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On the fifth anniversary of the Australian Unity Wellbeing Index: what have we learned about subjective wellbeing?

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This manuscript contains notes below each slide. To view these notes, open in Powerpoint, go to ‘View’, and click on ‘Notes Page’

Australian Centre on Quality of Life
http://www.deakin.edu.au/research/acqol
Quality of Life

Objective Conditions
  e.g. Physical health

Subjective Perceptions
  e.g. Satisfaction with health

Objective QOL

Subjective Wellbeing
Two kinds of ‘happiness’

Short-term ‘state’ happiness
An emotional response to something

Enduring ‘trait’
contentment
A mood with a genetic basis

Subjective wellbeing
What is subjective wellbeing?

A normally positive state of mind that involves the whole life experience
Personal Wellbeing Index
http://www.deakin.edu.au/research/acqol

“How satisfied are you with your ------?”

- Standard of living
- Health
- Achieving in life
- Relationships
- Safety
- Community connectedness
- Future security

(SWB)
The Australian Unity Wellbeing Index Surveys

Geographically representative national sample
N = 2,000

Telephone interview
#1: April 2001
#16: Oct 2006
[Jones and Thurstone, 1955]

11-point, end-defined scale

How satisfied are you with your --------?

Completely Dissatisfied

Mixed

Completely Satisfied
We code all data to lie on a range from complete dissatisfaction to complete satisfaction.
Personal Wellbeing Index

Scores above this line are significantly higher than S1

Major events preceding survey:
- Sept 11
- Bali Bomb
- Pre-Iraq War
- Hussain deposed
- Athens Olympics
- Asian Tsunami
- Second Bali Bomb
- New IR Laws

Survey date:
- S1: Apr 2001
- S2: Sept 2001
- S3: Mar 2002
- S4: Aug 2002
- S5: Nov 2002
- S6: Mar 2003
- S7: Jun 2003
- S8: Aug 2003
- S9: Nov 2003
- S10: Feb 2004
- S11: May 2004
- S12: Aug 2004
- S13: Dec 2004
- S14: May 2005
- S15: Oct 2005
- S16: March 2006

Scores above S11, S2, S4, S5
Satisfaction with feeling part of your Community

Strength of satisfaction

>S4, S5, S11

>S1

S1
Apr 2001
S2
Sept 2001
S3
Mar 2002
S4
Aug 2002
S5
Nov 2002
S6
Mar 2003
S7
Jun 2003
S8
Aug 2003
S9
Nov 2003
S10
Feb 2004
S11
May 2004
S12
Aug 2004
S13
May 2005
S14
Oct 2005
S15
May 2006
S16
Oct 2006
Satisfaction with the State of the Natural Environment

Intense media coverage of 'global warming'
Satisfaction with the Social Conditions

Introduction of new anti-union industrial relations laws
Satisfaction with Government

Strength of satisfaction

Government Re-elected

S1 Apr 2001
S2 Sept 2001
S3 Nov 2001
S4 Mar 2002
S5 Aug 2002
S6 Nov 2002
S7 Mar 2003
S8 Jun 2003
S9 Aug 2003
S10 Nov 2003
S11 Feb 2004
S12 Apr 2004
S13 May 2004
S14 Oct 2004
S15 Jan 2005
S16 May 2005
S17 Oct 2005
S18 May 2006
S19 Oct 2006

September 11
Bail Bombing
Post Iraq War
Olympics
Tsunami

>5,6,7,8,9
>3,4
Government Re-elected

Government Re-elected
Subjective wellbeing homeostasis

In a manner analogous to the homeostatic maintenance of body temperature, we propose a psychological/neurological homeostatic system that functions to hold subjective wellbeing steady.
Each person (cat) has a set-point for their subjective wellbeing.
Each person (cat) has a set-point for their subjective wellbeing.

The average set-point

Set-point range

When nothing much is happening to them, People (and cats?) rate how they feel about their life in terms of their set-point for SWB

Time
Challenging wellbeing

Bad stuff → Subjective wellbeing → Depression
Protecting wellbeing

- **Bad stuff**
  - Protective resources (eg. money, relationships)

External resources help to protect wellbeing against negative challenges
Can money buy happiness?
Income and subjective wellbeing

Total N ≈ 30,000

Subjective wellbeing

- Normal Range

Household Income ($'000)

- <$15
- $15-30
- $31-60
- $61-90
- $91-120
- $121-150
- $150+

Median

- 71.7
- 73.9
- 74.9
- 76.5
- 78.0
- 78.3
- 79.2
Does money buy a better life?

