

PRESS RELEASE

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Young People Are Lonely – New Research Reveals

Young people today are feeling more distant from their family members and also from their close friends, according to a new Index of Wellbeing from the Intergenerational Foundation (www.if.org.uk).

The Index, which analysed 24 British Household Panel Survey indicators over three points in time – 1995, 2005 and 2015 – found a number of disturbing trends emerging around young people’s wellbeing, a measure used to quantify standards of living.

The deterioration in the quality of family relationships – by more than 50% between 2005 and 2015 – revealed that twentysomethings were a great deal less likely to say that one of their three closest friends was also a relative in 2015 than they had been in either 2005 or 1995. Close friendships also deteriorated between 2005 and 2015, falling 6% during the period.

Overall, twentysomethings in 2015 had 10% lower overall scores for economic, health, relationship, personal environment and belonging wellbeing combined than either of the previous cohorts of twentysomethings.

Angus Hanton, IF Co-founder, comments, “For the first time we can prove that 20 years of economic stagnation has affected more than just young people’s economic wellbeing. We should all be concerned by the cracks now appearing in their closest relationships and sense of belonging.”

The Index reveals that economic wellbeing for young people has stagnated for two decades – with a decline in employment and real wages between 2005 and 2015 – in spite of slight improvements in access to pensions and savings. While fewer young people may be working long hours and more young people are enjoying shorter commuting times, the report’s author, David Kingman, argues that this is “likely to be because of the emergence of the ‘gig’ economy with fewer work hours available and consequently less commuting time undertaken.”

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“Belonging” wellbeing has seen very large declines since 2005 (-32%) because of falls in volunteering, interest in politics and observing a religion – all activities that have been strongly associated with a sense of belonging and a level of trust in society.

Health wellbeing saw a sharp decline of 11% between 2015 and 1995. This change has been driven by a very significant decline in how twentysomethings assess the level of their own physical health. David Kingman reflects that “this could be due to an increase in obesity or it could be due to greater exposure to social media and anxiety over body image since younger generations are drinking less, taking drugs less, and exercising more than previous generations did at the same age.”

Angus Hanton concludes, “While we welcome government attempts to measure wellbeing, it appears that little has been done to analyse the plight of young people specifically when they are experiencing such high levels of loneliness and social isolation on top of low wages, high student debt, and poor employment prospects.

“Very often the media focus is on loneliness experienced by older people. This research proves that young people are also affected.”

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Notes to Editors:

- The research, by the Intergenerational Foundation, analysed five wellbeing areas – relationships, economic, health, personal environment and belonging – over three snapshots in time for young people aged 20–29: 1995, 2005 and 2015.
- 24 indicators from the British Household Panel Survey and “Understanding Society” were chosen, as previous research has suggested that they each have a significant bearing on wellbeing.
- More than 1,500 people were surveyed in each of the three waves. The data were standardised and transformed so that an increase in a score always represents an increase in wellbeing.
- The model was validated using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), with the variables weighted in line with their relative importance for determining people’s wellbeing based on previous research.
- The Intergenerational Foundation is a non-party-political charitable think tank funded by no-strings donations.
- TV, radio and print interviews are available with Angus Hanton, IF Co-founder, and report author, David Kingman:

Please contact Liz Emerson on 07971 228823, liz@if.org.uk to arrange.