
Australians' subjective wellbeing in 2023: age, income and carer inequities



Australian Unity Wellbeing Index (AUWI) – Survey 40 Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Deakin University, in partnership with Australian Unity, has been monitoring the Subjective Wellbeing of Australian adults (18+) for the past 22 years through the Australian Unity Wellbeing Index (AUWI). This monitoring has been achieved through 40 cross-sectional national surveys, collectively involving over 75,000 Australians since the AUWI launched in 2001.

Each year, we chart the natural history of personal and national wellbeing in Australia. In addition, we examine how these measures vary by demographic groups and other groupings of interest. In the latest 2023 survey, data collection was conducted between 7 June and 27 June 2023 and the special interest areas included mental distress and carer wellbeing. The topic of carer wellbeing was chosen given the growing role that carers, unpaid and paid, play in our ageing population (Australian Government, 2023). With the number of people in Australia aged 65 and over expected to more than double over the next 40 years, demand for care is rising (Treasury, 2023). Understanding the wellbeing implications of these developments on informal and professional carers is paramount.

The Australian social and political landscape in the first half of 2023, leading up to the data collection period, was marked by several challenges. One of these was cost-of-living pressures driven largely by global supply chain problems due to geopolitical conflicts and economic recovery post-COVID-19 (Tsiaplias & Wang, 2023).

The rising costs of essential goods and services, including housing, energy and groceries, put a significant strain on household budgets. Over half of Australians reported feeling financially stressed, or just making ends meet, in February 2023 (Botha et al., 2023). However, this stress is not felt evenly across generations. For example, in the financial year ending in June 2023, living costs increased by 6-7% for people who were retired, but almost 10% for employees, who are more likely to have a mortgage and a family to support (ABS, 2023; Hawkins, 2023).

A second major event in the first half of 2023 was the decision to allow Australians to vote on a national bill to change the constitution to include an Indigenous Voice to Parliament through a referendum (Butler, 2023). Although voting did not take place until later in the year after data collection, heated debate was already raging (Roy Morgan, 2023).

The international stage was no less tumultuous, with international tensions and the ongoing war in Russia-Ukraine continuing to dominate headlines (e.g., Borger & Belam, 2023). Climate change impacts were also front of mind as the Northern Hemisphere entered what would be the hottest summer on record (Denning, 2023) and, at the time of data collection, Canadian wildfires blanketed much of North America in smoke (Dickie, 2023).

Amid these international challenges, there were also positive domestic developments. The May national budget announced a cost-of-living relief package to boost welfare support and payments for many, including those accessing JobSeeker, Austudy, Youth Allowance, rent assistance and single parent payments (Middleton, 2023). Aged-care workers also received a 15% pay rise (The Hon Mark Butler MP, 2023) and there was a huge investment in early childhood education and care, increasing government rebates substantially for most households (ELAA, 2023). The Fair Work Commission also announced increases in the Federal minimum wage and award rates (Hutchens & Chalmers, 2023).

Additionally, in Australia and abroad, we saw a return to near normalcy after three years of grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic. In early May 2023, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared an end to the global health emergency (UN News, 2023).

The following summary presents the key results from the 40th survey of the AUWI and highlights how Australians were faring against this backdrop in June 2023.

A total of 2,011 Australians aged between 18 and 97 years (mean 48, SD 18; 49% female) from across the country (sampled to be geographically representative) took part in the 40th survey, which was completed by phone.

Australians' personal wellbeing in 2023

In 2023, Australians' overall satisfaction with 'life as a whole' remained below the normal population range, close to the lowest score on record in 2022. Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI) scores remained within the normal range in 2023, with little change across most domains. Notably, Achieving in Life and the Health domains had small rises that saw them bounce back into their normal ranges, while Community Connectedness rose substantially. Although the changes across most PWI domains were modest, the downward pattern seen across all domains since 2020 appears to have been disrupted in 2023.

As usual, average PWI scores remained below normal levels for certain socio-demographic groups, for example, those on household incomes \$30,000 and under or those who are unemployed. But there were also groups who dropped below normal levels in 2023 who typically score within the normal range, including Australians who were: on household incomes between \$31,000 and \$100,000; 26-35 years old; living with their parents; occupied in full time home duties; or living in Tasmania.

When we compared personal wellbeing of socio-demographic groups to the previous year, people on a household income of \$30,000 or under and semi-retired people had notably higher average PWI scores in 2023. On the other hand, people from Tasmania had notably lower average scores in 2023 compared to 2022.

Age and income inequities

In a notable pattern that emerged in 2022, all age groups 55 years and under, and all household groups with incomes \$100,000 and under, had average PWI scores below or at the very bottom of the normal population level. This suggests changing age and income inequities on the PWI compared to years prior.

To further understand what was driving this, we examined how the three Golden Triangle of Happiness domains (i.e., Standard of Living, Personal Relationships and Achieving in Life) differed between these age and income groups. Every year, these three domains are found to be the most important in predicting overall satisfaction with 'life as a whole', thus they are often dubbed the 'key to happiness'. Australians aged 55 years and under were notably less satisfied with their Standard of Living than those 56 years and over.

Similarly, Australians in households with a gross annual income of \$100,000 and under were notably less satisfied with their Standard of Living compared to those in households \$101,000 and over. This pattern was also observed for Achieving in Life.

Australians' national wellbeing in 2023

Australians' overall satisfaction with the 'life in Australia' remained below the normal range, close to the record low measured in 2022. National Wellbeing Index (NWI) scores remained at the bottom of the normal range, with average levels of satisfaction for five of the six domains relatively similar to 2022 levels. The exception was satisfaction with the 'Economic Situation in Australia', which declined sharply to its lowest score on record.

The decline in Australians' satisfaction with the 'Economic Situation in Australia', was particularly notable when compared to scores from other periods of economic instability, such as the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) in 2008 and the relative high in 2020 during the first year of the pandemic.

Carers' wellbeing in 2023

We asked respondents whether they provided unpaid care to someone due to their ongoing illness, disability or old age to examine the wellbeing of *informal carers*. All respondents were also asked if they provided care as part of any paid work they do, to capture *professional carers*. Over 1 in 4 respondents (27%) held a caring role in their personal and/or professional lives and 63% of these identified as female. Of these, 69% were informal carers (i.e., provided unpaid care; 59% female), 21% were professional carers (i.e., provided care through paid work; 69% female), and 9% were both (80% female).

Carers' personal wellbeing

We compared the wellbeing of the three types of carers (i.e., informal carers, professional carers, both) and non-carers. Informal carers stood out, showing a pattern of lower levels of personal wellbeing and higher mental distress compared to other groups. However, not all informal carers fared the same. Those with more time intensive caring commitments (20+ hours per week) had notably lower PWI levels compared to non-carers and those with informal caring commitments of less than 20 hours.

Carers' mental distress

A similar pattern was seen across feelings of mental distress. Informal carers with commitments of less than 20 hours per week reported similar levels of mental distress to non-carers. Those with more time intensive caring commitments (20+ hours per week) reported higher feelings of mental distress compared to non-carers and informal carers with lighter caring loads (less than 20 hours per week). As informal care time commitments reached 40+ hours, feeling of stress increased substantially compared to commitments of 20-39 hours.

