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Australian Unity Wellbeing Index
Survey 27.0

Report 27.0
April 2012

Part A: The Report

"The Wellbeing of Australians – Quantity and Quality of Sleep"

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The Australian Unity Wellbeing Index monitors the subjective wellbeing of the Australian population. Our first survey was conducted in April 2001 and this report concerns the 27th survey, undertaken in April 2012. Our previous survey had been conducted six months earlier in September. This intervening period corresponded to the 4th year of the Labor Government, elected in November 2007. It was also marked by an increasing apprehension at the unstable international financial situation, with serious problems in Europe. The Australian economy, however, appeared stable.

The share market had been stable for a couple of years, at a level well below its peak before the financial crisis. However, unemployment remained at about 5% and for those people with jobs, many were better-off financially due to cuts in interest rates, and so, in mortgage repayments.

Each survey involves a telephone interview with a new sample of 2,000 Australians, selected to represent the geographic distribution of the national population. These surveys comprise the Personal Wellbeing Index, which measures people's satisfaction with their own lives, and the National Wellbeing Index, which measures how satisfied people are with life in Australia. Other items include a standard set of demographic questions and other survey-specific questions. The specific topic for Survey 27 is the consequence of sleep patterns on wellbeing.

The Theory

The theoretical framework for the interpretation of data is the theory of Subjective Wellbeing Homeostasis. This proposes that each person has a 'set-point' for personal wellbeing that is internally maintained and defended. This set-point is genetically determined and, on average, causes personal wellbeing to be held at 75 points on a 0-100 scale. The normal level of individual set-point variation is between about 60-90 percentage points. The provision of personal resources, such as money or relationships, cannot normally increase the set-point on a long term basis due to the genetic ceiling. However, they can strengthen defences against negative experience. Moreover, for someone who is suffering homeostatic defeat, the provision of additional resources may allow them to regain control of the wellbeing. In this case the provision of resources will cause personal wellbeing to rise until the set-point is achieved.

We propose that low levels of personal resources, such as occasioned by low income or absence of a partner, weakens homeostasis. If personal challenges such as stress or pain exceed resources, homeostasis is defeated, and subjective wellbeing decreases below its normal range.

The Analyses

All data have been standardized to a 0-100 range. Thus, the level of wellbeing is referred to in terms of percentage points. Reference is also made to normative ranges. These have been calculated for the Personal Wellbeing Index in terms of the whole data-set that combines data across all surveys (see Appendix 2). Norms have also been calculated separately for each of the Personal Wellbeing Index domains. They have also been calculated for gender, age groups, income, marital status, household composition, and work-status groups. These norms are presented at the back of their respective chapters. All of the reported trends are statistically significant.

Dot point summaries are provided at the end of each Chapter.
The Results

NOTE: For the first time in the history of the index, not one domain in either the Personal or the National Wellbeing Index changed between Surveys 26 and 27. Consequently, none of the results have changed significantly and all of the descriptions given in Report 26.0 also apply for Report 27.0. Because of this, the descriptions below have all been reproduced from Report 26.0. However, for anyone wanting to see the detailed effects of the new data on the cumulative results, all of the results tables contained in the appendices have been updated with the new data.

The only chapter to be completely revised concerns the special survey topic for Survey 27.0, which is 'Sleep'. These new results are presented in Chapter 10 of the Report and a summary is provided below.

Personal Wellbeing Index:

The Personal Wellbeing Index has gradually decreased during the 24 months since Survey 22 in September 2009. Its current value of 75.5 remains marginally higher than the survey average of 75 points.

The first occasion it reached this value coincided with the Athens Olympics in August 2004. This was an unusual survey since data were collected over the Olympic period, meaning that the national elation at the amazing success of our athletes at these games, no doubt added to the value of the Personal Wellbeing Index. The high levels of the last four surveys probably reflect the sense of relief that Australia escaped the recession and that people’s savings and superannuation funds remain secure, continued low unemployment, low levels of inflation, and the breaking of the drought. There may also be an element of positive downward comparison against countries that have not been so lucky.

Over all the surveys, it is notable that the Personal Wellbeing Index is so stable. The survey mean scores have varied by just 3.1 points. Moreover, the change from one survey to the next has been 1 point or less except for 4 of the 24 adjacent surveys. These occasions have been S1-S2 (September 11), S11-S12/S12-S13 (Sydney Olympics), S14-S15 (Second Bali bombing), and S20-S20.1 (Victorian Bush Fires). The Personal Wellbeing Index is currently 1.9 points above its level at Survey 1, which is significant.

► The level of population wellbeing remain close to its average level.

National Wellbeing Index

The National Wellbeing Index has fallen by a significant 2.3 points in the six months since Survey 25 to 60.4 points. It is now among the lower scores for this index, being only 3.7 points below its maximum (64.1 points). It remains 4.6 points higher than it was in Survey 1 (55.8 points).

Historical: The National Index, like the Personal Wellbeing Index Figure 2.1 started from a very low initial value in April 2001. The reason for this low value is not known. What is apparent is that the National Wellbeing Index is more volatile than the Personal Index due to the relatively low level of homeostatic control. Its range is 7.9 points from April 2001 (S1:55.8) to September 2009 (S22: 64.1 points).

► Overall, the National Wellbeing Index is also at close to its average level.

Terrorist Threat

Among the people who consider a terrorist attack likely ‘in the near future’, the strength of their belief has fallen to its lowest level yet recorded.
Strong beliefs in the likelihood of an attack are associated with low personal wellbeing. The people who regard the likelihood of such an attack as 9/10 or 10/10 have below normal wellbeing. This finding raises the issue of the benefits and disadvantages of Government warnings concerning the possibility of terrorist attacks on Australia.

> Since people who regard such an attack as highly likely have lower than normal wellbeing, there is a clear downside to issuing national terrorist alerts.

**Special Survey Topic**

**Sleep**

1. There appears to be a relationship between average hours of sleep and PWI, such that PWI increases with increasing hours of sleep. This is true until 10 hours of sleep, at which point PWI falls below the normal range. Not surprisingly, PWI is most affected for people who sleep 4 hours or less in a 24 hour period.

2. Under challenging sleep conditions, female wellbeing is less affected than it is for males. Whereas the wellbeing of females who sleep 4 hours or less lies below the normal range, for males this amount of sleep is linked to a further 10 point detriment, taking their wellbeing down to very low levels indeed. While this same pattern is evident for people who sleep 10+ hours, the gender difference is not significant.

3. In general, the longer it takes to fall asleep, the lower a person’s wellbeing. This decrement is apparent in people who take 11 minutes or more to fall asleep, but they remain within the normal range. People who take an hour or longer to fall asleep (20.28% of the sample) have a PWI that is below the normal range, and significantly lower than all other groups.

4. The PWI scores are highest for people who sleep through the night without waking (12.4%) or who wake just once (34.0%). People who wake more often have lower wellbeing, however, they remain within the normal range until they wake up five times or more in a night (6.2% of the sample). The wellbeing of people who wake up five times or more in a night is significantly lower than those who only wake up once or not at all.

5. Of those people who remember their dreams, those who report bad dreams or nightmares have lower wellbeing, but it just remains in the normal range. This difference is significant for every domain, but largest for Community and Future Security.

6. Most people who remember their bad dreams have them only rarely (44.44%), and their wellbeing is unaffected. However, people who report that they have bad dreams once a week (9.04%) or more often (5.04%) have wellbeing below the normal range.

**Demographic Influences**

**Household Income:**

1. The PWI for all income groups is within its income-specific normal range.

2. Personal wellbeing consistently and significantly rises with income up to $101-150K. The 7.0 point gain over this range is associated with a change in wellbeing from below to well above the normative range. The further rise in SWB becomes non-significant at $101-150K but resumes at $251-500K.

3. The cost of increasing happiness increases with income. One additional percentage point of wellbeing for someone with a household income of $101-150K is an additional $111,000.

4. Income has the largest effect on the domain of satisfaction with Standard of Living. It has no systematic influence on satisfaction with Community Connection.
5. The personal wellbeing of people aged 26-55 years is highly sensitive to low income.

6. Between the ages of 36-55 years, low income is associated with lower wellbeing for males than for females.

7. (a) Household incomes under $30,000 combined with the presence of children, on average, takes wellbeing below the normal range.

(b) For people who also have a partner, wellbeing enters the normal range at $31-$60K. The wellbeing of sole parents enters the normal range only at an income of $61,000-$100,000.

8. Males who live alone have lower wellbeing than females who live alone. Moreover, whereas females enter the normal range at an income of $15-30K, males require three times as much ($100-150K).

9. The negative effects of separation and divorce on wellbeing can be reduced by a decent household income. However, both groups remain below the normal range even at a household income of $101-150K.

10. Married males and females have a very similar level of wellbeing. However, for the people who have divorced, those with the lowest income both genders have equivalently depressed wellbeing. Then, the rising income advantages females far more than males. At $101-150K females have entered the normal range while males have not.

