

How to be happy

I recently read an interesting article about a project that began in 1938, when a team of researchers started to document and analyse the lives of 268 male university students with the goal of studying what causes men to be happy and healthy as they journey through life.

The researchers collated and analysed an amazing range of information about the men as they aged, including personality profiles, IQ's, physical and mental health, lifestyles, careers, financial status, personal relationships, politics and religion.

The survivors are now well into their 90's, so the study is going to come to a natural end in due course, but I was fascinated to discover some of the findings, and I thought I'd share a few of them with you:

1. Men who thrive (emotionally and physically) in later life did not necessarily thrive in their early or mid-life, and vice versa.
2. Boys can recover from an unhappy childhood, but happy childhood memories were highly correlated with a man's long-term resilience and success
3. Marriage brings more contentment to a man after his age 70 than it does before
4. Physical health in retirement is less determined by heredity and more determined by the habits and lifestyle choices established before age 50.
5. Alcohol abuse is highly correlated with divorce and depression and (together with cigarette smoking) was the number one cause of ill-health and premature death.
6. Political ideology has no noticeable bearing on overall life satisfaction
7. Above a certain minimum level, there is no noticeable link between high incomes and high IQ's, however the 20% of men who scored highest on having "warm relationships" earned an average of £98,000 per year more in their peak earning years (55-60) than the 20% of men who scored the lowest on that measure.
8. The single most powerful correlation was between the warmth of a man's personal relationships throughout his life and his health and happiness in retirement.
9. The quality of a boy's relationship with his mother is highly correlated to his health, earnings and sense of well-being during his adult working life, but has little bearing on his life satisfaction after retirement.
10. Warmer childhood relations with fathers correlates with lower levels of stress and anxiety in adulthood and higher levels of 'life satisfaction' in retirement.

To my mind, the overall conclusion of the study is simple and clear; if our kids are loved and enjoy warm relationships with their parents as they grow up (and with their peers, friends and colleagues throughout their lives) they will be wealthier, healthier, happier and more resilient to the inevitable challenges that life throws at them. I think there's a lesson in that for us all!

Have a great summer holidays everyone,

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