Carers' satisfaction with access to supports

Informal carers were far less satisfied with their 'access to training', 'psychological support' and 'ability to connect with other carers' compared to professional carers.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Australian Unity Wellbeing Index (AUWI) is a barometer of Australians' subjective wellbeing (SWB). It measures both SWB using the Personal Wellbeing Index (International Wellbeing Group, 2013), and the National Wellbeing Index (NWI: Cummins et al., 2003). The PWI determines the average level of satisfaction across seven domains of personal life – standard of living, health, achieving in life, personal relationships, safety, community connectedness, and future security. The NWI determines the average satisfaction across six domains of national life – the economy, the natural environment, social conditions, government, business, and national security.

Forty cross-sectional surveys of the Australian adult population have been conducted between April 2001 and June 2023. The same core questions, forming the PWI and the NWI, have been asked in each survey. In addition, two items are consistently asked about 'Satisfaction with Life as a Whole' (Global Life Satisfaction: GLS) and 'Satisfaction with Life in Australia' (Global National Wellbeing: GNW).

Results from each of these scales are reported in a standardised form of 'percentage points' (pp) in which the results from the 0-10 response scales are converted into a 0-100 format. This pp format allows a simple comparison between different measures and across time.

1.1.1.1 PART 1: OVERVIEW OF SURVEY 40 SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING RESULTS

- Summary data on SWB (i.e., PWI and NWI) across 38¹ national surveys are presented to examine changes over time in the cross-sectional samples.
- The PWI results are then broken down by the following key socio-demographic factors: gender, age, household income, marital status, household composition, full time and part time occupation, state, and remoteness. These are presented in comparison to the past year, to examine differences.
- NWI results are reported for the same socio-demographic factors and for the last two years.

1.1.1.2 PART 2: ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

Each survey also includes 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 questions allow further exploration and understanding of theoretical frameworks supporting the wellbeing construct. In 2023, our survey included additional items about mental distress, loneliness, satisfaction with time for oneself, and carer wellbeing, to enable answering of the research questions presented in Table 1-1.

¹ Issues with data fidelity from surveys 1 and 2 and unavailability of their raw data for validity checks resulted in their exclusion from presentation in this report.

Table 1-1 Part 2 research questions

Topic 1: Generational and income inequities in the Golden Triangle of Happiness domains

RQ1: How do the Golden Triangle domains differ across age groups in 2023?

RQ2: How do the Golden Triangle domains differ across income groups in 2023?

Topic 2: A deeper dive into satisfaction with the national economic situation

RQ3: Did satisfaction with the economic situation in Australia differ across age and income groups in 2023?

Topic 3: Mental distress and the Personal Wellbeing Index

RQ4: Did mental distress differ in 2023 compared to the pandemic years (2020-22)?

RQ5: Did mental distress differ across age and income groups in 2023?

RQ6: Was mental distress related to the Personal Wellbeing Index in 2023?

Topic 4: Loneliness and the Personal Wellbeing Index

RQ7: Did loneliness differ across age and income groups in 2023?

RQ8: Was loneliness related to the Personal Wellbeing Index in 2023?

Topic 5: Satisfaction with time for oneself and the Personal Wellbeing Index

RQ9: Did satisfaction with time for oneself change across age and income groups in 2023?

RQ10: Was satisfaction with time for oneself related to the Personal Wellbeing Index in 2023?

Topic 6: Carers wellbeing in 2023

RQ11: How does personal wellbeing differ in carers versus non-carers?

RQ12: How does mental distress differ in carers versus non-carers?

RQ13: How does loneliness differ in carers versus non-carers?

RQ14: How does satisfaction with time for oneself differ in carers versus non-carers?

RQ15: How does satisfaction with access to supports differ in informal versus professional carers?

RQ16: How does personal wellbeing differ in informal carers by weekly caring load?

RQ17: How does mental distress differ in informal carers by weekly caring load?

RQ18: How does loneliness differ in informal carers by weekly caring load?

RQ19: How does satisfaction with time for oneself differ in informal carers by weekly caring load?

2 METHODS

2.1 Participants

Data for the 40th Australian Unity Wellbeing Index Survey were from a geographically representative national sample, based on population distribution. The sample comprised 2,011 English-speaking Australians aged 18 or over, who accepted an invitation to respond to the survey. Data collection was carried out by [Ipsos](#), a social research data collection agency. Most participants were contacted via randomly generated mobile numbers (71%), obtained by attaching randomly generated digits to valid mobile prefixes. To achieve a geographically representative and gender balanced sample, remaining participants (29%) were contacted via targeted mobile lists. Participant matching within states and territories also took place at the area level (e.g., metro vs other) according to the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics population distributions. Surveys took place between 7 June and 27 June 2023, until a sample of over 2000 participants had been recruited. A comparison of targeted and actual geographic representation within the sample is presented in Table 2-1.

Table 2-1 Geographic representation of sample across Australia split by Target and Actual distribution

| Target | | | | | Actual | | | | |
|-----------|------|--------|-------|-------|--------|--------|-------|-------|-------|
| Location | Male | Female | TOTAL | Dist% | Male | Female | Other | TOTAL | Dist% |
| Sydney | 206 | 206 | 412 | 21% | 199 | 201 | 6 | 406 | 20% |
| Other NSW | 114 | 114 | 228 | 11% | 108 | 104 | 2 | 214 | 11% |
| Melbourne | 193 | 193 | 386 | 19% | 188 | 184 | 6 | 378 | 19% |
| Other VIC | 63 | 63 | 126 | 6% | 63 | 73 | 2 | 138 | 7% |
| Brisbane | 96 | 96 | 192 | 10% | 93 | 93 | 4 | 190 | 9% |
| Other QLD | 103 | 103 | 206 | 10% | 103 | 95 | 1 | 199 | 10% |
| Adelaide | 56 | 56 | 112 | 6% | 49 | 52 | 3 | 104 | 5% |
| Other SA | 16 | 16 | 32 | 2% | 18 | 21 | 0 | 39 | 2% |
| Perth | 83 | 83 | 166 | 8% | 79 | 80 | 4 | 163 | 8% |
| Other WA | 22 | 22 | 44 | 2% | 26 | 33 | 0 | 59 | 3% |
| Hobart | 10 | 10 | 20 | 1% | 11 | 6 | 0 | 17 | 1% |
| Other TAS | 12 | 12 | 24 | 1% | 13 | 9 | 1 | 23 | 1% |
| ACT | 17 | 17 | 34 | 2% | 23 | 16 | 0 | 39 | 2% |
| NT | 9 | 9 | 18 | 1% | 6 | 10 | 1 | 17 | 1% |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------|------|------|------|----|-----|-----|----|------|----|
| <i>Not known</i> | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0% | 11 | 11 | 3 | 25 | 1% |
| TOTAL | 1000 | 1000 | 2000 | | 990 | 988 | 33 | 2011 | |

2.2 Data preparation

Average levels of satisfaction with the PWI and the NWI were calculated as described in the Personal Wellbeing Index Manual (International Wellbeing Group, 2013). Data cleaning revealed that 45 participants answered consistently 0 or 100 across all domains of the PWI or the NWI. Their responses were removed from the sample prior to statistical analysis. Such responses are likely due to misunderstanding or false reporting. Additionally, PWI and NWI scores are calculated only for those participants who responded to all domains. The proportion of participants excluded from the main analyses due to missing domain responses was 3.3% ($N=64$) for the PWI and 10.3% ($N=203$) for the NWI.