11. The wellbeing of people engaged in Fulltime home/family care is highly income dependent, from below normal at less than $30,000 to above normal at more than $60,000. People who are unemployed enter the normal range at $101-150K.

12. Unemployment has a stronger detrimental effect on the wellbeing of unemployed males than females at all levels of household income.

Happiness is bought at discount by people who are poor. For people with a household income <$15,000, an additional $6,000 buys an extra point of wellbeing. At a household income of $151-250K it requires an additional $333,333. However, due to ceiling effects, whether this increase can actually be achieved is uncertain.

Gender:

1. The male Personal Wellbeing Index remains within its normal range, as do most domains. The exceptions are Health, which lies below its range, and Achieving which is at the bottom. This is the second consecutive survey to show this pattern of low scores in these two domains.

The female Personal Wellbeing Index and all domains fall within their normal ranges. As with males, Health is low.

2. Using the combined data, the 1.0 point higher PWI for females is caused by their higher values on the two interpersonal domains of relationships and community.

Since interpersonal relationships are a major key to resilience, these differences may go some way to explaining why females are more resilient than males in such situations as unemployment and living alone.

3. The 1.0 point higher PWI for females is survey-dependent. There is no systemic gender difference over the five year period Survey 14 to Survey 22. However, the higher scores for females has again been evident in the past 5 surveys.

4. Male health satisfaction remains low. Female satisfaction has not statistically changed over these surveys.
5. Relationships shows a significant interaction between gender and survey. It seems possible that the sense of threat over surveys 2 (September 2001) to 12 (August 2004) increased the level of relationship satisfaction for both genders, but more so for females than males. Over the period of Surveys 13 (May 2005) to 22 (September 2009) the satisfaction of females returned to Survey 1 baseline, while the satisfaction of males shows a gradual rise. In Survey 23 female satisfaction showed a sudden rise which has been maintained.

6. The only personal domain to be mainly lower for females is safety. This dropped lower following September 11 for females but not for males. These differences were maintained up to October 2007 (S18). Since then the gender differences have been unpredictable.

7. Both genders showed rising satisfaction over the course of these surveys up to S22, but since then both have fallen. Males tend to score higher than females showing that the Personal Wellbeing Index difference is not due to gender response bias.

8. Satisfaction with the Economic Situation in Australia recovered to its pre-recession levels in September 2009 (S22), but it has now returned to low levels for both genders.

9. Satisfaction with the natural environment has been maintained at unprecedented levels for both genders. This may be a consequence of both climate-change denial and the breaking of the drought in most of Australia.

10. Gender differences in personal wellbeing only emerge at 26-35 years of age. They then progressively decrease up to 56-65 years and then increase once again. The reason for this is not understood.

11. The gender difference in satisfaction with relationships is most pronounced in the youngest groups. Males have lower satisfaction than females.

12. Males who live alone have lower personal wellbeing than females.

13. Female wellbeing does not significantly differ between full-time employed and full-time home care. Male wellbeing is higher for full-time employment than full-time home care.

14. Since Survey 9, the wellbeing of male fulltime workers has differed unpredictably on three occasions.

15. Unemployment has a more devastating effect on the wellbeing of males than on females.

16. In terms of the lowest margin of the normal distribution, the risk of depression (scores <50) is highest in males aged 36-55 years and females aged 46-55 years.

> While females had higher wellbeing from Survey 1 to 13, there was no systemic gender difference over the five year period Survey 14 to Survey 22. However, the early higher scores for females has again been evident in the past 4 surveys.

Age:

1. All PWI values within Survey 26 lie within their age-specific normal ranges and very close to the values for the previous Survey 25.

2. Satisfaction with Safety is currently high for all ages

3. (a) Satisfaction with Environment remains high and may be a consequence of wide-spread rains across the continent together with the climate-change sceptics gaining media dominance.

(b) Satisfaction with Government falls with age and is below their normal range for all groups older than 36 years

4. This shows the contrast between the youngest and oldest groups. During most of the Howard-era, the oldest group showed higher satisfaction with Government, but this has now dissipated, with the S26 result being the lowest on record. The youngest group, in contrast, showed lower
Executive Summary Continued

satisfaction during the Howard-era, and generally higher under Labor, but this has now fallen to its second lowest level

5. The U-shaped pattern across age groups, that is characteristic of the Personal Wellbeing Index, is shared by only two of its domains (Standard and Future Security). It is interesting that standard is highest at the age when household income is lowest. This exemplifies the difference between objective and subjective data. Elderly people adapt to their generally modest, but stable, financially circumstances

6. After the PWI being significantly different between the youngest and oldest groups over Surveys 2-16, the youngest group has sustained its rise to be statistically no different from the oldest group. The reason for this change is not known

7.1 The reason for the overall dip in middle-age is the low wellbeing of the people who do not have a partner. The people living with their partner show no such age-related change.

7.2 In their middle age, people who do not live with a partner are at risk of low wellbeing. However, these disadvantages disappear after 66 years of age.

7.3 Living with your children as a sole parent from 66 years and older is good for your wellbeing

8. The average wellbeing of married people varies by 2.6 points across the age-range. The wellbeing of people who are divorced varies by 5.7 points, is lowest at 36-45, and never enters the age-specific normal range

9. Unemployment has a devastating effect on personal wellbeing beyond 25 years of age

> Over the past few years, the youngest 18-25 year group have shown a substantial and maintained rise in wellbeing. The reason for this is uncertain.

Household Composition – who people live with:

1. The Personal Wellbeing Index of all groups lies within their specific normal ranges.

   Among the household composition groups, the highest levels of personal wellbeing are achieved by people living with their partner. The lowest personal wellbeing is found among sole parents. Their low wellbeing puts many of them at risk of depression.

2. People who live alone have a major loss of wellbeing in terms of relationships, health and achieving. The relative lack of buffering caused by poor relationship availability makes the person more vulnerable to life stressors. Thus, minor health issues may seem important due to the lack of a close friend with whom such matters can be discussed.

3. For a couple living together, the presence of children reduces two domains (Standard of Living, Relationships) and enhances one domain (Health). The net result is little difference between these groups in the overall Personal Wellbeing Index. However, since money and relationships are the most important domains for overall wellbeing, the relative deficit in these domains for partners with children may make them less resilient to additional stress, particularly if this is caused by poor health.

4. The advantage of living only with a partner is most obvious in the domain of relationships. Here the two groups are separated by 18.6 points. Couples also have much higher satisfaction with their Standard of Living and Future Security.

   It is notable that the most affected domain for sole parents is relationships rather than Standard of Living, even though most are on very low incomes (see Chapter 3). This is consistent with the view that the most important factor missing from these people’s lives is an intimate relationship with another adult.

5. For people who live alone, those who are married, and widows have above normal range Personal Wellbeing Index

Australian Unity Wellbeing Index, Survey 27, Report 27, April 2012
6. While the Never married, Divorced, and Separated show much the same trajectory with increasing income, widows are very different. Even at the lowest income their wellbeing falls within the normal range. This is mainly due to their older age.

The fact that the Never Married and the other two groups who were previously married (divorced/separated) do not differ indicates the dominating influence of income on their wellbeing. In other words, the commonly reported finding that people who have never married have low wellbeing is primarily a function of their low household income.

It is interesting to note that the divorced and separated groups remain well below the normal range even at $101-150K.

7. Being a sole parent is generally harmful to adult wellbeing. A major factor is low household income however it is notable that the divorced single parents do not enter the normal range even at an income of $101-150K.

Widows do better than the other three non partnered groups, probably because they are older and are living with adult children.

Sole parents who remain married tend to do better than other sole parents. These people may retain the emotional security of marriage, and even perhaps some instrumental support, even though they regard themselves as sole parents. This group of sole parents constitute 24.8% of all sole parents.

8. One key to wellbeing for people who are unemployed is to live with a partner. The presence of children diminishes wellbeing to some extent, but only among low income couples.

9. For Sole Parents, part-time work is associated with only marginally higher wellbeing than part-time volunteering. Both groups enter the normal range at $61-100K.

> Children, or other dependent family members, drain the financial and emotional resources of their supporting adults. When the family resources are adequate, dependents have little influence on parental wellbeing. When resources are inadequate children place the wellbeing of co-habiting adults at risk.

Marital Status:

1. Most values for the Personal Wellbeing Index in Survey 26 lie within their Marital-status Specific normal ranges. The exception is de facto which lies 0.3 points below. The domain-level analysis shows all except community lie low within their ranges, with health and relationships lying below. No other domain values for any of the other marital status groups lie below their normal ranges.

2. Of all the marital status groups, satisfaction with Government is lowest for the Widows, and has been for the last two surveys.

3. The most advantaged group are Married, having a level of wellbeing that is higher than that of all other groups and 2.4 points above Defacto. The reason for this high wellbeing may be that they are older, wealthier, and that unhappy married people have separated from one another.

Widows have an average level of wellbeing that lies at the top of the normal range. This is despite low income for this group.

