

Middle class, but feeling economically insecure

By Patricia Cohen, New York Times

It's not only what you have, but how you feel.

When it comes to membership in the middle class, earnings and assets are just part of the definition. Nearly nine out of 10 people consider themselves middle class, as a recent survey by the Pew Research Center found, regardless of whether their incomes languish near the poverty line or skim the top stratum of earners.

"Middle income is not necessarily the same thing as middle class," said Rakesh Kochhar, a senior research associate at Pew. Even as the proportion of households in the middle-income brackets has narrowed, people's identification with the middle class remains broad.

That's because the middle-class label is as much about aspirations among Americans as it is about economics. But a perspective that was once characterized by comfort and optimism has increasingly been overlaid with stress and anxiety.

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