2.3 Measures

Demographic items asked in this and past surveys were: gender, age, marital status, household composition, number of children under 18 per household, occupation (full time, part time and seeking work), and household income. Geographic region and the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD) were calculated based on the postcodes. A new demographic item included in this survey was Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status. Each of these measures are described in more detail below.

In addition, we also trialled a new open-response method for recording household income. Participants were randomly asked for their household income in one of three ways: 1) via open-response, 2) via income categories (as in previous years), or 3) via open response with an option to choose a category if they declined to provide a numerical value. Response rates on these questions were examined half-way through data collection and a decision was made to ask remaining participants (53% of total sample) for income using option 3. Response rates and wording of the three questions are presented in Appendix Section 1.1.

The reason for this change was two-fold. Firstly, we have been collecting broad income categories since the study's inception over 20 years ago. However, comparing a particular income category (e.g., $\leq \$30,000$) over two decades without adjusting for inflation is misleading. Our survey data offer rich insights into how household income impacts on Australia's subjective wellbeing over time. However, to make meaningful comparisons between groups across this entire period, we need to adjust income for inflation, so it is comparable over a large time period.

Secondly, our income categories are not directly comparable with the ABS categories that are used in other studies, such as HILDA. By collecting numeric household income data, we will be able to index future data, create our usual categories for comparison with our recent surveys and also categorise our income data according to the ABS categories if and when comparing to other studies.

2.3.1 Standard survey questions

2.3.1.1 Personal and National Wellbeing Indices

Subjective Wellbeing was measured using the Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI; International Wellbeing Group, 2013). The PWI score represents the mean of the seven domains of

satisfaction with: standard of living, health, achieving in life, personal relationships, safety, community connectedness, and future security.

Similarly, the NWI score represents the mean of the six national domains of satisfaction with: economic situation, state of natural environment, state of social conditions, government, business, and national security.

The responses for both PWI and NWI are recorded on a unipolar, numerical scale, ranging from 0 (no satisfaction at all) to 10 (completely satisfied).

2.3.1.2 Gender

Participants were asked *"How would you describe your gender?"*. Respondents were given a choice of three categories: 1) Male; 2) Female; 3) In some other way. For the purpose of this report, researchers coded the last category as 'non-binary/gender diverse'.

2.3.1.3 Indigenous status

Participants were asked *"Are you of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin?"* with two response options (yes or no). The purpose of this question is to track the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our sample and consider an appropriate subjective wellbeing measure in this priority population in the future.

2.3.1.4 Age

Participants were asked *"Can you tell me your age?"* as an open-ended question and, as with previous surveys, responses were grouped into six categories (18-25, 26-35, 46-55, 56-65, 66-75, and 76+ years of age).

2.3.1.5 Marital status

Participants were asked: *"Which of the following categories best describes your relationship status?"*, with six response options (never married, de facto/living together, married, separated, divorced, or widowed).

2.3.1.6 Household composition

Participants were asked to indicate who lives with them in their household and were given a list of five response options (you live by yourself, you live with your partner, with one or more children, with one or both of your parents, or with one or more adults who are neither your partner nor parent). Participants could select multiple options for all except the first. For the purpose of this report, household composition has been structured into five categories: alone, with partner only, with partner and children, with children only, with parents only, and with others only.

2.3.1.7 Number of children

Participants were asked *"How many children under 18 years old living in your house are you currently caring for?"* and were given an open-ended response option.

2.3.1.8 Occupation

Occupation was measured using three questions, assessing full time and part time occupations independently, as well as a separate question about work seeking behaviour.

Full time occupations were assessed by asking: *“Please tell me which of the following full time occupational categories best applies to you at the present time. Are you engaged in—?”*. The response options were: full time paid employment, full time retirement, full time volunteer, full time home or family duties, full time study, or none of these.

Part time occupations were assessed by asking: *“Please tell me whether any of the following part time occupational categories applies to you”*. The response options were: semi-retirement, part time paid employment, casual employment, part time volunteer, part time study, unemployed or none of these. For the purpose of this report, only those who responded to a single part time occupation option have been categorised.

Finally, all participants were asked: *“Are you currently looking for paid work?”* and were given the response options of yes, no or declined to answer.

2.3.1.9 Household income

For the first time in the AUWI, household income was examined using two questions by first asking as an open-ended response question: *“Thinking now about your household’s total income over the past year. That is, your household’s total income before tax. What would you say was your approximate total household income last year?”*. Participants that did not provide an answer were asked a follow-up question presenting them with a range of income categories to choose from: <\$15,000, \$15,000-\$30,000, \$31,000-\$60,000, \$61,000-\$100,000, \$100,000-\$150,000, \$151,000-\$250,000, \$251,000-\$500,000, >\$500,000. A small number of participants (16%) were asked the categorical income question only (in line with previous surveys) to enable comparison in responses (see Appendix Section 1.1).

Open text responses were then categorised into the above categories for the purpose of analyses. Given the small number of people in response options at either end of the scale, <\$15,000 was collapsed with the \$15,000-\$30,000 category, while >\$500,000 was collapsed with the \$251,000-\$500,000 category.

2.3.1.10 State

All participants were asked to provide a postcode, and the small number that declined were asked to provide their city. Based on these responses, participants were coded into a relevant State or Territory (NSW, VIC, QLD, WA, SA, TAS, ACT, NT).

2.3.1.11 Remoteness

Participants’ geographic location was coded into a 5-category variable by merging the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) derived geographic region structure variable (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018) with the participants’ postcodes. Geographic regions assigned by the ABS are: 1) Major Cities, 2) Inner Regional, 3) Outer Regional, 4) Remote and 5) Very Remote.

2.3.1.12 Socio-economic indexes for areas (SEIFA)

The SEIFA score was calculated based on each participant's postcode using the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) data, collected as part of the 2021 Census of Population and Housing (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021). This is referred to the Index of Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD). The SEIFA-IRSAD has a national mean 1000 (SD 100); where higher scores represent less disadvantage.

2.3.1.13 Follow up for longitudinal study

At the end of each survey, participants were asked if they wanted to join a longitudinal follow-up online survey, which is also conducted annually. The question was worded: *"We are going to carry out another survey like this in about 12 months. But this time it will be by email. Would you be willing to help us again if we email a copy to you at that time?"* and participants were asked to respond either yes or no.

2.3.2 Additional survey items

2.3.2.1 Mental Distress

Participants were asked to respond to three questions about how they feel and rate them on a scale from zero (Not at all) to 10 (Extremely). The questions were: *"How anxious do you generally feel?"*, *"How stressed do you generally feel?"*, *"How depressed do you generally feel?"*.