People who have never married have a level of personal wellbeing that lies between people who remain married and those who have separated or divorced. However, this is age dependent and is only evidenced by people aged between 26-65 years. Younger and older people who have never married have normal levels of wellbeing. See Chapter 5 for a full discussion.

4. Widows have relatively low health satisfaction. This is probably due to the burden of accumulated medical condition, that yield pain, such as arthritis.
Despite this, their overall wellbeing lies at the top of the normal range. This is due to the compensating effect of high satisfaction in other domains.

5. The fact of full-time employment is not, of itself, able to bring all marital status groups into the normal range. The values for Survey 26 for widows are well below the combined surveys.

6. The negative effect of unemployment on wellbeing is partially buffered through marriage. However, the combination of separation/divorce and unemployment is devastating, yielding one of our lowest group mean scores for personal wellbeing (58.6).

7. Marital status x F/T family care shows the largest range of personal wellbeing (15.9 points) of any marital status comparison. The two groups with partners and widows lie within the normal range. All other non-partner groups are very low indeed, with values that indicate a high probability of depression.

8. Across all groups, part-time volunteers have marginally higher wellbeing than the total comparison group. The largest effect (+4.8 points) is for people who have separated, which is almost sufficient to take them into the normal range. This may represent a novelty effect if more people in this group have recently adopted volunteering due to a recent separation. It is notable that the relative advantage is much reduced for people who have divorced (+2.2 points) and all other groups.

9. For people who are divorced and Fulltime Employed, income has little impact. Even with an income of $101-150K their Personal Wellbeing Index lies only marginally within the normal range. This is interesting since it indicates that above-average household income does not necessarily ensure high wellbeing. However, if these people also have dependents and are single parents, then maybe they need even more income to meet their resource needs.

10. Work status is a more powerful influence on SWB than is household income. Two work-status groups do show a substantial rise with income as people who are unemployed, SWB rises by 14.9 points from <$15K to $101-150. Full-time students show an 8.1 point gain and employed a 7.8 point gain over this same income range.

▶ The presence of a partner acts as a buffer against negative life experiences. Through this means partners strengthen one another’s personal wellbeing.

Work Status:

1. All group mean scores in Survey 26 are within their own normal range. The normal range for volunteers is so large because each survey only picks up <10 of these people, so the mean scores from each survey are unreliable and show high variation.

2. All values for the PWI and domains are within their full-time employed, specific normal range. Three domains are very low as Health (also low in Surveys 23-25), Achieving and Future Security.

3. The profile of Unemployed for Survey 26, matched against their own normative range, shows the PWI and domains to be generally high.

4. Relative to their own normal range, the full-time retired are within their normal range with the stark exception of Government (-3.8 points).

5. The personal wellbeing of most work-status groups falls in the generic normal range. People who are full-time retired lie above the normal range while people who are unemployed fall below.

6. Even though full-time employed have a level of wellbeing at the top of the generic normal range, both domains that concern associations with other people (Relationships and Community) are low.
7. Full-time retired have personal wellbeing above the generic normal range even though they have lower than normal health satisfaction. This emphasises that measures of subjective health are invalid as measures of overall wellbeing.

8. Full-time students have below-normal satisfaction in both domains that indicate connection to other people (relationships and community). This likely makes students more vulnerable to the effects challenging events. On such occasions, inter-personal relationships will provide a weak buffer.

9. People who are unemployed have lower than normal wellbeing for all domains except safety.

10. Engaging in part-time volunteer work has a marginal relationship with higher wellbeing for people who are unemployed. It does not bring their wellbeing into the normal range.

11. Of those people full-time employed, the 10.0% who are looking for work have lower than normal wellbeing. This is most particularly evident in the domain of Achieving. This domain pattern may be diagnostic of employees who are functioning poorly in their current employment.

12. Whether people who are unemployed are looking for work or not makes no significant difference to their low personal wellbeing. On a domain basis, people not looking for work have higher satisfaction with Achieving and Future Security.

► The low levels of wellbeing associated with unemployment are not significantly ameliorated by either active job hunting or volunteer work.

Life Events:

1. On average, about half of the sample consider that a recent life event, that has happened to them, has made them feel happier or sadder than normal.

2. Immediately following September 11 (S2), prior to the October 07 election (S18), and at Survey 25, a higher than normal proportion of both males and females reported the recent experience of a recent negative personal event. The coincidence of these rises for both genders makes it likely there is some underlying cause, rather than these being random changes.

3. Females are more likely to recall the experience of a sad than a happy event in their lives.

4. Young adults are more likely to report the experience of happy than sad events in their lives. This changes at 36-45 years. At this age and older, people are more likely to report the occurrence of a sad event.

5. As income increases, the frequency of people reporting sad events decreases, and the frequency for happy events increases up to an income of about $251-500K.

6. There is a significant decrease in the experienced intensity of happy events at the highest level of income. This is consistent with expectation from Adaptation Level Theory. Rich people are buying more positive events but experience less relative happiness from each experience.

7. Females experience the intensity of both happy and sad events more strongly than males. This represents a pattern of enhanced emotional responsiveness for females.

8. An investigation into changes in Personal Wellbeing Index across the days of the week detected no systematic effects. This is true irrespective of work-status.

► Females experience the intensity of both happy and sad events more strongly than males. This represents a pattern of enhanced emotional responsiveness for females.
1. Introduction

The Australian Unity Wellbeing Index is a barometer of Australians’ satisfaction with their lives and life in Australia. Unlike most official indicators of quality of life and wellbeing, it is subjective - it measures how Australians feel about life, and incorporates both personal and national perspectives. The Index shows how various aspects of life - both personal and national - affects our sense of wellbeing.

The Index is an alternative measure of population wellbeing to such economic indicators as Gross Domestic Product and other objective indicators such as population health, literacy and crime statistics. The Australian Unity Wellbeing Index measures quality of life as experienced by the average Australian.

The Index yields two major numbers. The Personal Wellbeing Index is the average level of satisfaction across seven aspects of personal life – health, personal relationships, safety, standard of living, achieving, community connectedness, and future security. The National Wellbeing Index is the average satisfaction score across six aspects of national life – the economy, the environment, social conditions, governance, business, and national security.

A considerable body of research has demonstrated that most people are satisfied with their own life. In Western nations, the average value for population samples is about 75 percentage points of satisfaction. That is, on a standardised scale from 0 (completely dissatisfied) to 100 (completely satisfied) the average person rates their level of life satisfaction as 75. The normal range is from 70 points to 80 points. We find the Personal Wellbeing Index to always fall within this range. However, levels of satisfaction with aspects of national life are normally lower, falling in the range 55 to 65 points in Australia.

The first index survey, of 2,000 adults from all parts of Australia, was conducted in April 2001. At the present time a total of 25 surveys have been conducted. The data for this most recent Survey 26 were collected in April 2011. Copies of earlier reports can be obtained either from the Australian Unity website (www.australianunity.com.au) or from the Australian Centre on Quality of Life website at Deakin University (http://www.deakin.edu.au/research/acqol/auwbi/survey-reports/index.php). This report concerns the most recent survey.

The same core index questions, forming the Personal and the National Wellbeing Index, are asked within each survey. In addition we ask two highly general questions. One concerns ‘Satisfaction with Life as a Whole’. This abstract, personal measure of wellbeing has a very long history within the survey literature and its measurement allows a direct comparison with such data. The second is intended as an analogous ‘national’ item. It concerns ‘Satisfaction with Life in Australia’.

Each survey also includes demographic questions and a small number of additional items that change from one survey to the next. These explore specific issues of interest, either personal or national. Such data have several purposes. They allow validation of the Index, the creation of new population sub-groups, and permit further exploration of the wellbeing construct.

1.1. Understanding Personal Wellbeing

The major measurement instrument used in our surveys is the Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI). This is designed as the first level deconstruction of ‘Life as a Whole’ and the manual can be found at http://www.deakin.edu.au/research/acqol/instruments/wellbeing-index/. It comprises seven questions relating to satisfaction with life domains, such as ‘health’ and ‘standard of living’. Each question is answered on a 0-10 scale of satisfaction. The scores are then combined across the seven domains to yield an overall Index score, which is adjusted to have a range of 0-100.
On a population basis the scores that we derive from this PWI are quite remarkably stable. Appendix AI presents these values, each derived from a geographically representative sample of 2,000 randomly selected adults across Australia. As can be seen, these values range from 73.7 to 76.7, a fluctuation of only 3.0 points. How can such stability be achieved?

We hypothesize that personal wellbeing is not simply free to vary over the theoretical 0-100 range. Rather, it is held fairly constant for each individual in a manner analogous to blood pressure or body temperature. This implies an active management system for personal wellbeing that has the task of maintaining wellbeing, on average, at about 75 points. We call this process Subjective Wellbeing Homeostasis.

