

Opinion

For richer or poorer; New study shows that a nation's economic prosperity can make you happy

350 words

21 April 2008

Las Vegas Sun

News4

English

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Economists have launched a new debate over the old question, "Can money buy happiness?"

The conventional wisdom, as well as the accepted academic research, says of course not. Economists and social scientists refer to the "Easterlin paradox" as proof.

In 1974 economist Richard Easterlin published a widely accepted study arguing that a nation's economic prosperity doesn't necessarily mean its people will be happy. For example, he noted that the economy in post-World War II Japan expanded dramatically, but people's satisfaction did not.

The New York Times reported Wednesday that a study by economists **Betsy Stevenson** and Justin Wolfers, using research over the past three decades, is gaining notice by experts because it contradicts Easterlin's conclusion. They argue that people in rich countries, even the poor, are typically more satisfied than people in less affluent countries. In other words, a rising tide floats all boats.

The timing of the study is interesting because of the problems with the nation's economy. The stock market has been tumultuous at best, gasoline and food prices are skyrocketing, and the housing market has collapsed. Nevada is at the center of the problems in the housing market, with the highest rate of foreclosures in the nation. And high gas prices have cooled tourism.

There are signs the nation could be in for a long economic struggle and Nevada's economy may not be, as once thought, recession-proof.

Looking at the study in light of the current situation, we take some comfort in the fact that, despite the problems, conditions in America are still better than they are in much of the world. But, understandably, it's hard to imagine many people in this country being content with that relative satisfaction.

Indeed, four of five Americans in a recent New York Times poll responded that they thought this country was on the wrong track. And while money can't guarantee happiness, in today's economy it sure can buy peace of mind.

Document LVSNO00020080421e44I0003b