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Applied Economic & Social Research

The HILDA Survey and Wellbeing Measurement

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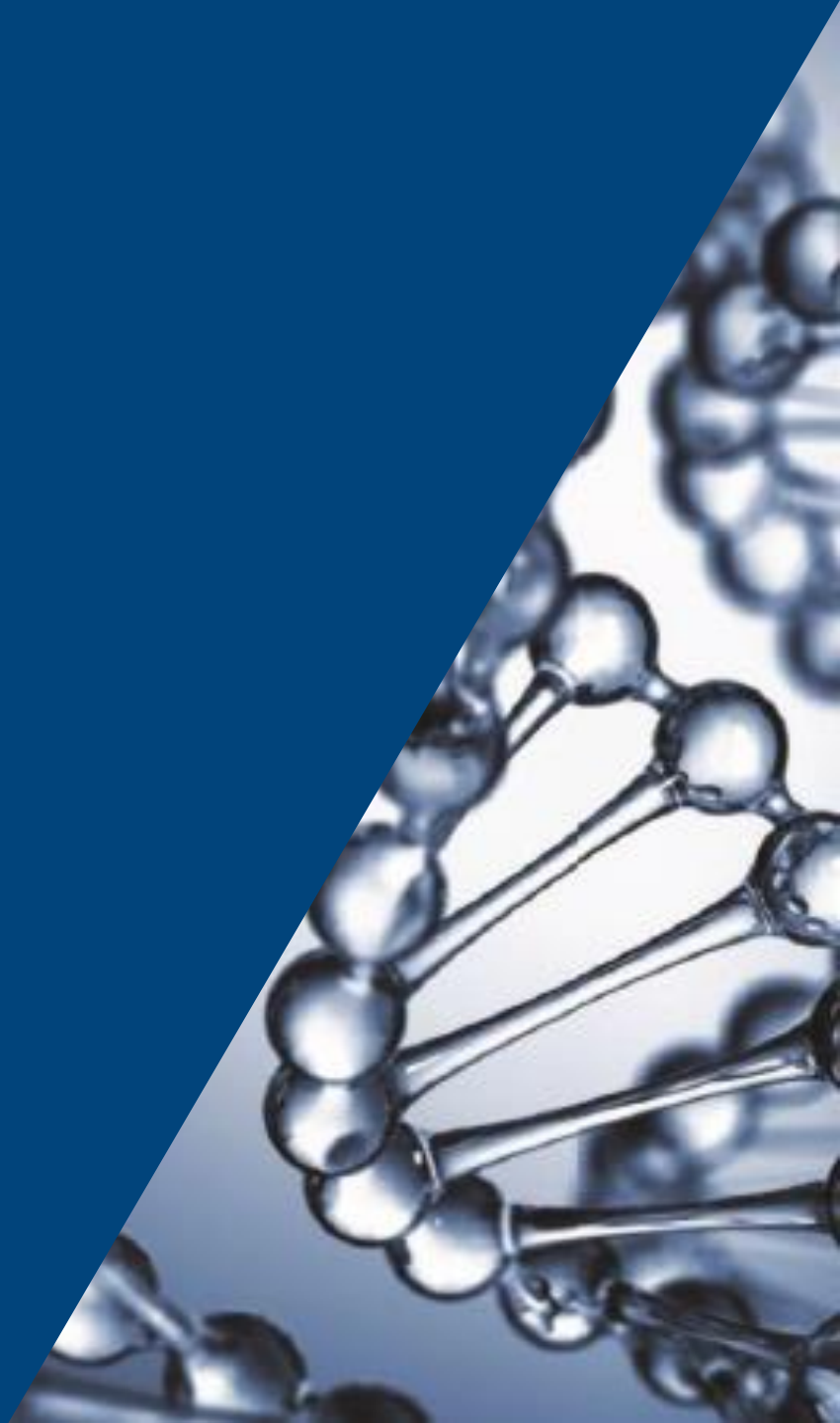
*Building Wellbeing into Policy and Action in Australia
workshop, 21-23 Nov 2022*



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HILDA crash course

- Indefinite life panel
- Annual (Commenced 2001; Top-up added 2011)
- Reference pop = residents of private dwellings.
- F2F interviews with self-completion supplement
- Data set size
 - T = 20 waves of data available.
 - N = 305,143 interviews
274,938 SCQs
 - i = 33,347 unique respondents
44,663 enumerated persons

HILDA: Ideal for measuring wellbeing

1. A study of life in Australia
2. An omnibus study
3. A household study
4. A longitudinal study

OECD How's Life Indicators vs HILDA (I)

