

Recession may have boosted teens' social consciousness

July 11 2013



In study, high school seniors were more likely to care about others, environment when economy faltered.

(HealthDay)—Concern for other people and the environment rose among American teens during the recent recession, a new study indicates.

Researchers analyzed data collected from high school seniors between 1976 and 2010, and found that concern for others declined significantly between the mid-1970s and 2004-2006, and then climbed during the 2008-2010 recession.

Along with greater concern for others, students who graduated during the recession also had more interest in social issues, in [saving energy](#) and in protecting the environment, the psychologists at San Diego State University (SDSU) and University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) found.

For example, 63 percent of recession-era high school seniors said they made an effort to turn down the heat at home to save energy, compared to 55 percent before the recession. Thirty percent of recession-era 12th graders said they thought often about social problems, compared to 26 percent before the recession, the investigators found. During the recession, 36 percent of [high school seniors](#) said they would be willing to use a bicycle or mass transit to get to work, up from 28 percent before the recession.

"Although young people's concern for others and for the environment is still lower than it was in the 1970s, the recession has apparently led youth to focus more on others compared to the [economic boom](#) times of the mid-2000s," Jean Twenge, a professor of psychology at SDSU, said in a university news release.

"Amidst all of the suffering caused by the recession, there may be positive benefits to society if more Americans are looking outside themselves," Twenge added.

And according to Patricia Greenfield, a [psychology professor](#) at UCLA, "This is the silver lining of the Great Recession."

Greenfield noted in the news release, "These findings are consistent with my theory that fewer [economic resources](#) lead to more concern for others and the community. It is a change very much needed by our society."

The study was published July 11 in the journal *Social Psychological and Personality Science*.

More information: The Nemours Foundation offers a family guide to [getting involved in the community](#).

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Citation: Recession may have boosted teens' social consciousness (2013, July 11) retrieved 23 April 2024 from

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