, it reveals that some societies with low incomes (who depend on nature, rather than money) have remarkably high life satisfaction, which could even make them the happiest people in the world. “The strong correlation frequently observed between income and life satisfaction isn’t universal and proves that wealth – as generated by industrialised economies – is not fundamentally required for humans to lead happy lives,” said Prof Victoria Reyes-García, senior author of the study. Though not conducted by the same research body as the WHR, the new study published in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (PNAS) measured happiness in a similar way. The WHR asks respondents to think of a ladder where the best possible life would be a 10 and the worst a 0. Their lives are then rated on that scale. For this new study, the researchers translated the question “Considering all aspects, how satisfied are you with your life on a scale from 0 to 10?” into local languages. The researchers collected the responses from 2,966 people from 19 Indigenous and local communities around the world. Only 64 per cent of the surveyed households in these communities received a cash income of any kind. They found that the average score for these 19 communities was 6.8, with the lowest score being 5.1 (the equivalent of Georgia or the Ivory Coast on the WHR). But four of those communities scored higher than 8/10, which would make these small-scale societies the happiest people in the world if included in the WHR. In 2023, the WHR found that the highest-scoring countries were Finland (7.8), Denmark (7.6) and Iceland (7.5). According to the authors of the new study, the highest scores were in Central and South America. These high figures, they say, are “despite many of these societies having suffered histories of marginalisation and oppression.” “It reveals that some societies with low incomes (who depend on nature, rather than money) have high life satisfaction”