2.3.2.2 Loneliness

Participants were asked to respond to a question *"How lonely do you generally feel?"* and rate it on a scale from zero (Not at all) to 10 (Extremely). This was asked in 2019 the same way and in 2020, with slightly different wording: *"How lonely do you feel?"*.

2.3.2.3 Satisfaction with time for oneself

Participants were asked to respond to a question *"How satisfied do you generally feel with the amount of time you have for yourself?"* and rate it on a scale from zero (Not at all) to 10 (Extremely).

2.3.2.4 Informal carer status

All participants were asked to respond either yes or no to the question: *"Do you currently provide any unpaid care for another person due to their ongoing illness, disability or old age?"*. Interviewers were advised that receiving government assistance (e.g., carers allowance) for a caring role does not exclude respondents from providing unpaid care.

2.3.2.4.1 Informal carer characteristics

Participants who responded 'yes' to providing unpaid care were asked a series of questions about their informal caring role. Firstly, participants were asked: *"Please tell me to whom you provide unpaid care"* and could select multiple of the following response options: your child or

grandchild, your partner or spouse, your sibling, your parent or parent-in-law, your grandparent, or other.

Next, participants were asked to respond yes or no to the question: *“Have you been providing unpaid care for more than 1 year?”*. They were then given an open text question based on their response: *“How many years?”* (if they answered yes) or *“How many months?”* (if they answered no).

Lastly, participants were asked an open text question: *“On average, how many hours each week do you currently provide unpaid care?”*.

2.3.2.5 Professional carer status

All participants – informal carers and the rest of the sample – were asked to respond either ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to the question: *“As part of any paid work you do, do you [also] currently provide care to people due to their ongoing illness, disability or old age?”*.

2.3.2.5.1 Professional carer characteristics

Participants who responded ‘yes’ to providing paid care were asked a series of questions about their professional caring role. Firstly, participants were asked an open text question: *“What is your occupation as a professional carer?”*.

Next, participants were asked to respond yes or no to the question: *“Have you been providing paid care for more than 1 year?”*. They were then given an open text question based on their response: *“How many years?”* (if they answered yes) or *“How many months?”* (if they answered no).

Lastly, participants were asked an open text question: *“On average, how many hours each week do you currently provide paid care?”*.

2.3.2.6 Carer satisfaction with access to supports

Participants who responded ‘yes’ to providing unpaid care and/or ‘yes’ to providing paid care were asked three questions about their satisfaction with access to carer supports. Participants were asked *“When thinking of your caring role or roles, on a scale from zero to 10, where zero means ‘Not satisfied at all’ and 10 means ‘Completely satisfied’, how satisfied do you feel with your...”*. The three supports that participants were asked about were *“...access to carer training and skills courses”*, *“...access to psychological support for carers”*, and *“...ability to connect to other carers to share experiences and advice”*.

2.4 Standardisation and presentation of results

2.4.1 Percentage point and standardised differences

All results from measurement scales have been converted to a percentage of scale maximum (%SM) score, which standardises any scale to a 0-100 percentage points. Thus, throughout the

report wellbeing levels will be referred to in terms of percentage points (pp). Raw mean scores for all measures are presented in Appendix Tables 1-2 and 1-3.

In Part 1 and 2 of the Results, in addition to pp differences between demographics groups, we also report standardised percentage point (std pp) differences² for each measure in the Appendices. In the main report, we flag notable differences of 0.30 Standard Deviations (SD) pp or greater by a star (*). This threshold is often used at the population level for meaningful differences.³ For the PWI and NWI, this difference is about 4 raw pp, which will be indicated in the charts below as “Difference >4pp”. For other measures, this difference varies from 5 to 9 raw pp. The thresholds for notable differences used for between group comparisons are presented in Appendix Table 1-4.

2.4.2 Normative ranges

Normative ranges indicate the range within which a score is considered normative for the population under study. These ranges have been calculated for the GLS, GNW, PWI and NWI measures, as well as the PWI and NWI domains. The upper and lower bounds of the normative range were determined respectively as 2 standard deviations above and below the mean aggregated from the means of individual cross-sectional surveys since 2002. Surveys 1 and 2 from 2001, were excluded due to a lack of confidence in data across these two surveys. These normative ranges are updated each year and are published in the Appendix accompanying each report (see Appendix Section 1.4). In this report, normative ranges are depicted by the yellow areas on figures. This area shows that 95% of average scores fall within the normative range over time.

2.5 Data Analyses

Analyses were conducted using Stata SE version 18.0 (StataCorp, 2023), R (R Core Team, 2023), R studio (Posit team, 2023) and Datawrapper (Datawrapper GmbH, 2023). Subgroups that made up less than 2% of the analytic sample were excluded from subgroup analyses as they were deemed too small for meaningful comparisons. The exception to this rule was income, where the two lowest and highest income categories that were <2% of the sample were merged with other categories instead of excluded.

2.5.1 Part 1 analyses

First, we examine the 2023 Survey response rates and sample characteristics in relation to population norms from the ABS. This allows us to consider the generalisability of the results to the Australian population.

Second, we present average scores for the PWI, NWI and their respective domains in 2023, relative to their respective normative ranges and over time. This is done visually, with each graph showing the latest 2023 average score (blue triangle), as well as the highest (green circle) and lowest average scores (red circle), over time.

² Standardised scores were calculated by converting PWI scores to have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. Differences in standardised scores have consistent interpretation across disciplines, with ≥ 0.20 , ≥ 0.50 and ≥ 0.80 standard deviations (SD) interpreted as small, medium and large differences respectively Cohen, J. (1992). A power primer. *Psychological bulletin*, 112(1), 155.

Third, we examine whether average PWI and NWI scores differed in 2023 compared to the previous year. Of particular interest was whether PWI or NWI scores varied within the following demographic categories: gender, age, marital status, household composition, gross household income, full time and part time occupation, and geographic location (state and remoteness).

Average PWI and NWI scores for 2023 were examined for each of these demographics in relation to:

- 1) the overall PWI or NWI normative range respectively;
- 2) differences between demographic groups; and,
- 3) differences within demographic groups compared to the previous years (i.e., 2022).

We flag notable differences of 4 pp (i.e., a meaningful change in average PWI and NWI scores) or greater.

2.5.2 Part 2 analyses

Part 2 examines the additional 2023 Survey questions. We focus on describing Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI) across six topic areas of interest. These include:

1. satisfaction with the three 'Golden Triangle' domains from the PWI (i.e. Standard of Living, Achieving in Life and Personal Relationships) (3 items),
2. satisfaction with the economic situation in Australia (1 item),
3. feelings of mental distress (i.e. anxiety, stress, and depression) (3 items),
4. feelings of loneliness (1 item),
5. satisfaction with time for oneself (1 item), and
6. carer status (i.e. informal, professional, both) (3 items)

We compare all continuous outcomes (i.e., the first five topics) across age and income groups. For feelings of mental distress, loneliness and satisfaction with time for oneself (i.e., topics 3-5), we also created dichotomous groups and compared the continuous PWI outcome across those to ease interpretation. The groups include people who scored in the top 25th percentile (i.e. "high") and the rest of the sample (i.e., "other"). Responses of zero (i.e., no feelings of anxiety/stress/depression/loneliness or satisfaction with time for oneself) were excluded from the comparison.

