

Societal shift towards individualism began a century ago

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Toronto: Although the baby boomers have been referred to as the Me Generation, new research indicates that people actually started to become increasingly self-centred more than a century ago.

Baby boomers are people born between the years 1946 and 1964.

Societal shift towards more white collar jobs drove the shift towards individualism, said the study covering a 150-year period.

For the study, the researchers looked at the US culture to determine how and why people there became more independent and less reliant on family ties, conformity and duty. This phenomenon is called individualism.

"As demands of American society shifted from manual labour to office jobs, Americans gained education and wealth, both of which promote self-direction and ultimately facilitate individualism," said the study's first author Igor Grossmann from the University of Waterloo in Canada.

"We found that changes in the social class structure precede changes in individualism," Grossmann pointed out.

They tested six factors commonly thought to influence cultural change toward individualism: urbanisation, secularism, socio-economic structure, climatic demands, infectious disease and disaster.

Then in the context of those factors, they examined the growth of eight indicators associated with cultural individualism, such as presence of individualist words in books, percentage of single child families, percentage of adults living alone and divorce rates.

The findings appeared in the journal Psychological Science.

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