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How happy are Australians with their quality of life?

The results of a study commissioned by the Australia Institute called “Quality of Life in Australia: A analysis of public perceptions” have revealed a new insight into what Australians think about life in this country.

The research conducted by Newspoll and overseen by Richard Eckersley from the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health found only 24 per cent of Australians think quality of life is getting better, while 36 per cent think it is getting worse.

The results of the survey contradict recent claims of a new mood of optimism in Australia, although they do suggest a lift in public mood within the last two years. In 1997 only 13 per cent of Australians thought quality of life was improving, while 52% thought it was declining.

The survey was undertaken as part of an analysis of recent research into public attitudes. Researcher Richard Eckersley said, “The study reveals a sense of personal optimism and belief in Australia that has probably always existed. There appears to be a lifting of the national mood, but it may be superficial and short term. There remains an underlying current of pessimism and concern in the national psyche that has grown over the past 20 years.”

A state-by-state break up of the figures has uncovered some startling differences between which state is the happiest and the most disappointed with the quality of life in Australia. Victoria recorded the largest proportion of respondents (37%) who believe life is getting better, while Queensland recorded the lowest (14%).

Survey respondents also nominated which decade they considered to be the best for quality of life. Opinion was spread evenly over the 1990s, 1980s and 1970s, with a declining percentage choosing earlier decades.

The survey also found Australians were more likely to rate spending more time with family and friends and having less stress in their lives as very important in improving their personal quality of life than they were to rate having more money as very important.

Australia Institute Executive Director Dr Clive Hamilton said: “Most of us suspect that money can’t buy happiness; this research reinforces the view that as a society we need to go beyond growth fetishism.”

A press conference will be held at the Sir Roland Wilson Building, McCoy Circuit, Australian National University, Canberra at 11am on Wednesday 1st September.

Clive Hamilton from the Australia Institute and Richard Eckersley from the ANU will be available for interview.

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