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Coverage

United Kingdom

Theme

Social and Welfare

Wealthier and healthier, but are we happier?

Social Trends – 38th edition

Britons have enjoyed a steady improvement in their standard of living in the last 30 years. On average, they are also healthier. But satisfaction has changed little over this period.

Figures on health, wealth and life satisfaction are published today in *Social Trends*, the 'state of the nation' statistical report from the Office for National Statistics, which this year takes the theme of societal well-being. The report indicates that:

- household net wealth has more than doubled in the UK in real terms between 1987 and 2006;
- the volume of spending on goods and services by households in the UK in 2006 was two and a half times that in 1971;
- life expectancy stood at 77 for males and 82 for females in 2006, compared with 69 for males and 75 for females in 1971;
- the mortality rate for circulatory diseases such as heart disease or stroke has seen a marked decline, from 6,936 per million males and 4,285 per million females in 1971 to 2,462 per million males and 1,559 per million females in 2006;
- meanwhile, attitude surveys suggest little has changed in adults' satisfaction with their standard of living over the same period.

A study by Eurobarometer indicates that between 1973 and 2006 people saying they were satisfied on the whole with the life they led fluctuated closely around an average of 86 per cent. In 2006, the figure was 85 per cent.

National Statistician Karen Dunnell said: "Assessing societal well-being is relevant for an increasing number of public policy needs and in political and public debate. The Office for National Statistics is undertaking a programme of work to produce better and more detailed measures.

To help with this, *Social Trends* has brought together a range of indicators in this edition that can be explored in establishing a detailed frame of reference for societal well-being."

Other trends emerging in this year's edition include:

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Family structures: Partnerships are changing but family life is still important. Whilst marriage is still the most common form of partnership, the proportion unmarried and cohabiting has doubled in the last decade. At the same time, births outside marriage have increased with the majority born to cohabiting couples.

Environment and lifestyles: We're recycling more with less going to landfill in 2006/07 than a decade ago, but an increase in the number of people living alone may be thwarting the gains from energy efficiencies.

Free time and money: Essentials such as housing and transport constituted substantial proportions of our household budgets in 2006 but eightfold growth in the volumes of consumption for recreation and leisure and UK tourist expenditure abroad over the last three decades suggests that how we spend our free time is very much important in today's society.

Social Trends 38

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<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/socialtrends38>

BACKGROUND NOTES

1. *Social Trends* is published by the Office for National Statistics. The ONS is the executive office of the UK Statistics Authority, a non-ministerial department reporting directly to Parliament. It is the UK Government's single largest statistical producer.
2. *Social Trends* brings together a wide range of information from different sources on various aspects of society, including expenditure, income and wealth, the labour market, the environment, health, crime, social participation, households, families and education. It is a popular reference source among public policy makers and is also widely used in education, academia and business.
3. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available from the press office.
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