The proper functioning of this homeostatic system is essential to life. At normal levels of wellbeing, which for group average scores lies in the range 73.7 to 76.7 points, people feel good about themselves, are well motivated to conduct their lives, and have a strong sense of optimism. When this homeostatic system fails, however, these essential qualities are severely compromised, and people are at risk of depression. This can come about through such circumstances as exposure to chronic stress, chronic pain, failed personal relationships, etc.

Fortunately for us, the homeostatic system is remarkably robust. Many people live in difficult personal circumstances which may involve low income or medical problems, and yet manage to maintain normal levels of wellbeing. This is why the Index is so stable when averaged across the population. But as with any human attribute, some homeostatic systems are more robust than others. Or, put around the other way, some people have fragile systems which are prone to failure.

Homeostatic fragility, in these terms, can be caused by two different influences. The first of these is genetic. Some people have a constitutional weakness in their ability to maintain wellbeing within the normal range. The second influence is the experience of life. Here, as has been mentioned, some experiences such as chronic stress can challenge homeostasis. Other influences, such as intimate personal relationships, can strengthen homeostasis.

In summary, personal wellbeing is under active management and most people are able to maintain normal levels of wellbeing even when challenged by negative life experiences. A minority of people, however, have weaker homeostatic systems as a result of either constitutional or experiential influences. These people are vulnerable to their environment and may evidence homeostatic failure. An important feature of our survey analyses is the identification of sub-groups which contain a larger than normal proportion of people in homeostatic failure. These groups need additional resources in order to regain homeostatic control and normal levels of wellbeing.

The influence of homeostasis

The purpose of SWB homeostasis is to maintain the wellbeing of each individual person close to their genetically-determined set-point, which averages 75 points. However, of course, wellbeing fluctuates around its set-point. These fluctuations can be very large if homeostasis is defeated in the presence of an unusually good or bad experience. While such experiences are unusual, when they do occur, people will normally return quite quickly to a level of wellbeing that approximates their set-point once again.

For these reasons, the wellbeing of individuals is normally highly predictable. It is lying within a restricted range around the set-point, called the set-point-range. The homeostatic processes attempt to hold each individual’s wellbeing within this range. Therefore, since there is a normal distribution of set-points around 75, probably between about 60 and 90 points, there is an associated distribution of overlapping set-point-ranges. This explains why the population mean is so predictable. The distribution of scores conforms to the distribution of set-point ranges, and these are genetically determined.
Why, then, does the mean of the survey samples vary from one time to the next? The answer, we propose, is that events which are experienced by the whole population will exert a systematic influence on the wellbeing of the individuals making up the whole sample. These influences will act to cause the wellbeing of each affected individual to be more likely to lie either above or below its set-point. Thus, a national event, such as Olympic success, will exert a systematic influence, such that each person’s wellbeing will be more likely to be found above their set-point than below. In other words, a meaningful national event will systematically change the probability of measured wellbeing being dominated by scores that lie within the upper or lower halves of the set-point-ranges. Moreover, the stronger and more universal the experience, the more likely is each individual level of wellbeing to be found above or below its set-point, and the more the sample average will deviate from 75 points.

So, how much variation in survey mean scores is possible? There are two answers to this. The first involves a catastrophic experience, such as might occur in a sudden financial depression, such as might have happened if the 2007-2009 economic down-turn had continued in Australia. In this event, the average wellbeing of the sample would possibly sink below any approximation of the normal range as a high proportion of the population suffer homeostatic defeat. This, however, will be a most unusual situation and one not yet experienced in the history of these surveys.

The second form of variation in survey mean scores will reflect systematic shifts in the probability of wellbeing being found above or below each set-point, but within each set-point range, and under homeostatic control. The extent of such variation depends on a number of factors as:

(a) The strength and ubiquity of the experience.

(b) The width of the set-point-range. While this remains somewhat speculative, a ball-park figure seems to be about 12 points.

(c) The strength of homeostasis. The influence of homeostasis is to control small fluctuations around the set-point. However, as wellbeing strays further and further from the set-point, homeostatic forces are increasingly unleashed to reign it back. We propose that these controlling forces increase in intensity with distance from the set-point until they lose control and SWB goes into free-rise or free-fall under the control of the experience.

So, given all these suppositions, how much movement is possible while most people’s wellbeing remains under homeostatic control? The answer is uncertain but certainly much less than the full six points on either side of the set-point defining the set-point range. The boundaries of this range demarcate homeostatic failure and so wellbeing would normally be maintained much closer to the set-point.

The total variation of population mean scores to date is 3.1 percentage points, or about 1.5 points on either side of the average set-point. This represents just 25% of the set-point-range. What this indicates is that the mood of the nation normally fluctuates within only a very tight band of values. What is not known is the extent that these small movements indicate anything important about the frequency of psychopathology or changed behaviour at a national level.

Causal influences

It is not possible from these cross-sectional data to determine causation of the changes in personal wellbeing between surveys. However, a number of ideas concerning possible sources of influence can be advanced. These are acknowledged in the caption to each figure. It is at least notable that the major changes in the level of the PWI have been associated with major national events. These trends are shown in Figure 2.1.
1.2. **The Survey Methodology**

A geographically representative national sample of people aged 18 years or over and fluent in English, was surveyed by telephone over the period 8th to 22nd September. Interviewers asked to speak to the person in the house who had the most recent birthday and was at least 18 years old. An even geographic and gender split was maintained at all times through the survey. A total of 6,808 calls connected with an eligible respondent and 2,000 agreed to complete the survey. This gives an effective response rate (completes/refusals and completes) of 29%.

The average period of contact with each respondent is nine minutes. All responses are made on a 0 to 10 scale. The satisfaction responses are anchored by 0 (no satisfaction at all) and 10 (completely satisfied). Initial data screening was completed before data analysis.

1.3. **Presentation of results and type of analysis**

In the presentation of results to follow, the trends that are described in the text are all statistically significant at $p<.05$. More detailed analyses are presented as Appendices. These are arranged in sections that correspond numerically with sections in the main report. All Appendix Tables have the designation ‘A’ in addition to their numerical identifier (e.g. Table A9.2).

All satisfaction values are expressed as the strength of satisfaction on a scale that ranges from 0 to 100 percentage points.

In situations where homogeneity of variance assumptions has been violated, Dunnetts T3 Post-Hoc Test has been used. In the case of t-tests we have used the SPSS option for significance when equality of variance cannot be assumed.

The raw data for this and all previous reports are available from our website: http://www.deakin.edu.au/research/acqol/auwbi/survey-reports/index.php

1.4. **Internal Report Organisation**

(a) The new results from this survey are summarised in Table 2.1 (see Chapter 2).

(b) Most Tables are presented as appendices in a separate volume.

(c) Chapter 2 presents a comparative analysis of Personal and National Wellbeing with previous surveys.

(d) Chapters 3-8 present the major groupings of independent (demographic) variables. Within each Chapter, the first section concerns the analysis of all dependent variables listed in Table 2.1. This is followed by analyses of the demographic variables in combination with the Personal Wellbeing Index and other measures.

(e) Chapter 9 concerns Life Events.

(f) Chapter 10 concerns the special topic for this survey which is: Sleep and dreams.

(g) Each Chapter contains a dot-point summary.
1.5. Glossary of Terms

Normal Ranges: These set the boundaries within which 'normal' values will fall. Each range is generated by computing the distance of two standard-deviations on either side of the mean. There are various types of range as:

(a) **Generic normal range for group means:** These are calculated using survey mean scores as data. For example, the generic Personal Wellbeing Index normal range for groups has been calculated using each overall survey Personal Wellbeing Index mean as data, so N for this calculation is the number of surveys.

This is the most commonly employed source of reference in the report. The range reflects the extent of variability between surveys and the 95% probability that any future survey mean will fall within this range. Any group mean score can be compared against this range to indicate the extent of its 'normality'.

(b) **Specific normal ranges for groups:** These are calculated using the mean scores of specific groups within surveys as data (e.g. people who are retired).

(c) **Generic normal ranges for individuals:** These are calculated using the scores from individuals as data. For example, the generic Personal Wellbeing Index normal range for individuals has been calculated using the Personal Wellbeing Index scores from all of the people involved in the surveys. So N for this calculation is the number of people within all of the combined surveys.

This range reflects the variability between people and the 95% probability that the score from any single person will fall within this range.

(d) **Specific normal ranges for individuals:** These are calculated using the scores from individuals within specific groups as data. Thus, there is a specific normal range for the individuals who are full-time retired, and there is a 95% probability that the score from a retired person will fall within this range.

These normal ranges are found in the appendices at the back of their respective chapters.

**Homeostatically Protected Mood (HPMood):** A genetically-derived individual difference in mood comprising the three affects of Content, Happy and Alert. It accounts for the majority of variance in Subjective Wellbeing.

**Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI):** The Personal Wellbeing Index comprises eight domains rated on satisfaction. All results from the Index are standardized into a scale from 0 to 100.

**Subjective Wellbeing (SWB):** The output from the Personal Wellbeing Index. It measures how satisfied people are with their lives.