Dimension	OECD indicators	HILDA Survey (examples)
Income and wealth	Net disposable income Net wealth	Income by component for each hh member HH wealth by asset / liability type* Expenditure by type (~20 categories) Stressful financial events
Housing	Disposable income after housing costs Overcrowding rate	Mortgage payments / Rent payments Number of bedrooms + Household composition Basic dwelling characteristics*
* Only every 4 years		

OECD How's Life Indicators vs HILDA (II)

Dimension	OECD indicators	HILDA Survey (examples)
Work and job quality	Employment rate Gender wage gap Working very long hours	Employment status (time of interview) Employment calendar Gross (and net) wages and salaries Non-cash benefits Weekly work hours (usual and preferred) Employment type (permanent / fixed-term / casual / self-employed) Job satisfaction (overall and 5 sub-domains) Perceived probability of job loss / quitting Other job characteristics (job demands, control, security)
* Only every 4 years		

OECD How's Life Indicators vs HILDA (III)

Domain	OECD indicators	HILDA Survey (examples)
Health status	Life expectancy	SF-36 (incl. self-reported health status) Long-term health conditions / disabilities Health behaviours Smoking Drinking Exercise Diet* / BMI Illicit drug use* Sleep hours / Sleep quality* Serious illness conditions* Hospital visits* Medical practitioner visits*
* Only every 4 years		

OECD How's Life Indicators vs HILDA (IV)

Domain	OECD indicators	HILDA Survey (examples)
Knowledge and skills	Students (15 yo) cognitive skills (PISA) Students (15 yo) with low skills (PISA)	Educational attainment English language proficiency Self-assessed literacy / numeracy* Cognitive tests (waves 12 and 16)
Environmental quality	Access to green space Exposure to outdoor air pollution	<i>Geo-coded data provide potential to link to known area characteristics.</i>
Safety	Deaths due to assault Gender gap in feeling safe at night	Self-reported victimisation (2 items) Satisfaction with how safe people feel
* Only every 4 years		

OECD How's Life Indicators vs HILDA (V)

Domain	OECD indicators	HILDA Survey
Work-life balance	Time allocated to leisure and personal care Gender gap in total hours worked	Usual paid hours worked Hours worked at home Self-reported time use Sat. w flexibility to balance work / non-work Work-family gains and strains (parents)
Social connections	Time interacting with friends and activity Perceived lack of social support	Social interaction with friends Social support (10 items) Inter-personal trust
Civic engagement	Voter turn-out Having no say in government	Community participation (12-items)*
Subjective well-being	Life satisfaction Negative affect balance	Life satisfaction (overall + 8 sub-domains) Kessler-10: Psychological distress** SF-36 (incl. Mental Health Inventory)

* Only every 4 years. ** Only every 2 years.

Lessons from research

- Single composite measures of well-being are difficult to “sell”
- Subjective measures attract a lot of attention from academics

Terms appearing in HILDA Survey article titles

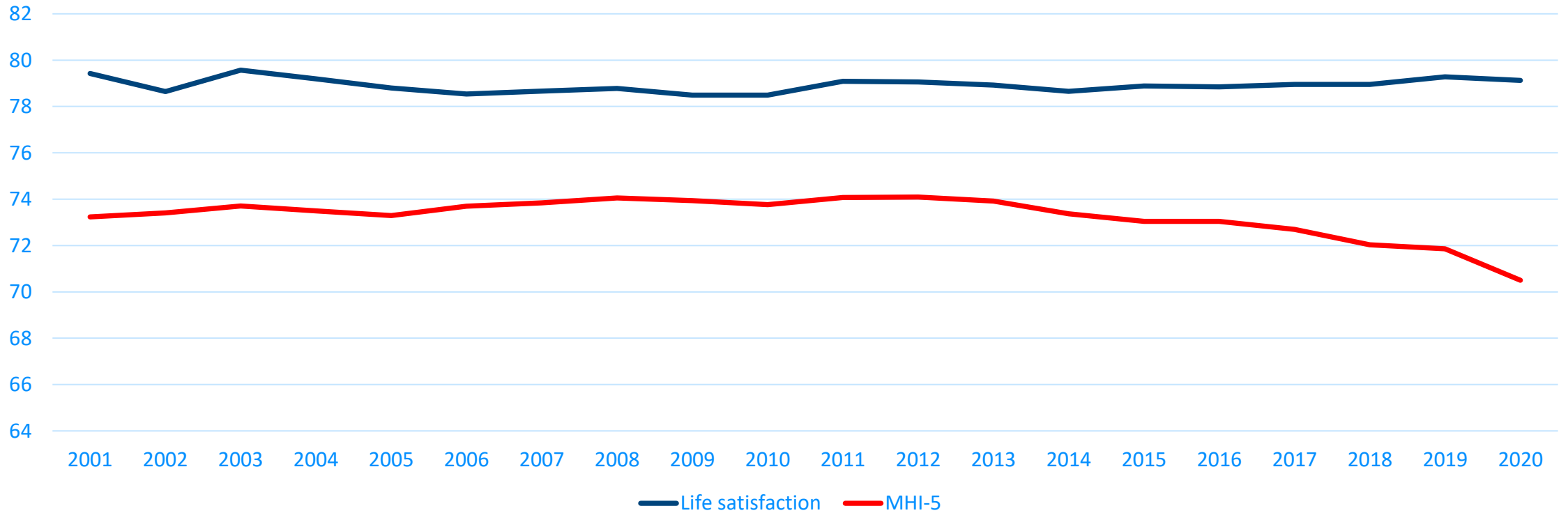
TERM	N
Mental health	152
Life satisfaction / Satisfaction with life	56
Subjective well-being / wellbeing	42
Happiness / Unhappiness / Happy / Unhappy	32
Job satisfaction	22
Quality of life	16
Psychological distress / well-being / wellbeing	15
TOTAL	335

