



Press Release

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Gen Z South Africans struggle to find happiness this Valentine's Day

While South Africa ranks among the world's most romantically content nations, a new Ipsos Love Life Satisfaction study reveals a troubling trend: Generation Z is the unhappiest generation in the country – with young women bearing the heaviest burden.

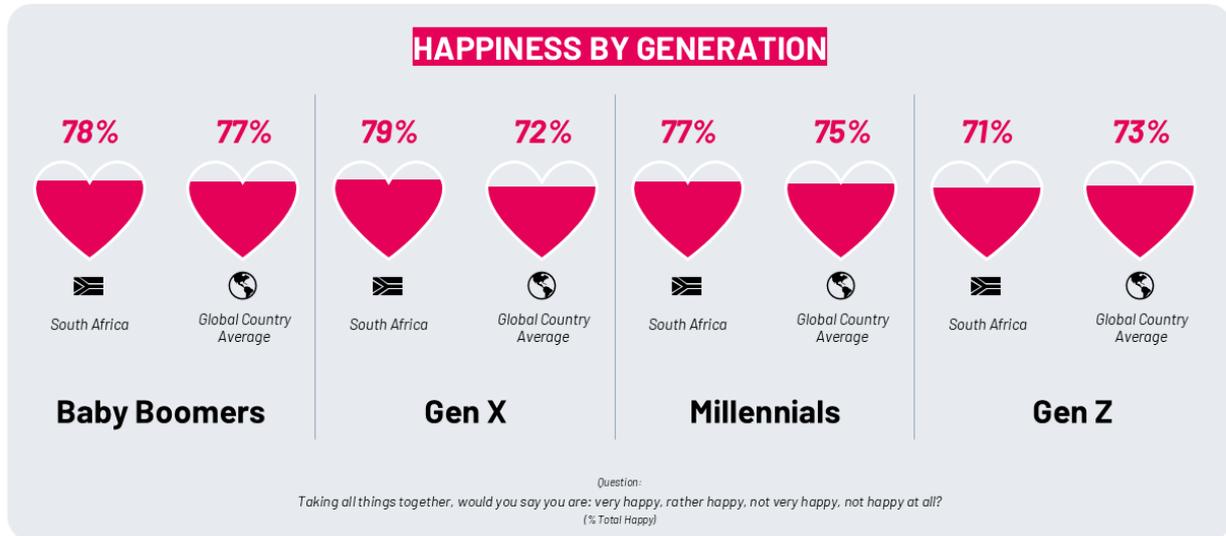
The survey, which covered 29 countries, shows that only 71% of Gen Z South Africans report being happy, compared to 78% of Gen X and 78% of Baby Boomers. More striking still, Gen Z South Africans are the only generation in the country less happy than their global peers (73%).

Key findings include:

- **Gen Z happiness gap:** Only 71% of Gen Z South Africans are happy, compared to 78% of older generations and 73% of Gen Z globally.
- **Young women in crisis:** Just 66% of Gen Z women report being happy – a stark 12 percentage point gap compared to Gen Z men (78%).
- **Financial stress hits hardest:** 67% of unhappy Gen Z South Africans cite their financial situation as a primary cause – higher than the global Gen Z average of 53%.
- **Search for meaning:** 23% of Gen Z say their life lacking meaning contributes to unhappiness, compared to just 8% of Baby Boomers, 5% of Gen X and 7% of Millennials.
- **Feeling out of control:** 24% of Gen Z feel a lack of control over their lives drives their unhappiness, versus 8% of Boomers.