**Wellbeing:** An abbreviated form of subjective wellbeing as measured by the Personal Wellbeing Index.
2. Personal and National Wellbeing Over Time

2.1. A Comparison Between Survey 26 and Survey 27

Table 2.1: Means and standard deviations of the 26th and 27th survey

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>S26 Mean</th>
<th>S26 SD</th>
<th>S27 Mean</th>
<th>S27 SD</th>
<th>Point change from Nov 2011</th>
<th>Significance of change</th>
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<td>Personal domains</td>
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<td>2. Health</td>
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<td>8. Spiritual fulfilment</td>
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<td>Terror Attack likely (%)</td>
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<td>38.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood of attack</td>
<td>60.82</td>
<td>20.16</td>
<td>61.38</td>
<td>18.34</td>
<td>.568</td>
<td>.551</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Major Indices

These results are found in Table 2.1 and discussed in the sections below. Past comparative results between surveys are found in Tables A2.1.2 and A2.1.3. None of the above indices have changed significantly since the previous survey.

Note: The shaded blue area in the subsequent figures shows the generic normal range for survey mean scores.
2.2. Personal Wellbeing Index

Scores above the line are significantly higher than S1

Maximum = 76.3
Current = 76.4
Minimum = 73.2

Survey Date

Key:
- a = September 11
- b = Bali Bombing
- c = Pre-Iraq War
- d = Hussein Deposed
- e = Athens Olympics
- f = Asian Tsunami
- g = Second Bali Bombing
- h = New LRT Laws
- i = Labor Government Elected
- j = Stock market collapse
- k = Fires and floods
- l = Stock market recovery
- m = Labor government re-elected
- n = Qld/Vic floods

Special Surveys:
18.1: Three months after the change in Government and following several consecutive interest-rate rises.
20.1: Following the Victoria Bush Fires in which 173 people died.

Note: In this and subsequent figures, the shaded (blue) area shows the generic normal range of survey means scores for the measure in question (Table A2.22). These blue areas represent two standard deviations around the mean using survey mean scores as data.

Figure 2.1: Personal Wellbeing Index
The Personal Wellbeing Index has gradually decreased during the 24 months since Survey 22 in September 2009. Its current value of 75.4 remains marginally higher than the survey average of 75 points.

The first occasion the PWI reached a very high value coincided with the Athens Olympics in August 2004. This was an unusual survey since data were collected over the Olympic period, meaning that the national elation at the amazing success of our athletes at these games, no doubt added to the value of the Personal Wellbeing Index. The high levels at Survey 22 probably reflected the sense of relief that Australia escaped the recession and that people’s savings and superannuation funds remain secure, continued low unemployment, low levels of inflation, and the breaking of the drought. There may also be an element of positive downward comparison against countries that have not been so lucky.

Over all the surveys, it is notable that the Personal Wellbeing Index is so stable. The survey mean scores have varied by just 3.1 points. Moreover, the change from one survey to the next has been 1 point or less except for 4 of the 24 adjacent surveys. These occasions have been S1-S2 (September 11), S11-S12/S12-S13 (Sydney Olympics), S14-S15 (Second Bali bombing), and S20-S20.1 (Victorian Bush Fires). The Personal Wellbeing Index is currently 1.8 points above its level at Survey 1, which is significant.

**Historical:** The most obvious trend for the Personal Wellbeing Index is that it rose following September 11 and remained generally higher. Of the 26 surveys conducted since Survey 1, 21 (80.8%) have been significantly higher than this initial value.

It seems that both positive and negative events have acted to raise the wellbeing of the Australian population. In terms of the negative events, it appears that the presence of external threat causes the population wellbeing to rise. This has occurred first followed September 11 and reached its maximum about 6 months after the event. The second occurred immediately following the Bali Bombing and ran into the build-up in tension surrounding the Iraq war. It is possible that the Second Bali Bombing, which substantially increased the perceived probability of a terrorist attack in Australia (see section 2.8) prevented the Personal Wellbeing Index continuing its fall back to the baseline value recorded at that time. In Survey 12, the positive influence of Olympic success also caused personal wellbeing to rise, to an even greater extent than either of the terrorist or war events, as did also the coincidence of economic survival and breaking drought in Survey 22.

In terms of other national influences, Australia was remarkably politically stable over the first six years of these surveys, but quite unstable since then. These changes are described under ‘Satisfaction with Government’.
Figure 2.2: National Wellbeing Index
The National Wellbeing Index remains now among the lower scores for this index, being 3.7 points below its maximum (64.1 points). It remains 4.6 points higher than it was in Survey 1 (55.8 points).

**Historical:** The National Index, like the Personal Wellbeing Index Figure 2.1 started from a very low initial value in April 2001. The reason for this low value is not known. What is apparent is that the National Wellbeing Index is more volatile than the Personal Index due to the relatively low level of homeostatic control. Its range is 7.9 points from April 2001 (S1:55.8) to September 2009 (S22: 64.1 points).

**Note:** No test of significance can be run against Survey 1 due to a different composition of the NWI at that time.
2.3. **Personal Wellbeing Domains**

Table 2.1 shows that only the domain of Future Security has changed (decreased) over the last six months since Survey 26 in September 2011.
How satisfied are you with your Standard of Living?

Figure 2.3: Satisfaction with Standard of Living
Satisfaction with standard of living has not significantly changed in the 30 months since Survey 22 and it remains at a very high level (78.4 points) which is in the upper portion of its normal range. The reason for this continued high level seems likely tied to the recovering economy. The range of scores across all surveys is 5.3 points, between April 2001 (S1:74.5) and September 2009 (S22:79.8).

**Historical:** The values for this domain have generally remained significantly higher than they were at Survey 1, with only two (Survey 4 in 2002 and Survey 15 in 2006) being statistically at the same level as this first survey. Thus, 24/26 (92.3%) of the subsequent survey mean scores are higher than Survey 1.

It is interesting to note that the rise in satisfaction with Standard of Living between May 2006 (S15) and October 2007 (S18) occurred despite a succession of 0.25 point rises in interest rates. It is also interesting to note that the rise in wellbeing from April 2008 (Survey 19) commenced in the face of the continuing economic down-turn.

There were probably two reasons for this. One was that the various economic stimulus packages released by the Government provided households with additional discretionary income. The second was that the poor national economic situation had had a serious negative effect on only a minority of the population. The people adversely affected were those who had lost their job, or who were reliant on interest from shares or other investments for their income. But these people were in a great minority. While a majority of people had lost wealth with the downturn, for the most part their investments were intact and so they felt they could just wait for the economy to recover. And, in the meantime, if they still had a job and a mortgage, and if their wage has not diminished, then they were better off financially than maybe they had ever been due to the decrease in interest rates and, so, their mortgage payment.
How satisfied are you with your Health?

Strength of satisfaction

Survey Date

Major events preceding survey

Key: a = September 11  b = Bali Bombing  c = Pre-Iraq War  d = Hussein Deposed  e = Athens Olympics  f = Asian Tsunami  g = Second Bali Bombing  h = New IR Laws  i = Labor Government Elected  j = Stock market collapse  k = Fires and floods  l = Stock market recovery  m = Labor government re-elected  n = Qld/Vic floods

Maximum = 76.0
Current = 73.4
Minimum = 73.1

Figure 2.4: Satisfaction with Health
Satisfaction with health really does not change significantly between surveys and so is a good benchmark to indicate that the data set as a whole is reliable. In this survey (73.4 points) it has not statistically changed since Survey 26 but has risen back into its normal range. It remains not different (-0.2 points) from its level at Survey 1 (73.6 points). There is no obvious cause for the low score at Survey 26 and it may represent a random fluctuation.

**Historical:** This domain rose briefly at March 2003 (S6: Pre-Iraq war) but quickly returned to its original level. It is notable that the level of significance at Survey 6 was marginal ($p=.02$) and so probably reflects a random fluctuation. While the overall ANOVA between surveys is significant ($p = .006$; Table A 2.1), this is the most stable domain, with a total range between surveys of just 2.9 points. It is evident that satisfaction with personal health is little influenced by either world or national events and this stability is confirmation that the changes recorded in the other domains since Survey 1 are valid. The range of scores is between April 2001 (S26: 73.1) and March 2003 (S6: Pre-Iraq war: 76.0).
How satisfied are you with what you are Achieving in Life?

Figure 2.5: Satisfaction with What you are Currently Achieving in Life
Achieving in life has not significantly changed in the 24 months since Survey 24, and its current level (72.8 points) remains no different than it was at Survey 1 (73.1 points).

**Historical:** The wording of this item has changed once. From Survey 1 to Survey 10, satisfaction with 'what you achieve' barely changed over the surveys. It was marginally higher at Survey 6 (Pre-Iraq war), and over this period the range of scores was 1.8% between April 2001 (S1: 73.2) and March 2003 (S6: Pre-Iraq war: 75.0).

In Survey 11 the wording of this item changed from 'How satisfied are you with what you achieve in life?' to 'How satisfied are you with what you are currently achieving in life?'. The reason for this change is to make it more explicit that the question referred to current life rather than to some past aggregation of achievement.