For the carer topic, we compare scores on continuous outcomes across four carer status groups: informal, professional, both and non-carer. The outcomes include PWI, mental distress, loneliness and time for oneself. In addition, we examine differences in the same outcomes for informal carers across three caring load groups (i.e. <20hours, 20-39 hours, 40+ hours). We also compare satisfaction with access to carer supports across informal and professional carers.

For each of the four topic areas, we present basic descriptive statistics for 2023, including Mean and SD for all continuous outcome measures and frequency and proportion for all categorical outcomes. For mental distress, we also present Means and SD for prior pandemic years (i.e. 2020-2022).

3 RESULTS

3.1 Part 1 - Summary of 2023 Survey results: response rates, sample characteristics and PWI scores by demographic factors

3.1.1 Response rates

After removal of a small number of cases (as described in section 2.2), a total of 1,966 (97.8%) participants were included in the 2023 Survey analytic sample. The response rate in 2023 was 22%, this represents the number of participants who agreed to take part in response to the invitational phone call. While the response rate increased from last year, it is notable that it has decreased substantially since 2021 where it was 30% (see Table 3-1). Declining response rate has been reported in other studies in Australia and globally (Rothbaum & Bee, 2022; Watson et al., 2022).

The 2023 average interview length was 11.1 minutes in length, which was slightly shorter (10-11%) than the previous two years.

Table 3-1 Recruitment and interview data

| | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|---|------|------|------|
| Agreed to take part in response to invitation call, % | 30 | 18 | 22 |
| Interview length, minutes | 12.4 | 12.5 | 11.1 |
| Agreed to be followed up longitudinally, % | 69.5 | 67.7 | 59.0 |

3.1.2 Sample characteristics

A summary of the sample characteristics for the 2023 Survey are presented in Table 3-2. The average age was 48 years (SD: 18; Range: 18 to 97 years), with a relatively even spread of males and females in the sample (females 49%). Participants were predominantly married (45%), or never married (24%). Households mainly comprised a partner (31%) or partner and children (26%), and most were from major cities (68%). Very few participants were unemployed (1.9%). Detailed frequencies and proportions are presented in Appendix Table 1-9 for 2022 and 2023 and the aggregated 2002-2021 sample, and where available, details on Australian population norms for each of the sample characteristics.

Table 3-2 Summary of sample characteristics for 2023

| Sample characteristics | Proportion (%) (N=1966) ^a |
|---|---|
| Gender | |
| Male | 49.4 |
| Female | 48.9 |
| Other | 1.7 |
| Indigenous Status | |
| Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander | 3.1 |
| Age Group | |
| 18 – 25 | 13.3 |
| 26 – 35 | 17.5 |
| 36 – 45 | 17.4 |
| 46 – 55 | 16.5 |
| 56 – 65 | 16.3 |
| 66 – 75 | 12.6 |
| 76+ | 6.5 |
| Household Income | |
| ≤\$30,000 | 13.6 |
| \$31,000 - \$60,000 | 16.8 |
| \$61,000 - \$100,000 | 20.0 |
| \$101,000 - \$150,000 | 18.5 |
| \$151,000 - \$250,000 | 21.1 |
| ≥\$251,000 | 9.9 |
| Marital status | |
| Married | 45.2 |
| De facto/living together | 13.4 |
| Never married | 23.9 |
| Separated | 4.1 |
| Divorced | 8.1 |
| Widowed | 5.3 |
| Household Composition | |
| Alone | 21.2 |
| Partner | 31.0 |
| Children | 6.3 |
| Partner and children | 25.7 |
| Parents | 8.3 |
| Others | 7.5 |
| Full time occupation^b | |
| Employed | 63.9 |
| Retired | 21.1 |
| Volunteer | 0.6 |
| Home duties | 5.5 |
| Study | 6.7 |
| Unemployed | 2.1 |
| Part time occupation^c | |
| Semi-retired | 5.2 |
| Employed | 33.3 |
| Casual work | 26.0 |
| Volunteer | 25.0 |

| Sample characteristics | Proportion (%) (N=1966) ^a |
|------------------------|---|
| Study | 10.5 |
| State | |
| TAS | 2.1 |
| VIC | 26.2 |
| NSW | 31.2 |
| ACT | 2.0 |
| QLD | 19.4 |
| NT | 0.8 |
| WA | 11.3 |
| SA | 7.1 |
| Remoteness | |
| Major cities | 71.0 |
| Inner regional | 18.7 |
| Outer regional | 8.7 |
| Remote or very remote | 1.7 |

^a N's varied slightly across sample characteristics in 2023 and are listed in Appendix Table 1-7. The most notable source of missing data was for the household income question (N=1609).

^b Proportions represent sub-sample of those with a full time occupation or in unemployment (n=1587)

^c Proportions represent sub-sample of those with a part time occupation (n=639)

3.1.2.1 Sample characteristics in 2023 vs. 2022 and the past 6 years

Sample characteristics in 2023 were similar to 2022 (see Appendix Table 1-9), with few notable differences. Primarily, there is a more balanced gender split achieved this year compared to last year, as a deliberate effort was made to target and include more female participants during the recruitment.

Furthermore, fewer young adults (18-25 years) participated this year (13.3%) compared to last year (15.4%) and compared to 2018 (16.9%) when the recruitment strategy changed from mostly landline to mobile phone, suggesting that there is a declining pattern in the participation of young people over the years.

In terms of household income, a notable increase is observed in the proportion of people living on household incomes of \$100,000 or less (50.4%) compared to last year (47.8%). Although this aligns with income distribution patterns observed over the last six years, it is important to highlight that household incomes have not kept up with inflation over the recent period. Thus, real wages have actually been cut if one considers cost of living pressures (Hannam, 2022).

In addition, this year more people are living alone (21.2%) compared to last year (17.7%), marking a steady increase over the past six years. This shift coincides with decreased cohabitation with other non-family members (7.5% vs 10.2%) and de facto couples (13.4% vs 14.3%), and an increase in people who are divorced (4.1% vs 3.2%), separated (8.1% vs 7.6%) or widowed (5.3% vs 3.8%) compared to last year.

Finally, this year we are seeing more people who are in full time (63.9% vs 62.9%) and part time or casual employment (59.3% vs 56.3%) compared to last year and fewer people in full time or part time studying (17.2% vs 21.2%). Increasing shifts from studying to employment may be indicative of the rising financial pressures that many Australians are facing amidst the rising costs of living and interest rates in the recent year.

3.1.2.2 Survey data compared to population norms

When we compared the 2023 sample to the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021 Census data, we found that our sample is relatively reflective of the Australian population at large, with few notable differences (see Appendix Table 1-9). Compared to population norms, our sample contained fewer females (48.9% vs. 51.2%), elderly people (i.e., 76+ years: 6.5% vs 8.7%) and people who lived in less disadvantaged neighbourhoods (i.e. SEIFA M=1011, SD=77 vs. M=1000, SD 100 respectively). In addition, our sample had more people in a de facto relationship (13.3% vs. 8.4%) and fewer who were married (45.2% vs. 48.5%); more people who lived alone (21.2% vs 12.6%), and fewer who lived with their parents (8% vs. 14%); We were unable to compare household income groups and the full time or part time occupation status to population norms due to measurement differences.

