

DAVOS 2021: Americans 'no less happy' despite coronavirus crisis



Tom Belger · Finance and policy reporter

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A couple in the snow in Britain as studies suggest little change in aggregate happiness levels despite the COVID-19 crisis. Photo: PA.

Happiness levels among much of the US public quickly returned to normal after the initial shock of the coronavirus crisis, according to an academic.

Professor Tali Sharot, a cognitive neuroscientist at University College London (UCL) made the bold claim at a [panel event at the virtual Davos Agenda 2021 summit on Monday](#).

A team at UCL surveyed 1,145 Americans in 30 states last year. Sharot said they found a “significant decrease” in happiness and higher stress levels in the early stages of the pandemic’s spread.

But a follow-up survey found happiness and stress levels went back to prior levels within a month, in findings she called “incredible.”

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Participants reported anxiety falling and a greater sense of control over time, with greater optimism about their own

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researchers involved, [in a summary of the research last year](#).

Sharot told the panel the happiest participants were those who did feel agency over their lives, and urged policymakers to look at ways to boost the public's sense of agency. She highlighted some US school districts where choice over sending children to school had been left with parents as an example.

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But she said a "significant minority" of people were struggling with the pandemic. The study was also concluded by mid-2020, when not all the health, social and economic impacts of the pandemic would have been felt.

The study also found the number of COVID-19 cases and deaths in their state had no discernible impact on respondents' wellbeing.

WEF'S annual meeting of global business, political and civil society leaders has been postponed to May and moved from Davos, Switzerland, to Singapore because of the pandemic.

The move led to the launch of this week's additional 'Agenda' event in the run-up to the in-person summit, with more than 100 virtual sessions including heads of state and CEOs of global companies.

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