The effect of this word change has significantly reduced the score for this domain. The average value over Survey 1 to Survey 10 is 74.47 (SD=0.45). The average value over Survey 11-Survey 17 is 72.96 (SD = 0.53). So it appears to still be a highly reliable measure that has stabilised about 1.5 points below the original and no different from Survey 1.
How satisfied are you with your Relationships?

Figure 2.6: Satisfaction with Relationships
Satisfaction with Relationships, has not changed over the past 12 months, falling by a non-significant 0.5 points to 79.4. It is at a level no different than it was in survey 1 (78.2 points). The most sustained trend of increasing satisfaction for this domain began with the lowest level (77.2 points) in February 2008 and peaked at 81.5 points in April 2010, an overall rise of +4.3 points.

Prior to Survey 23 (April 2010), it had been at its highest level on two previous occasions. These were as Survey 7 (Hussein deposed) and Survey 12 (Athens Olympics). Notably, except for the special survey 18.1, its values since then have remained within the normal range and so it may simply reflect random fluctuation.

The range of scores across all surveys is 4.3 points, between February 2008 (S18.1:77.2) and April 2010 (S23:81.5).
How satisfied are you with how Safe you Feel?

Figure 2.7: Satisfaction with How Safe you Feel
Satisfaction with personal safety (80.4 points) has fallen by a non-significant -0.2 points since the last Survey 26. It remains at a very high level, only 0.9 points below its highest level ever (81.3 points in February 2009).

**Historical:** The overall trend of these results, over the whole sequence of these surveys, is that satisfaction with safety is gradually rising. The first major rise in Safety satisfaction followed the defeat of Saddam Hussein in Iraq at Survey 7. This may have been linked to the positive feelings of relief following the defeat of Hussein without unleashing weapons of mass destruction, and subsequently our increasingly strong American alliance. The rise during the Olympics ($12) may have been more due to the overall sense of elevated wellbeing than to specific feelings of greater safety. The further rise is hard to explain. While it is associated with a decreasing proportion of the sample feeling that a terrorist attack is likely, it is also true that terrorist attacks were unthinkable prior to Survey 2.

It is interesting to relate these data on safety to the sense of terrorist threat that is felt by the population. Since Survey 9 (November 2003) we have asked people ‘whether they think a terrorist attack is likely in Australia in the near future’ and, if they say ‘Yes’, we ask about the strength of their belief that such an attack will occur.

These data are combined with the population levels of ‘Satisfaction with Safety’ in Table A2.9. It can be seen that the average level of safety satisfaction correlates negatively with the percentage of people who think an attack is likely ($r = -0.65$, which is highly significant) but much less strongly with the strength of belief among those respondents who think an attack likely ($r = -0.26$, non-significant). The correlation of -0.65 explains about 44% of the variance between these two measures, which is a significant degree of co-variation. Other factors that will be contributing variance to safety are homeostasis, personal circumstances and, quite possibly, the sense of security offered by an effective wellbeing military force and alliance with the USA. The latter influence, exemplified by the rise in safety at Survey 7 (defeat of Hussein) may represent a constant background factor onto which the fluctuations in terrorist attack probabilities are imposed.

One implication of these results is that raising terrorist attack fears through issuing terrorist alerts, harms the safety satisfaction, and thereby compromises the overall wellbeing of vulnerable members of the population. However, the most remarkable feature of this graph of safety satisfaction is its continued rise over the period of these surveys. This is further discussed in Section 2.4.1.
2.3.6. **Community**

How satisfied are you with feeling part of your community?

---

Figure 2.8: Satisfaction with feeling part of your community

Key:
- a = Labor Government re-elected
- b = Second Ball Bombing
- c = Pre-Iraq War
- d = Husiveh Deposed
- e = Labor Government Blasted
- f = Stock market collapse
- g = Free and floods
- h = New IR Laws

Survey Dates: 70, 71-73, 74-78


Maximum = 7.3, Minimum = 6.6

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Australian Unity Wellbeing Index, Survey 27, Report 27, April 2012
People’s satisfaction in feeling part of their community (71.9 points) has risen non-significantly by +0.1 points since the last survey. It remains close to its highest level yet recorded (73.0 points) at Survey 20.1 (February 2009), immediately following the Victorian bushfires. At that time Satisfaction with Community was 0.3 points higher than it was at the time of the Athens Olympics, and 4.4 points higher than it was in Survey 1. It seems self-evident that this rise was due to the increased sense of community generated by the tragedy of the floods and fires. These events generated an enormous outpouring of sympathy and tangible assistance, which caused the population to experience a heightened sense of belonging to the ‘Australian family’.

It is interesting that this elevated level of satisfaction with community connection has been maintained over the past 2.5 years. The range of scores over the whole survey series is 4.4 points, between April 2001 (S1:68.6) and February 2009 (S20.1:Victorian Fires:73.0).

**Historical:** Apart from the Olympic period elevation (S12), rises are coherently related to times of major conflict or national distress. In the six months following September 11, satisfaction with community connectedness went up from its lowest level in April 2001, and was maintained at this higher level for a further six months. It then fell, but returned to an even higher level in the lead-up to the Iraq war (S6). This higher level was maintained for six months following the defeat of Hussein (S9), then dissipated only to be recharged once again following the second Bali bombing (S14). It then rose to record levels immediately following the Victorian bushfires in February 2009. This pattern is consistent with social psychological theory. A perceived source of threat will cause a group (or population) to become more socially cohesive. However, it must also be noted that the level of safety satisfaction also rose at the time of the Athens 2004 Olympics (Survey 12), and around the period of the election of the new Labor Government (Surveys 18 and 18.1).
How satisfied are you with your Future Security?

Strength of satisfaction

Survey Date

Major events preceding survey

Key:
a = September 11
b = Bali Bombing
c = Pre-Iraq War
d = Hussein Deposed
e = Athens Olympics
f = Asian Tsunami
g = Second Bali Bombing
h = New IR Laws
i = Labor Government Elected
j = Stock market collapse
k = Fires and floods
l = Stock market recovery
m = Labor government re-elected
n = Qld/Vic floods

Maximum = 73.2
Current = 71.2
Minimum = 68.6

Figure 2.9: Satisfaction with Future Security
Satisfaction with future security (71.2 points) has risen non-significantly since the previous survey (+0.2 points) and remains mid-range. The range of scores over the whole series is 4.6 points between September 2001 (S2: 68.6) and February 2008 (S18.1: 73.2).

**Historical:** Satisfaction with future security dropped to its lowest level immediately following September 11, and then recovered to move in much the same range up to Survey 15 (May 2006). Since that time it has shown a rising trend. This pattern is very similar to that shown by safety and the explanations are probably similar to those that have been stated for the safety domain. The correlation between the survey mean scores for safety and future security is \( r = .71 \) (Table A2.13).
How satisfied are you with your Spirituality or Religion?

Figure 2.10: Satisfaction with Religion/Spirituality
The 8th Personal Wellbeing Index domain ‘How satisfied are you with your spiritual fulfilment or religion’ was included for the first time in Survey 16 (October 2006). In Survey 17 this was changed to ‘How satisfied are you with your spirituality or religion?’ Over this initial period of 8 surveys (Survey 16: October 2006 to Survey 23: April 2010) the values for this domain ranged between 67.7 and 72.5 points (Table A2.16).

In Survey 24 the question was changed again. The previous surveys had asked the question just as for the previous domains, with the opportunity for the interviewer to record ‘No spiritual or religious beliefs’ if that information was volunteered by the respondent. In Survey 24, this item was preceded by a gating item as ‘Do you have spiritual or religious beliefs?’, and only those people who responded ‘yes’ were then asked the satisfaction question. As can be seen, this dramatically changed the average satisfaction level (Table A2.16.1). The values now range from 78.2 to 78.6 points, averaging some 8 points higher than the previous un-gated format. The current value of 78.4 points falls within this very tight 0.4 point range over 4 surveys.

2.3.8.1. The strength of Spiritual/Religious Satisfaction using the no-gating data

These results comprise the combined data from surveys 16 to 23, when no gating question preceded the question of spiritual/religious satisfaction. While 11.6 percent of the combined sample respond that they do not have the Spiritual/Religious experience, another 3.2 percent responded that they had zero satisfaction with their experience. These are two very different groups of people as seen by matching of the strength of the Spiritual/Religious experience to the Personal Wellbeing Index. This is shown in Table A2.14 and below.

![Graph showing satisfaction with S/R](image)

Figure 2.11: Satisfaction with Spiritual/Religious vs. Personal Wellbeing Index (combined sample)

This figure shows the relationship between the Spiritual/Religious experience and personal wellbeing. These can be summarised as:

1. People who have no spiritual/religious experience (11.2% of the combined samples) have normal levels of wellbeing.
2. People who rate their spiritual/religious experience as providing 0-6 levels of satisfaction have a level of personal wellbeing that lies below the normal range (36.8% of the sample of believers).
3. The Personal Wellbeing Index of the spiritual/religious group does not enter the normal range until people rate their level of satisfaction as 7/10.

