

Study suggests greeting strangers can boost happiness levels

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Credit: Sora Shimazaki from Pexels

A team of psychologists at Sabanci University, in Turkey, working with a colleague from the University of Sussex, in the U.K., has found that people simply saying "hello" to strangers they encounter can lead to increased life satisfaction. In their study, [reported](#) in the journal *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, the group queried two large

groups of people regarding their encounters with strangers and how they graded their own level of life satisfaction.

Recently, the World Health Organization declared that loneliness is a global public health concern—one that is as bad as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Psychologists say such loneliness is related to the degree of isolation reported in most Western modern societies. People tend to keep to themselves and only talk to people they already know.

But isolation, the team suggests, is leaving people less happy than in days past when [strangers](#) spoke freely with one another. For this study, the researchers sent out and received back questionnaires asking people first in Turkey, then the U.K., about recent momentary interactions, or even conversations, with strangers. They also asked each respondent to rate their level of [life satisfaction](#) or general happiness levels. In the first study, the researchers received 3,266 replies and in the second, 60,141.

The research team found a trend—those people who reported having momentary interactions with strangers, or conversations with them, tended to report higher levels of life satisfaction or happiness as compared to those who kept to themselves and avoided talking to strangers.

The researchers suggest that interacting with strangers on a regular basis can lead to feelings of belonging to a community, which can make people feel more accepted and even valued by those who share their small part of the world—feelings that prior studies have shown help people to feel satisfied with their lives. Such [feelings](#), they note, can also reduce [loneliness](#), which, as the WHO pointed out, can be dangerous to a person's health.

More information: Esra Ascigil et al, Minimal Social Interactions and Life Satisfaction: The Role of Greeting, Thanking, and Conversing,

Social Psychological and Personality Science (2023). [DOI: 10.1177/19485506231209793](https://doi.org/10.1177/19485506231209793)

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