3.1.3 Personal and national wellbeing over time

This section shows the mean scores for subjective wellbeing (SWB) over time: Global Life Satisfaction (GLS), the Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI) and each of its domains. Similarly, it shows the mean scores for the measures of national wellbeing (NWB) over time: Global National Wellbeing (GNW), the National Wellbeing Index (NWI) and each of its domains. Questions asked:

Thinking about your own life and personal circumstances...

1. *How satisfied are you with your life as a whole? (Global Life Satisfaction)*
2. *How satisfied are you with life in Australia? (Global National Wellbeing)*
3. *How satisfied are you with... [each Personal and National Wellbeing domain]?*

Figures 3-1 to 3-19 show the patterns over time for each SWB measure. Normative ranges on each graph are represented by a yellow band. In previous years these graphs have presented all survey data points, with some years containing multiple survey points (e.g., May 2004, Aug 2004, May 2005), whereas the following graphs present average mean scores by year (e.g., 2004, 2005). As such, minimum and maximum scores may differ slightly from previous reports.

3.1.3.1 Personal Wellbeing

For GLS, PWI and PWI domains, graphs are presented on a scale of 65 to 90 pp.

3.1.3.1.1 GLS over time

Average GLS scores remained below their normative range in 2023, and were almost identical to 2022, the lowest recorded score in 22 years (see Figure 3-1). The GLS scores have been at the lower end of the normative range since 2017.

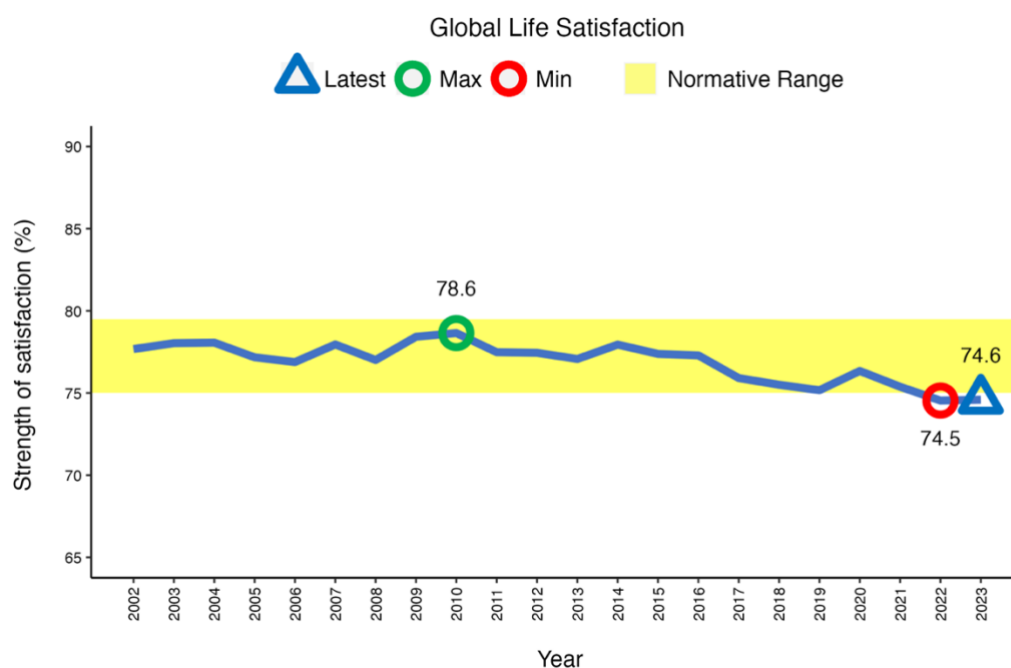


Figure 3-1 Global Life Satisfaction (GLS) over time

3.1.3.1.2 PWI over time

After dropping to the bottom of the normative range in 2022, average PWI scores rose slightly in 2023 towards the middle of the normative range (see Figure 3-2).

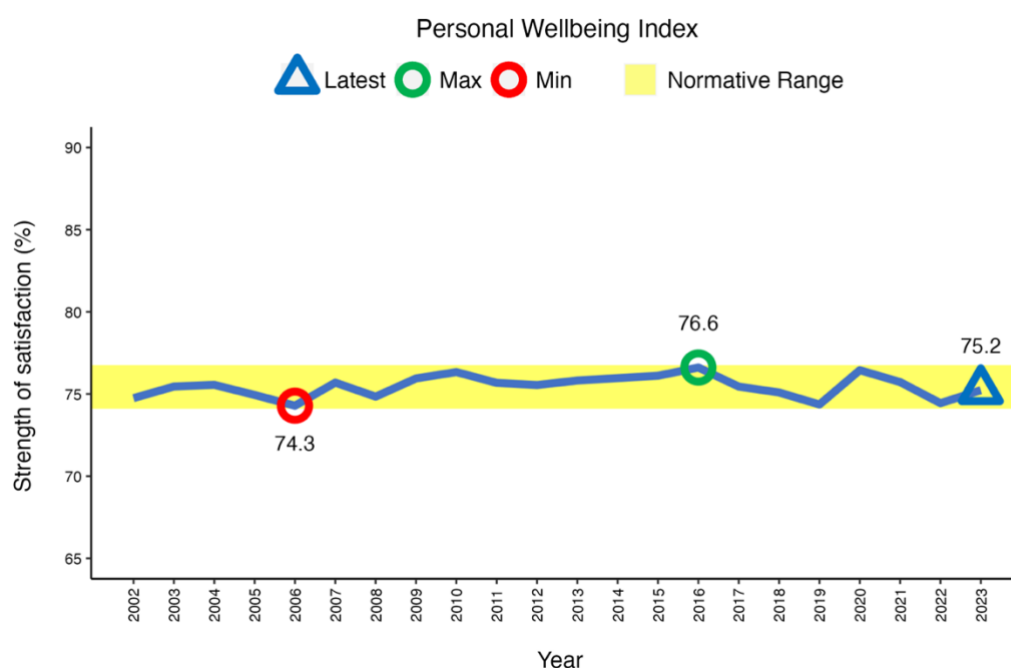


Figure 3-2 Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI) over time

3.1.3.1.2.1 Standard of Living over time

Average satisfaction with standard of living was within the normative range in 2023 and similar to the 2022 level (see Figure 3-3). Average satisfaction with standard of living peaked in 2020, and has now returned to pre-pandemic levels.