The three groups of Spiritual/Religious experience are shown in relation to the Personal Wellbeing Index domains in Table A2.15. From this it can be seen that:
1. There are no significant differences in the Personal Wellbeing Index between people who do, and those who do not have the Spiritual/Religious experience, on any other domain.

2. For all domains, the zero Spiritual/Religious satisfaction group are significantly lower than the other two groups.

Figure 2.12 shows the pattern of the relationship between levels of Spiritual/Religious and the PWI. It also compares this pattern with that of two other domains as Relationships and Future Security (Table A12.4 and Table A12.9).

![Diagram showing PWI vs. Satisfaction rating]

Figure 2.12: Spiritual/Religious vs. Relationships x Future Security (Personal Wellbeing Index)

It can be observed that the Spiritual/Religious domain behaves differently from the other two domains in this figure. Low scores are less attached to low Personal Wellbeing Index values, and high scores are less attached to high Personal Wellbeing Index values. In other words, the Spiritual/Religious domain is more independent of the Personal Wellbeing Index than the other two domains.

This is consistent with the correlation matrix in Table A2.18.1 which shows the domain to be obviously less strongly connected to ‘Life as a whole’ and to the other seven domains, than the other domains are connected to one another.

Despite this, the Spiritual/Religious domain makes a significant unique contribution of 0.1% to ‘Life as a whole’ (Table A2.18.1) using the combined surveys and yields a stronger result (0.2%) when the gating-question is used (Table A2.18.2). Moreover, the inclusion of this domain does not detract from the contributions of the other domains. A comparison with Table A2.17.1, which displays the regression for the seven domains only, shows that the Spiritual/Religious inclusion does not markedly change the unique contribution of any of the original domains. The maximum fall is -0.4% for Standard but its inclusion does decrease the net unique variance from 14.9 to 13.8% (-0.9%) while increasing the overall variance accounted for (Adjusted $R^2$) from 50.8 to 51.1% (+0.3%).

These results qualify the Spiritual/Religious domain as a component of the Personal Wellbeing Index in Australia.

2.3.8.2. The performance of the Personal Wellbeing Index at different levels of Spiritual/Religious

Tables A2.19 to A2.19.5 show regressions of the original seven domains against Life as a Whole when the data set is restricted to match levels of Spiritual/Religious. The first (A2.19) shows the full data-set. The next shows the data set reduced by eliminating all respondents who scored 0 or 1 on Spiritual/Religious. This process of elimination is repeated through the remaining tables.
It can be seen that this procedure does not substantially change the pattern of domain contributions to LAAW. The explained variance drops from 51.9% (full data set) to 47.7% (Spiritual/Religious 7-10 only), but this probably just reflects the overall reduced variance in the sample.

It can be concluded that the performance of the 7-domain Personal Wellbeing Index is not influenced by different levels of Spiritual/Religious satisfaction.

2.3.8.3. Changes in the value of the Personal Wellbeing Index due to Spiritual/Religious inclusion

The data for the domain of Spiritual/Religious come in two forms. Surveys 16-23 offered no gating option is answering the question. Thus, the people who declared that they did not have this dimension in their life volunteered this information with no prompting. The following surveys, from Survey 24 and onward, did offer a response option by using a prior gating question as ‘Do you have spiritual or religious beliefs? Y/N’. The subsequent item ‘How satisfied are you with your spirituality or religion? was then only asked of the people who had responded in the affirmative.

Tables A2.14 and A2.14.1 show the distributions of the ‘no gating-option’ and the ‘gating-option’ forms of this item. The proportion of people declaring that they did not have a spiritual/religious dimension to their life rose from 11.6% with no-option to 44.2% when the gating option was provided. Surprisingly, when the data are restricted to the people who confirm they have the spiritual/religious dimension in their lives (gating-option), the domain mean for spiritual/religious satisfaction does not significantly change, rising from an average of 75.4 points (no-option) to 75.9 points (gating-option). This is a mystery waiting to be solved.

Due to current uncertainty as to the psychometric performance of this item, the Spiritual/Religious domain is not included in the calculation of the Personal Wellbeing Index for any of the cumulative data or time-series data in this report.
How satisfied are you with your Life as a Whole?

Fig. 2.13: Satisfaction with Life as a Whole
"How satisfied are you with your Life as a Whole?"

Satisfaction with life as a whole (77.1 points) has shown a non-significant increase (+0.1 points) since the previous survey. It remains at a level no higher than Survey 1. This is quite a curious result given the continued strong showing of the PWI.

**Historical:** After the initial rise one year following September 2001 (S3), this global item dropped back 6 months later, only to rise again after the Bali bombing (S5) and during the period of the Iraq war (S6-S7). Then it gradually decreased until, one year after Hussein had been defeated it was no different from Survey 1 again. Since Survey 12 it seems to have stabilized at about 77-78 points which is marginally significantly higher than at Survey 1. The range of scores is 3.9 points between April 2001 (S1:75.2) and August 2004 (S12:Olympics:79.1).
2.5. **Summary of the Changes in Personal Wellbeing**

The level of personal wellbeing in Australia has not changed over the past 24 months and remains at a very high level. The high levels of the last five surveys probably reflect the sense of relief that Australia escaped the recession and that people's savings and superannuation funds remain secure, continued low unemployment, low levels of inflation, and the breaking of the drought. There may also be an element of positive downward comparison against countries that have not been so lucky.

Looking back over the entire record of the Index (Figure 2.1) it appears that it has mainly varied within a band of just two percentage points, from 74 to 76. There have been three slight variations outside this range. These are the survey run at the time of the Athens Olympics (Survey 12: 76.3 points), Survey 22 (76.3 points) and Survey 24 (76.2 points). It is interesting to reflect on the domains that have fuelled these deviant values for the PWI.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domains</th>
<th>PWI</th>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Health</th>
<th>Achieving</th>
<th>Relationships</th>
<th>Safety</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Future</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surveys BELOW the normal range</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>S13</td>
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<td>Surveys ABOVE the normal range</td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>S20.1/24</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary of these results:

(a) Only 3 domains (Achieving, Health and Relationships) have registered a value below their normal range. Both of the two relevant surveys, S13 and S18.1, yielded quite low values for the PWI, but S26 is quite normal. There is no obvious reason for these low scores and they likely reflect random variation.

(b) Only one domain (Community) has registered a subsequent value above its normal range, and this has happened twice (S20.1-Fires and Floods, and S24). The reason the latter value is so high is unclear.
Summary of domain changes

Standard (Figure 2.3): Along with several other domains, Standard of Living peaked first at the time of the Athens Olympics (S12, August 2004). Over the next 4.5 years it remained within a 2 percentage point band, but it peaked again at Survey 22 (September 2009) perhaps fuelled by the recovering economy, and has been slowly falling ever since.

Health (Figure 2.4): This domain has failed to show any systematic change over the entire survey sequence. An apparent aberration is S26, which lies below the normal range for this domain.

Achieving (Figure 2.5): This domain has failed to show any systematic change over the entire survey sequence.

Relationships (Figure 2.6): This domain has fallen below its normal range of 4.3 points on two occasions (S13/S18). Notably, its largest fluctuation between adjacent surveys is 3.2 points between Survey 12 and Survey 13.

Safety (Figure 2.7): This domain has been rising, on average, throughout this series of surveys. The reason for this is uncertain. While the correlation of -66 with the % of the sample expecting a terrorist attack is interesting (Table A2.9), this cannot explain the full pattern of results. The lowest level of safety was immediately prior to September 11; a time at which the possibility of terrorist attacks in Australia were not even being considered by the general population.

Community (Figure 2.8): This domain has peaked twice, with values above the normal range. The first occasion was Survey 20.1 (February 2009) at the time of the Victorian bushfires, and the second was Survey 24 (September 2010). It seems likely that national horror at the level of bush-fire destruction bonds the community and makes people feel more connected to one another. Over the surveys 21-26 Community has remained at generally very high levels.

Future Security (Figure 2.9): This domain has changed markedly since its nadir in Survey 15, (May, 2006) it rose to unprecedented heights in Survey 18.1 (February 2008) and then plummeted for reasons probably linked to the falling stock market at this time. It has now returned to be mid-range.

It is important to note that the two domains of Safety and Future Security do not measure the same experience. While the mean scores between surveys show a high correlation (.71, Table A2.13), the within-survey correlation, using the scores of individuals (Table A2.17.1) is much lower (.43). It can also be noted that, while Safety remained high over Surveys 15-16 (Table A2.1), Future Security fell to be no different from Survey 1.

Why, then, did population satisfaction with Safety and Security suddenly rise to such heights? It is most unclear, but some co-indicators can be identified.