Generational happiness gap

Gen Z is the only South African generation trailing global peers



Gen Z South Africans struggle to find happiness this Valentine's Day (13 February 2026)
Source: Ipsos Love Life Satisfaction 2026 | © Ipsos 2026



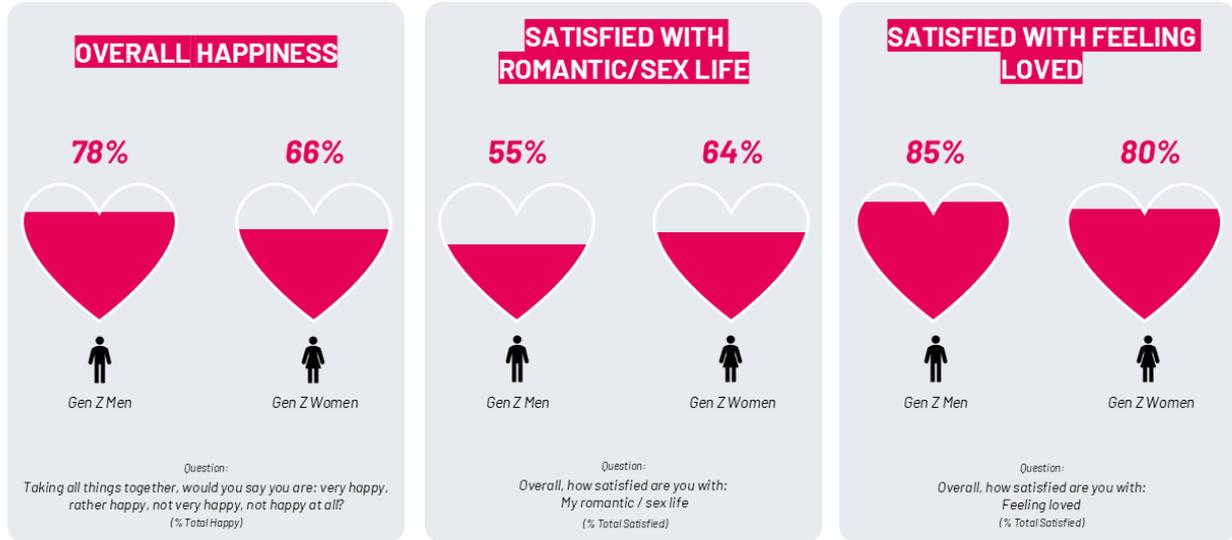
"These findings should concern us all," says Natalie Otte, Country Manager at Ipsos in South Africa. "While South Africa generally outperforms on happiness metrics, our youngest adults are struggling. Gen Z is navigating a perfect storm of economic uncertainty, social media pressures, and a post-pandemic world – and the data shows they're feeling it."

The Gen Z gender divide

Perhaps the most concerning finding is the significant happiness gap between Gen Z men and women in South Africa:

South African Gen Z happiness by gender

Young South African women less happy overall despite stronger romantic satisfaction



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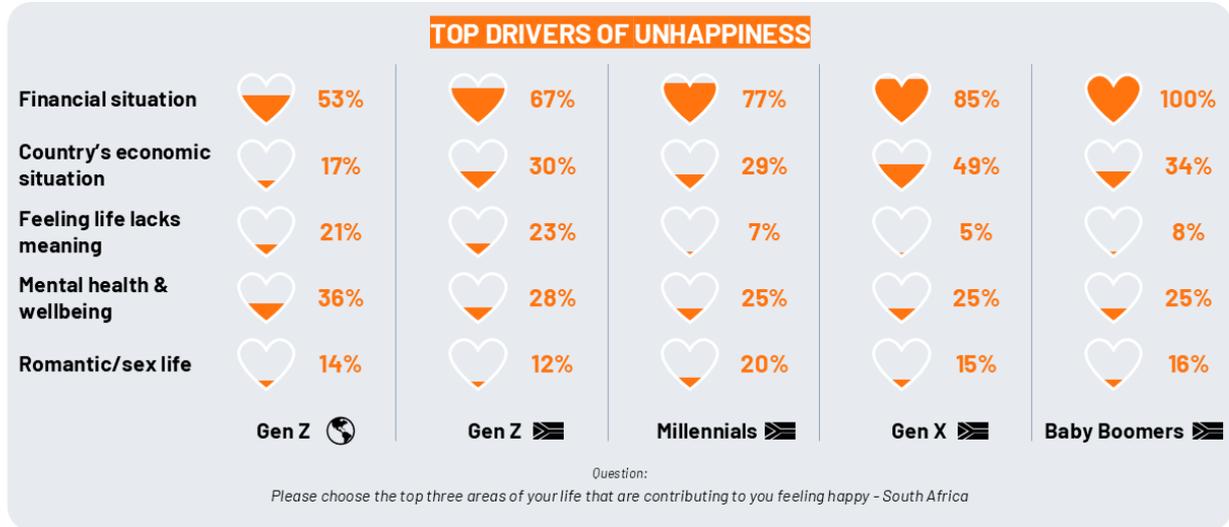
"The paradox here is striking," Otte explains. "Gen Z women report higher satisfaction with their romantic and sexual relationships than Gen Z men, yet they're significantly less happy overall. This suggests that while relationships may be positive, other factors – financial pressures, mental health, and the search for meaning – are weighing heavily on young women."