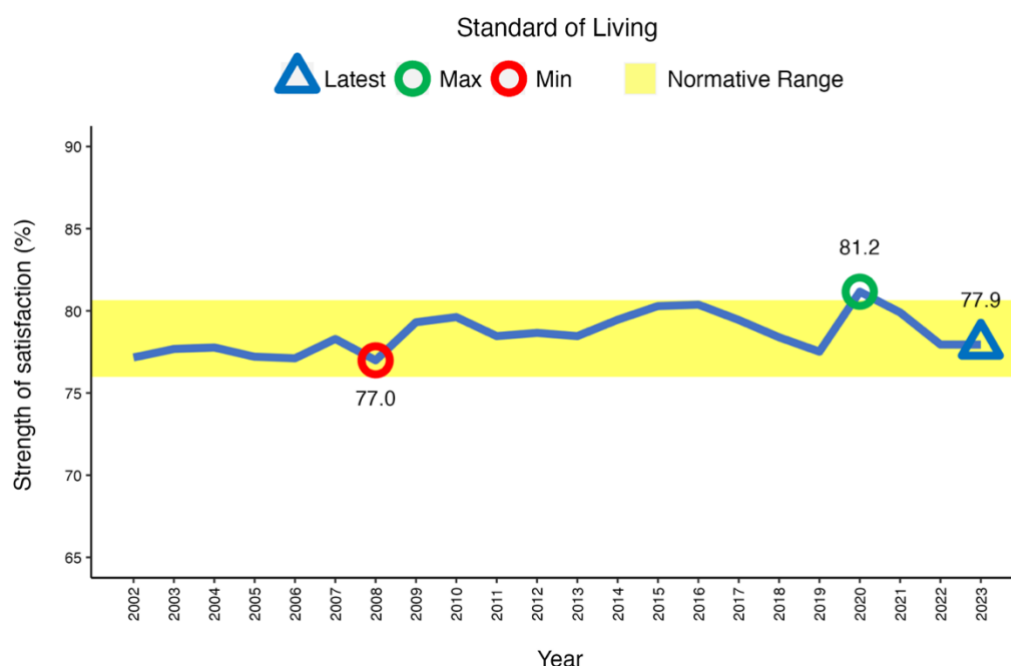


Figure 3-3 Satisfaction with Standard of Living over time

3.1.3.1.2.2 Health over time

Average satisfaction with health remained low in 2023, but it returned to the bottom of the normative range after falling to its lowest score on record in 2022 (see Figure 3-4).

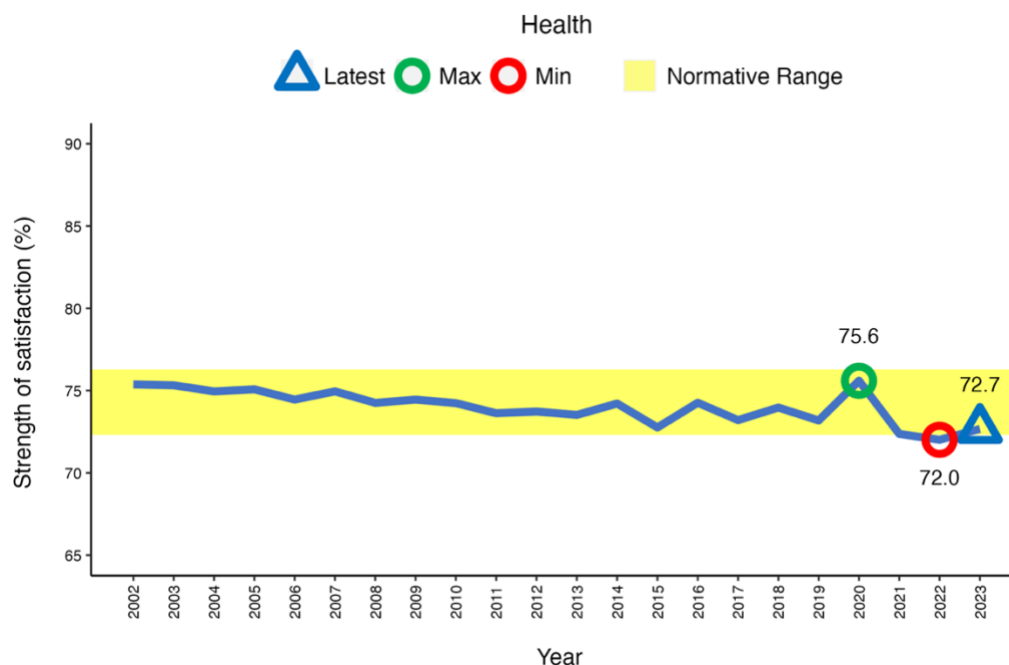


Figure 3-4 Satisfaction with Health over time

3.1.3.1.2.3 Achieving in Life over time

Average satisfaction with achieving in life rose slightly in 2023 from its lowest score on record in 2022, remaining in the lower end of the normative range – where it has been since 2017 (see Figure 3-5).

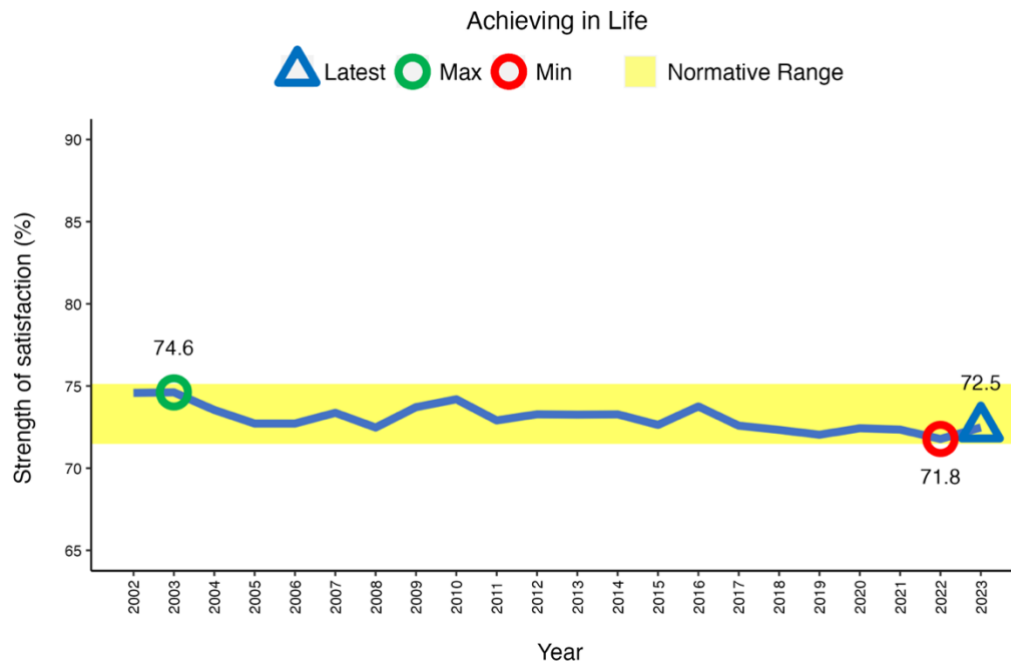


Figure 3-5 Satisfaction with Achieving in Life over time

3.1.3.1.2.4 Personal Relationships over time

Average satisfaction with personal relationships remained in the lower end of the normative range in 2023, rising slightly from 2022 levels (see Figure 3-6).