Lessons from research

- Single composite measures of well-being are difficult to “sell”
- Subjective measures attract a lot of attention
- Population averages can be quite stable

Example: Aggregate subjective wellbeing trends

Mean Life Satisfaction (x10) and MHI-5 scores, 2001-2020



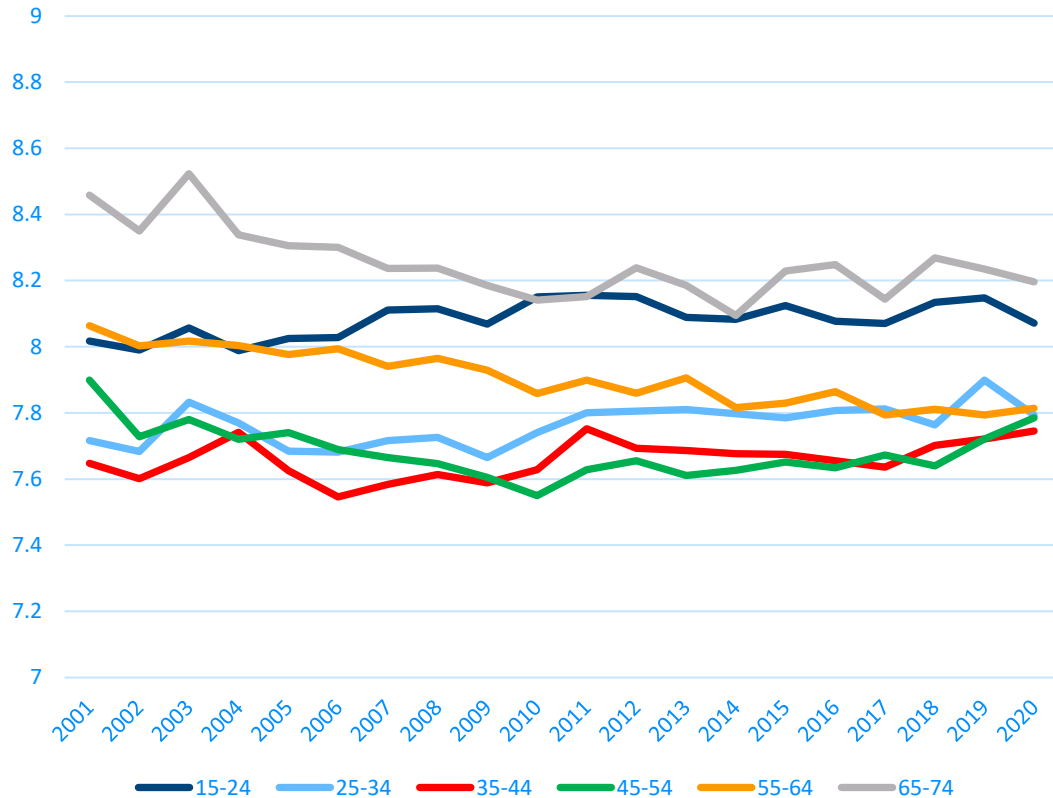
Source: HILDA Survey unit-record data release 20.

