

Is narcissism on the rise? Do millennials really feel more entitled?

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PhD candidate Samantha Stronge. Credit: University of Auckland

Are New Zealanders more narcissistic than they used to be? Do millennials really have a stronger sense of entitlement than previous generations?

The answer, according to the first-ever study investigating [narcissism](#) in New Zealand, is no.

The research, from the University of Auckland, tested 'psychological entitlement', the sense that one is entitled to more than other people, as a measure of narcissism. Entitlement is a key indicator of narcissistic behaviour because it is considered "socially toxic", associated with emotional instability, disagreeableness, selfishness and aggression.

Lead author and doctoral candidate in the University of Auckland's School of Psychology, Sam Stronge, says the study found no evidence that New Zealanders are more narcissistic than they used to be, or that younger generations feel any more entitled than previous generations did at the same age.

However the study findings, from surveying more than 10,000 New Zealanders aged 19 to 75 years using data from the National Attitudes and Values Survey (NZAVS) is only a 'first look' at narcissism and should be treated with caution, Ms Stronge says.

"The NZAVS has only been going six years so far, so we could only track changes over five years of data and we know that psychosocial changes happen slowly and over longer periods of time," she says.

"What we have done in this study is come up with some initial findings and what we're looking forward to is building on these to track changes in narcissism over time."

While the study found no significant rise in a sense of entitlement by younger people, including the so-called millennial [generation](#) (those born between 1982 and 2002) it did find a slight increase in entitlement for people aged 65 years and over.

Women aged 69 years showed higher levels of entitlement than women aged 69 did five years ago, as did men aged 64 and 69 years old.

"There could be a simple explanation for this, which aligns with international research, and that is what we call the 'la dolce vita' effect, retired people feeling they have worked hard and now deserve to reap the benefits of that."

The study also generally mirrored the findings of international research which theorises that our sense of entitlement naturally decreases over time as we age.

"When older generations look at younger generations and judge them to be more narcissistic, they may well be right – but only at their current age."

The study also looked at gender differences in regard to a [sense](#) of entitlement.

"Looking at [gender differences](#) for example, men were on average more entitled than women. Men and women's entitlement also changed differently across the lifespan: women's entitlement appears to steadily decrease, whereas men's [entitlement](#) initially gets higher across their 20's before decreasing."

The study is published in the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*.

More information: Samantha Stronge et al. Are People Becoming More Entitled Over Time? Not in New Zealand, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* (2017). [DOI: 10.1177/0146167217733079](https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167217733079)

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