What's driving Gen Z unhappiness?

The study reveals distinct generational differences in what causes unhappiness:

Unhappiness drivers by generations in South Africa

Gen Z uniquely struggles with meaning and control - not just money



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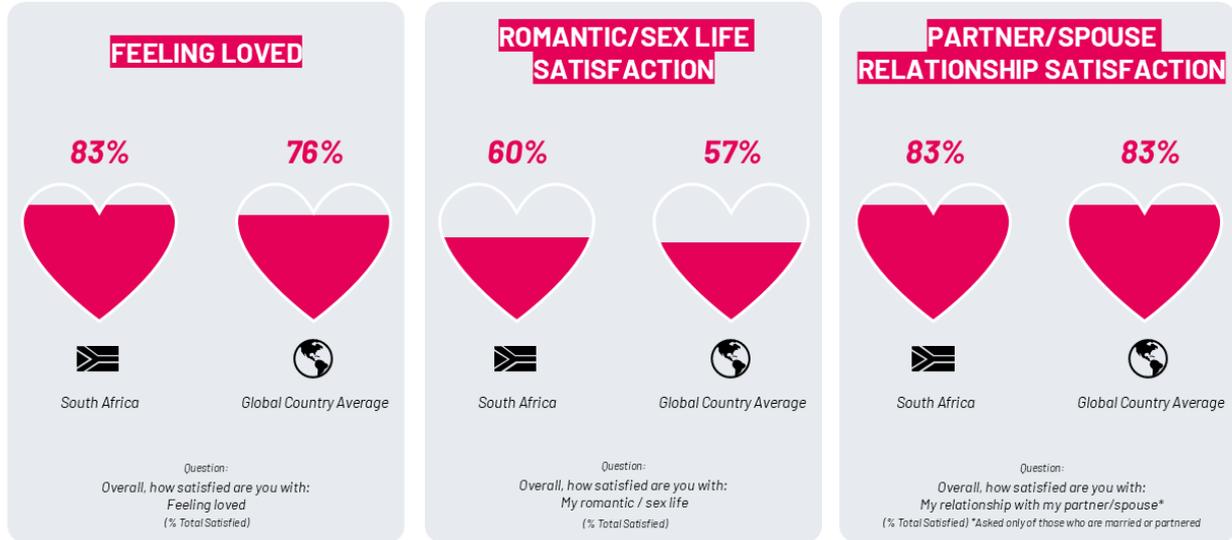
"What differentiates Gen Z's unhappiness is the existential dimension," Otte notes. "While financial stress is universal across generations, Gen Z is uniquely wrestling with questions of meaning and agency. Nearly a quarter feel their life lacks meaning, and a similar proportion feel they've lost control over their own lives. These are concerns that transcend economics."