Some lessons from research

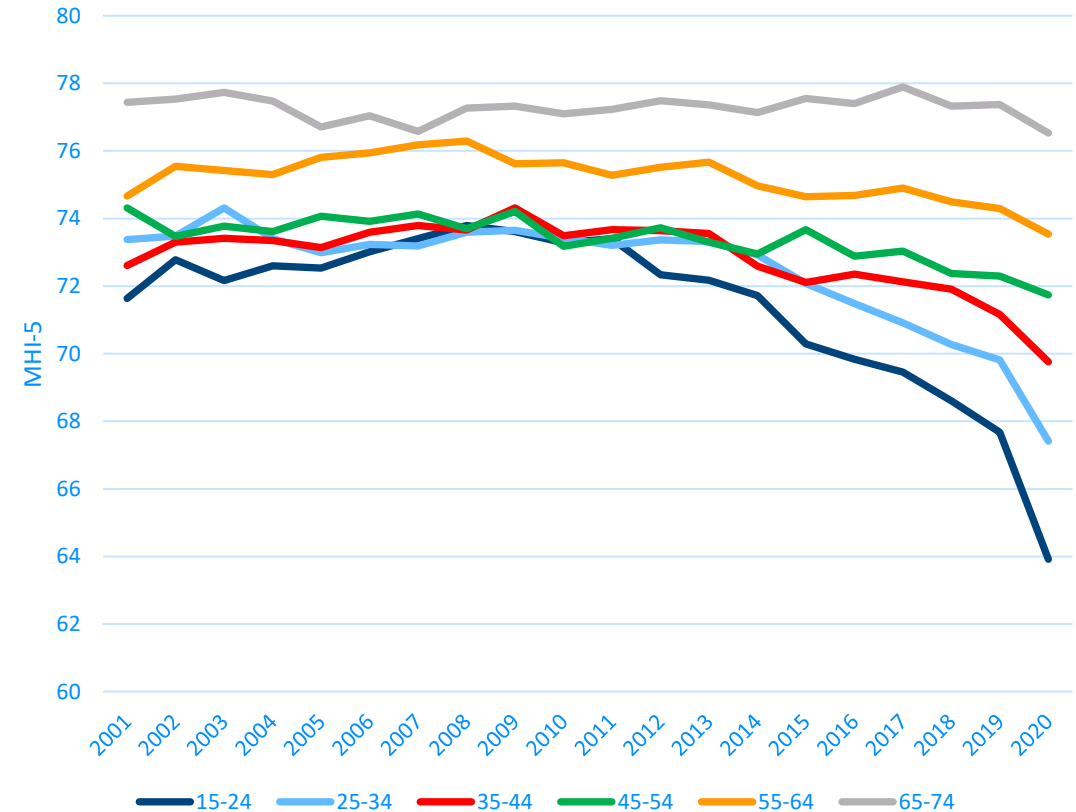
- Single composite measures of well-being are difficult to “sell”
- Subjective measures attract a lot of attention from researchers
- Population averages can be quite stable
- Substantial across-person heterogeneity

Example: Heterogeneity in SWB measures

Mean Life Satisfaction by Age Group and Year



Mean MHI-5 by Age Group and Year



Some lessons from research

- Single composite measures of well-being are difficult to “sell”
- Subjective measures attract a lot of attention
- Population averages can be quite stable
- Substantial across-person heterogeneity
- What about within-person person variation?
- People are resilient

Does SWB adapt to life events?

Event	0-12 months ago		
Marriage	0.10***		
Marital separation	-0.29***		
Birth of a child	0.06**		
Serious injury	-0.17***		
Death of spouse / child	-0.30***		
Death of friend	-0.03**		
Victim of violent crime	-0.07***		
Victim of property crime	-0.06**		
Job dismissal	-0.06**		
Major improvement in finances	0.14***		
Major worsening in finances	-0.49***		
Moved house	0.07***		

Does SWB adapt to life events?

