Study reveals that unhappy people watch more TV

AN extensive new research study has found that unhappy people watch more TV while those consider themselves happy spend more time reading and socializing.

The University of Maryland analysed 34 years of data collected from more than 45,000 participants and found that watching TV might make you feel good in the short term but is more likely to lead to overall unhappiness.

"The pattern for daily TV use is particularly dramatic, with 'not happy' people estimating over 30 percent more TV hours per day than 'very happy' people," the study says. "Television viewing is a pleasurable enough activity with no lasting benefit, and it pushes aside time spent in other activities -- ones that might be less immediately pleasurable, but that would provide long-term benefits in one's condition. In other words, TV does cause people to be less happy."

The study, published in the December issue of Social Indicators Research, analysed data from thousands of people who recorded their daily activities in diaries over the course of several decades. Researchers found that activities such as reading and socializing correlated with the highest levels of overall happiness.

Watching TV, on the other hand, was the only activity that had a direct correlation with unhappiness.

"TV is not judgmental nor difficult, so people with few social skills or resources for other activities can engage in it," says the study. "Furthermore, chronic unhappiness can be socially and personally debilitating and can interfere with work and most social and personal activities, but even the unhappiest people can click a remote and be passively entertained by a TV. In other words, the causal order is reversed for people who watch television; unhappiness leads to television viewing."

Unhappily married couples also watch more TV: "(Happily married couples) attend religious services more and read newspapers on more days," reports the study. "While those not happy with their marriages watch more TV."

Yet there may be good news here for broadcasters. Commenting on the study, co-author John P. Robinson said the worsening economy could boost TV viewing.

"Through good and bad economic times, our diary studies, have consistently found that work is the major activity correlate of higher TV viewing hours," Robinson says. "As people have progressively more time on their hands, viewing hours increase."

Concludes the study: "These points have parallels with addiction; since addictive activities produce momentary pleasure but long-term misery and regret. People most vulnerable to addiction tend to be socially or personally disadvantaged, with TV becoming an opiate."

Source: Reuters