The reason for the trend of rising satisfaction with safety is uncertain. One possibility is that the continued presence of a ‘terrorist threat’ during this period has given people a heightened sense of safety because the threat has not materialised as an attack on Australian soil. This may give rise to feelings that the anti-terrorist measures, so evident at airports and in the media, are effective. This brings to consciousness a domain of life that is normally of little real consequence to most Australians, and so they have increased positive regard for their safety, instead of the more neutral feelings they held before the threat was evident.

It may also be fuelled by perceptions of competence in the military and the police to deal with difficult situations. In terms of the military, Australian troops are playing an increasingly active role as peacekeepers within the Pacific region, with troops deployed in New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and East Timore. The Australian police have uncovered terrorist threats and, working with other authorities, successfully prevented a recurrence of the Sydney ‘race riots’ of November 2005. There is also increasing evidence of Islamic integration within Australia and, perhaps therefore, a sense that potential threats are being effectively managed.
2.6. National Wellbeing Domains

2.6.1. Economic situation
"How satisfied are you with the Economic Situation in Australia?"

Satisfaction with the economic situation (60.9 points) has risen by a non-significant +0.9 points since Survey 26 and remains well below the level it has been for much of the period of these surveys, between about 64-68 points. It is no longer different from survey 1. This is the most volatile domain. The range of values is 14.9 points, being between April 2001 (S1:53.6) and October 2007 (S18: 70.9 points).

**Historical:** This domain rose significantly from its baseline (S1) immediately following September 11 (S2) and again six months later (S3). This was followed by a sustained and gradual rise up to Survey 18. It then showed a precipitous 12.4 point fall over the 12 month period including Survey 19 (April 2008) and Survey 21 (May, 2009). The reason is almost certainly tied to the major fall in the stock market over this period. It then staged a dramatic recovery back to its normal level.

The domains of Economic Situation and Business in Australia showed an almost continuous rise over the six-year period of these surveys from 2001 to 2007. This run ended in October 2007 with both domains posting significant falls (Economic situation -8.5 points and Business -2.2 points). These may have been influenced by rising interest rates or by popular perceptions of Labor governments in general as poor economic managers. The stock-market collapse in 2008 further enhanced this loss of satisfaction. The turn-around between October 2008 (S20) and May 2009 (S21) may have been initiated by the Government's various measures to stimulate the economy, most particularly the $900 one-off cash payments to tax-payers and school-age children in March/April 2009. Until this survey, it seemed to have been sustained by the evident economic recovery.
How satisfied are you with the state of the Natural Environment in Australia?

Figure 2.15: Satisfaction with State of the Natural Environment in Australia
"How satisfied are you with your state of the Natural Environment in Australia?"

Satisfaction with the state of the natural environment (63.9 points) has fallen by a non-significant -0.1 points since the last survey. It remains very high. The range over all surveys is 8.7 points between October 2006 (S16:55.8) and April 2011 (S25:64.5).

The environmental reality

From Survey 1 in April 2001 to Survey 23 in April 2010, Australia experienced the worst drought in recorded history. This changed in the latter part of 2010. According to a statement issued by the National Climate Centre on 6th October 2010 [link](http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/drought/drought.shtml) the following statements represented the reality of the current environmental situation at that time:

1. Australia recorded its wettest September on record in 2010. However, above-average rainfall was largely in the north and the east of the country, missing the southwest corner of WA, which is experiencing its driest start to the year on record and its driest 12-month period on record.

2. The Northern Territory and Queensland had their wettest September on record. New South Wales declared its drought over.

3. The rains in 2010 have only made limited inroads into the serious deficiencies which remain on multi-year time-scales, especially in south-eastern and south-western Australia and south-east Queensland. These continue to affect water supplies; to alleviate these would require above average rainfall for a sustained period.

4. Rainfall has been below average across much of southwest and southeast Australia since 1997, whilst central and southern parts of the Murray-Darling Basin have experienced below average rainfall since 2002. These long-term deficiencies have taken place against a background of well above average temperatures, including Australia's warmest decade on record.

The NCC statement on 6th April 2011 records:

All states and territories recorded above median rainfall in March 2011. Australia as a whole recorded its wettest March on record, as did Queensland and the NT, with many areas receiving highest on record rainfall for the month. Eastern parts of WA also recorded above average rainfall with a large area in the inland east Kimberley receiving highest on record totals for the month. However, the southwest of the state was again below average in March, the tenth driest March on record for the region.

In summary, except for a small portion of Western Australia, the drought is over.

**Historical record of satisfaction with the natural environment:** The record of satisfaction with the environment in Figure 2.15 shows little correspondence with the objective record. Prior to Survey 16 this domain was very stable, fluctuating by only 3.0 points over the time-series, even though the drought was steadily deepening over this period. While the level of satisfaction did occasionally move to be significantly higher than Survey 1, the reasons were not clear. Most likely these single changes mirrored fluctuations in the National Wellbeing Index overall, rather than anything directly attributable to the environment.

This pattern changed dramatically between May 2006 (Survey 15) and October 2006 (Survey 16) when satisfaction fell by 3.1 points, to a level below the normal range, as it was at that time. Satisfaction then remained significantly below its value at Survey 1 for at least the next six months, up to Survey 17. Then in October 2007 (Survey 18) it returned to be no different from Survey 1 once again. This is the only domain to have fallen significantly below the level of Survey 1 values in any survey.

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Australian Unity Wellbeing Index, Survey 27, Report 27, April 2012
The cause of this fall in satisfaction is both remarkable and attributable. In the period prior to Survey 16, Al Gore’s film ‘An Inconvenient Truth’ had been released and widely discussed in Australia. Moreover, in the few months prior to Survey 16 the media had repeatedly featured ‘global warming’ and the various doomsday scenarios. This negative publicity, backgrounder by the continuing drought, caused people to feel less satisfied with the natural environment.

This decreased level of satisfaction is interesting for two reasons. First, it is one of the few times we have been able to link a change in a particular domain to a national phenomenon (negative publicity). Second, it reinforces the separate performance of objective and subjective variables. The actual state of the natural environment had not changed discernibly between Survey 15 and Survey 16.

It is also interesting that this lower satisfaction lasted somewhere between 6-12 months. However, sometime within this period, people generally adapted to the negative information and it lost its power to influence satisfaction with the environment.

During 2008 the levels of satisfaction returned to their previous level, but during the following year, in 2009, the ‘Environment change sceptics’ gained media ascendancy. Their claims, that the evidence for human-induced climate change was false, was a message many people wanted to hear. The following Survey 22, in September 2009, reflected their renewed hope as sudden increase in satisfaction with the natural environment.

The summer of 2009/2010 was mild over much of Australia; very different from the searing heat and bushfires experienced a year earlier. This seemed to reinforce the sceptics’ message. Then, as stated earlier, by Survey 24 in September 2010, the rains had come and most of Australia was mainly drought-free for the first time in a decade. Thus, satisfaction with the environment has remained at very high levels ever since.

In summary, these changes in satisfaction reflect two major influences. First is personal experience of the natural environment, making people more likely to believe global warming when they experience hot and dry conditions. Second, their attitudes also reflect the dominant media message, but the strength of this influence seems highly dependent on both the prevailing conditions and the passage of time.

People are readily influenced by media reports carrying information supporting their personal views or experience. Thus, when the environment is hot and dry, a dooms-day message of global warming is taken to heart. However, because pessimistic thoughts are potentially damaging to personal wellbeing, people adapt to such information, and the message loses its capacity to change attitudes. Helping to counter pessimistic thoughts are the views of climate-change sceptics. They offer optimism, and so their views are embraced because positive views support personal wellbeing. It is unfortunate that the duration of the sceptics’ influence cannot be determined from the current data because of the breaking drought. What is clear, however, is that people have a high capacity to adapt to both changes in their experienced environment and to media messages about the environment. So all such influences on environment satisfaction are short-term.

The weakest effect on satisfaction with the natural environment is the actual trend data showing global warming and the long-term consequences of such change. Thus, public opinion concerning the state of the natural environment should not be used by policy-makers for the planning of any long-term goals.
How satisfied are you with Social Conditions in Australia?

Figure 2.16: Satisfaction with Social Conditions in Australia
"How satisfied are you with Social Conditions in Australia?"

Satisfaction with social conditions (63.9 points) has fallen by a non-significant -0.8 points over the past six months. It remains at one of its highest recorded levels. The range of values is 4.6 points between April 2001 (S1:59.3) and April 2010 (S23:65.7).

**Historical:** Looking over the whole record, the rise in satisfaction with social conditions, evident following September 11 (S2), was sustained up to May 2006 (Survey 15), after which it fell back to be no different from Survey 1 for a period of at least 6 months. It is possible that this lower satisfaction with social conditions reflected the new Industrial Relations laws that came into effect shortly before Survey 15. This effect dissipated in less than 12 months, with satisfaction returning to its previous levels.

Since Survey 16 (October 2006), the rise in satisfaction with social conditions has been sustained. The cause of this rise is uncertain.
How satisfied are you with the Government in Australia

Figure 2.17: Satisfaction with Government in Australia