Event	0-12 months ago	13-24 months ago	25-36 months ago
Marriage	0.10***	0.00	0.03
Marital separation	-0.29***	-0.08***	-0.01
Birth of a child	0.06**	-0.00	-0.05**
Serious injury	-0.17***	-0.04***	-0.06***
Death of spouse / child	-0.30***	-0.05	-0.07
Death of friend	-0.03**	-0.02*	-0.02*
Victim of violent crime	-0.07***	-0.10**	-0.04
Victim of property crime	-0.06**	-0.01	0.02
Job dismissal	-0.06**	-0.06	-0.01
Major improvement in finances	0.14***	0.07**	0.05**
Major worsening in finances	-0.49***	-0.14***	-0.10***
Moved house	0.07***	0.03**	0.01

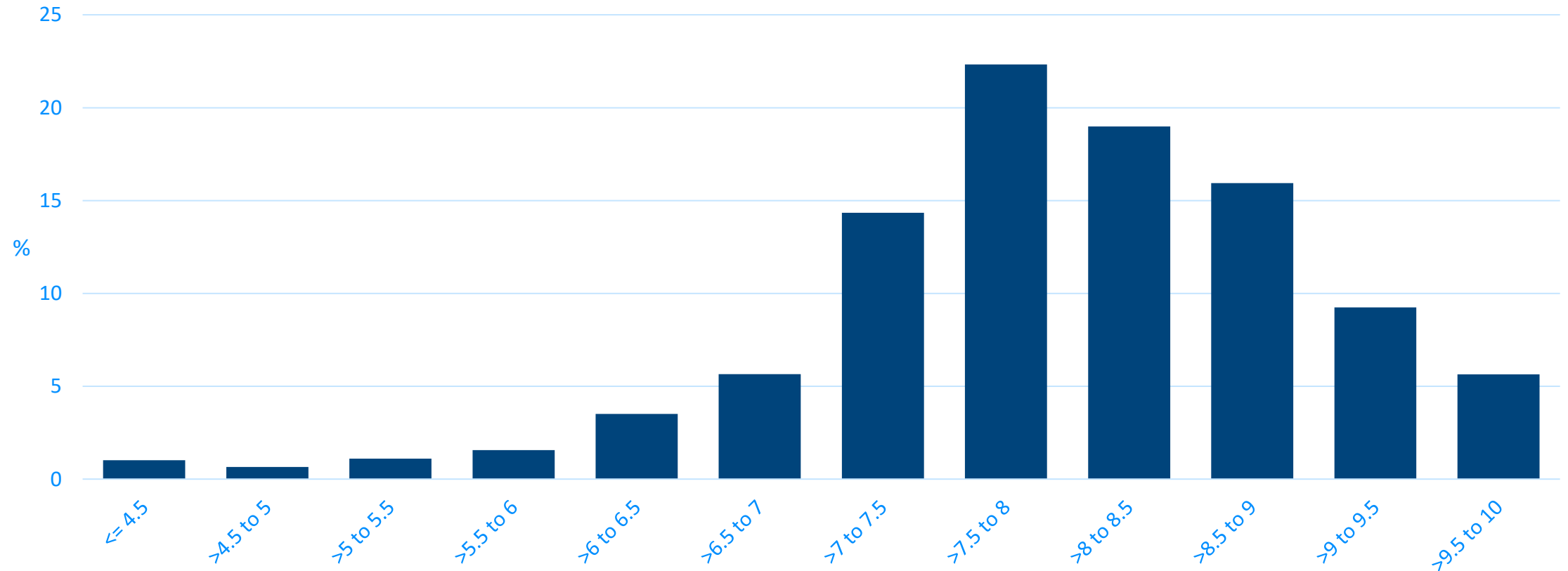
REFERENCES

- Frijters P, Johnston DW, Shields M. 2011. Life satisfaction dynamics with quarterly life event data. *Scandinavian Journal of Economics* 113(1):190-211.
- Kettlewell N, Morris RW, Ho N, Cobb-Clark DA, Cripps S, Glozier N. 2020. The differential impact of major life events on cognitive and affective wellbeing. *SSM-Population Health* 10:100533.

Some lessons from research

- Single composite measures of well-being are difficult to “sell”
- Subjective measures attract a lot of attention
- Population averages can be quite stable
- Substantial across-person heterogeneity
- What about within-person person variation?
- People are resilient
- Ill-being may matter more than well-being
- Persistent disadvantage is more important than temporary disadvantage

Distribution of long-term SWB (life satisfaction)



Source: Cummins R, Li N, Stokes M, Wooden M. 2014. A demonstration of set-points for subjective wellbeing. *Journal of Happiness Studies* 15(1):183-206.

Want to know more?

- Review articles: HILDA Survey data
 - Economic Record, 2007
 - Longitudinal and Life Course Studies, 2012
 - Journal of Economics & Statistics, 2021
- Review articles: HILDA Survey research
 - Australian Economic Review, December 2021
- Website: <https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/hilda>
 - User manual
 - Survey instruments
 - Bibliography
 - Instructions on how to access the data