“Has something happened to you recently causing you to feel happier or sadder than normal?”
Does money buy a better life?

% reporting an event

Household Income ($'000)

Happy event

Sad event

17.6
21.3
22.9
25.1
26.0
26.1
28.2
29.5
32.4

<$15
$15-30
$30-60
$60-90
$90+
Household Structure and SWB

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household Structure</th>
<th>SWB</th>
<th>Depression risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partner and parents</td>
<td>78.3</td>
<td>73.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner only</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>72.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner and children</td>
<td>77.0</td>
<td>71.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner children and other adults</td>
<td>76.9</td>
<td>70.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents and children</td>
<td>75.3</td>
<td>70.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner, children and parents</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>70.3</td>
</tr>
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<td>74.9</td>
<td>70.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents only</td>
<td>73.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alone</td>
<td>72.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other adults</td>
<td>71.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sole parents</td>
<td>70.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents and other adults</td>
<td>70.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other adults and children</td>
<td>67.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SWB: Subjective Well-Being

Normative Range: 76.3 to 73.0

Living with a partner

Living without a partner
Money and Relationships are additive external resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjective Wellbeing</th>
<th>Household Income ($'000)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>75.4</td>
<td>&lt;$15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76.5</td>
<td>$15-$30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>$31-$60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77.4</td>
<td>$61-$90</td>
</tr>
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<td>79.1</td>
<td>$150+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Normative Range: 73.4 - 76.7
Subjective Wellbeing

Household Income ($'000)

- Partner only
- Partner & children

Normative Range

<$15 $15-$30 $31-$60 $61-$90 $91-$120 $121-$150 $150+

70.3 72.6 75.9 77.3 77.4 78.2 78.9 79.1 80.7

72.6 75.4 76.5 77.3 77.4 78.2 79.1 80.7

73.4 76.7 80.7
How much support do you receive from----?

Source of support:

- Partner: 84.4
- Family: 75.4
- Friends (work): 67.5
- Friends (general): 76.0
- Professional: 55.2

Strength of support:

- Partner: 85
- Family: 80
- Friends (work): 75
- Friends (general): 70
- Professional: 55
Is receiving support always good for wellbeing?

Subjective wellbeing vs Level of support

- **Partner**
- **Family**
- **Friends (work)**
- **Friends (general)**
- **Professional**

Normative range: 76.3 - 73.0

Wellbeing scores:
- Partner: 80.4 - 81.9
- Family: 79.2 - 80.1
- Friends (work): 76.2 - 77.7
- Friends (general): 74.7 - 76.1
- Professional: 73.0 - 74.9

Output type: Graphic representation

Legend:
- Green dash: Partner
- Blue dash: Family
- Red dash: Friends (work)
- Yellow dash: Friends (general)
- Orange dash: Professional

Title: Is receiving support always good for wellbeing?
Level of support from partner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of support from partner</th>
<th>80.4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative range</td>
<td>76.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Never married: 72.0
- Live alone: 70.6

Level of support (SWB):

- Never married: 71.4
- Live alone: 70.1

80% (51%) (15%) (14%)
Where is wellbeing higher?

In the city?

or in the country?


New South Wales

Above average  Average  Below average
Conclusions

• The Australian Unity Wellbeing Index provides a unique view of the Australian population. It remains the only index in the world monitoring the subjective wellbeing of a population using a standardized instrument.

• The differences in subjective wellbeing can be interpreted in terms of Homeostatic Theory and point to the importance of wealth and relationships as buffers against challenging living conditions.

• There are significant geographical difference in subjective wellbeing across Australia.

• The results from the Index can be used to inform policy in relation to issues of national importance.

• We anticipate that the Index will continue to develop and advance our understanding of how we might increase the life quality of all Australians.
References


References


Juvenal (55 AD - 127 AD), Roman poet & satirist.
http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/29034.html (accessed 05/01/07)