Gen Z and love: A mixed picture

Despite overall happiness challenges, Gen Z South Africans show resilience in their romantic lives:

Gen Z love life

Gen Z South Africans feels MORE loved than global peers



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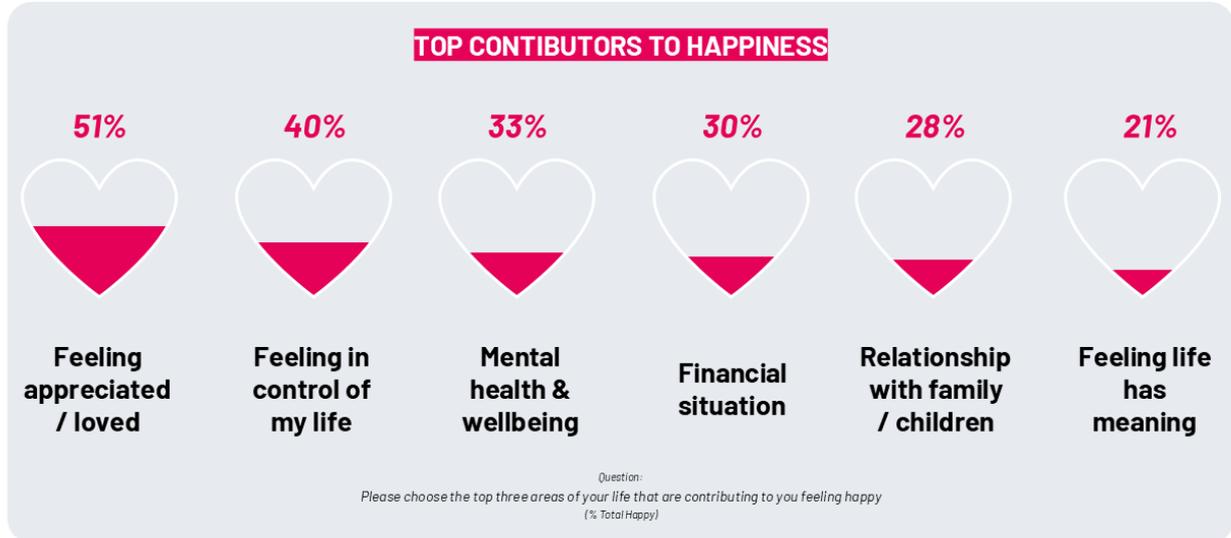
"There's hope in these numbers," Otte observes. "Gen Z South Africans feel more loved than their global counterparts – 83% versus 76%. They're building meaningful connections and maintaining strong relationships. The challenge isn't love itself; it's everything else competing for their emotional bandwidth."

What makes Gen Z happy?

When asked what contributes to their happiness, Gen Z South Africans prioritise:

South African Gen Z happiness drivers

Love and control matter most to Gen Z



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"For Gen Z, feeling loved is paramount – but so is feeling in control," Otte explains. "40% of happy Gen Z South Africans credit their sense of control over their lives, compared to just 28% of Boomers. This generation values autonomy and agency. Brands, employers, and policymakers who can help Gen Z feel more in control will resonate deeply."

The path forward

"Gen Z isn't asking for the world – they're asking for meaning, agency, and connection," Otte concludes. "This Valentine's Day, the gift they want isn't expensive – it's feeling valued, heard, and empowered. For marketers, employers, and policymakers, the opportunity is clear: help Gen Z feel in control of their futures, and you'll earn their loyalty. Ignore their struggles, and you risk losing an entire generation."

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About the study

- *Technical note: For this survey, Ipsos interviewed a total of 23,268 adults aged 18 years and older in India, 18-74 in Canada, Republic of Ireland, Malaysia, South Africa, Türkiye, and the United States, 20-74 in Thailand, 21-74 in Indonesia and Singapore, and 16-74 in all other countries.*
- *The sample consists of approximately 2,000 individuals in Japan, 1,000 individuals each in Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Mexico, Spain, and the U.S., and 500 individuals each in Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Hungary, Indonesia, Ireland, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Peru, Poland, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, Thailand, and Türkiye.*



Press Release - Continued

The sample in India consists of approximately 2,200 individuals, of whom approximately 1,800 were interviewed face-to-face and 400 were interviewed online.

- *The “29-country average” reflects the average result for all the countries and markets where the survey was conducted. It has not been adjusted to the population size of each country or market and is not intended to suggest a total result.*

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