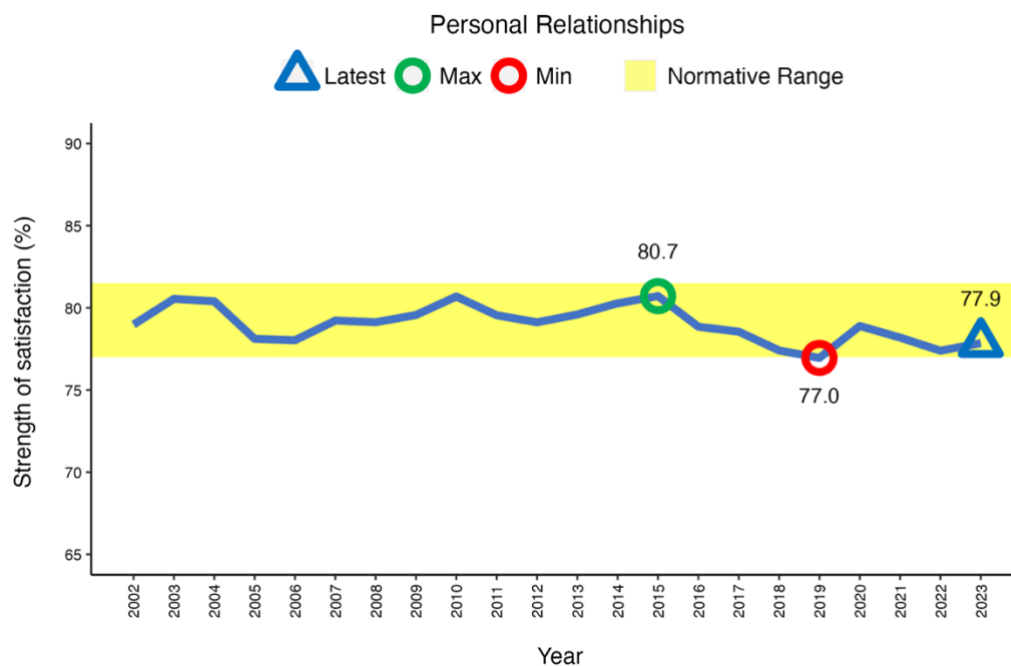


Figure 3-6 Satisfaction with Personal Relationships over time

3.1.3.1.2.5 Personal Safety over time

Average satisfaction with personal safety remained above the normative range in 2023 where it has been for the last four years, following a rising pattern seen over the past 22 years (see Figure 3-7).

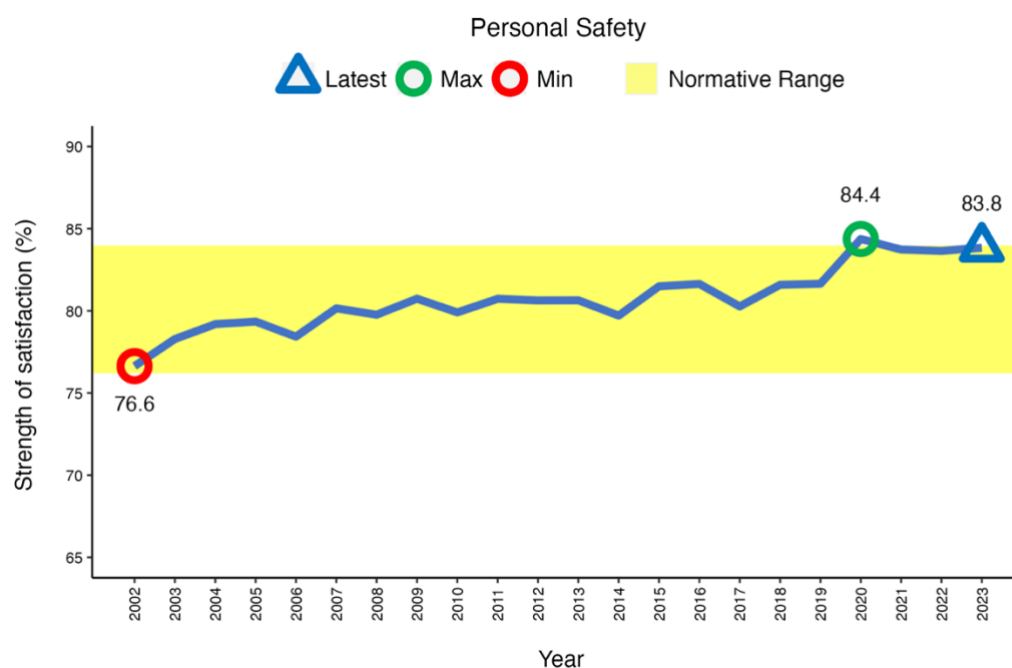


Figure 3-7 Satisfaction with Personal Safety over time

3.1.3.1.2.6 Community Connectedness over time

Average satisfaction with community connectedness returned to the middle of the normative range in 2023 (where it was in 2021), after dropping to its lowest point ever in 2022 (see Figure 3-8).

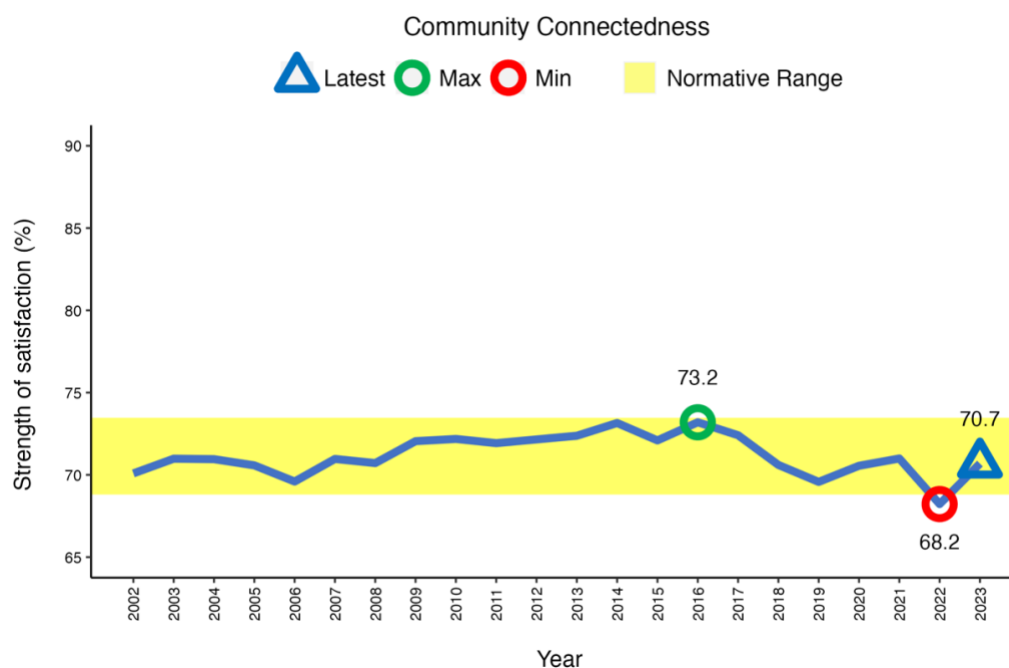


Figure 3-8 Satisfaction with Community Connectedness over time

3.1.3.1.2.7 Future Security over time

Average satisfaction with future security was in the middle of the normative range in 2023 and rose slightly from 2022 (see Figure 3-9).

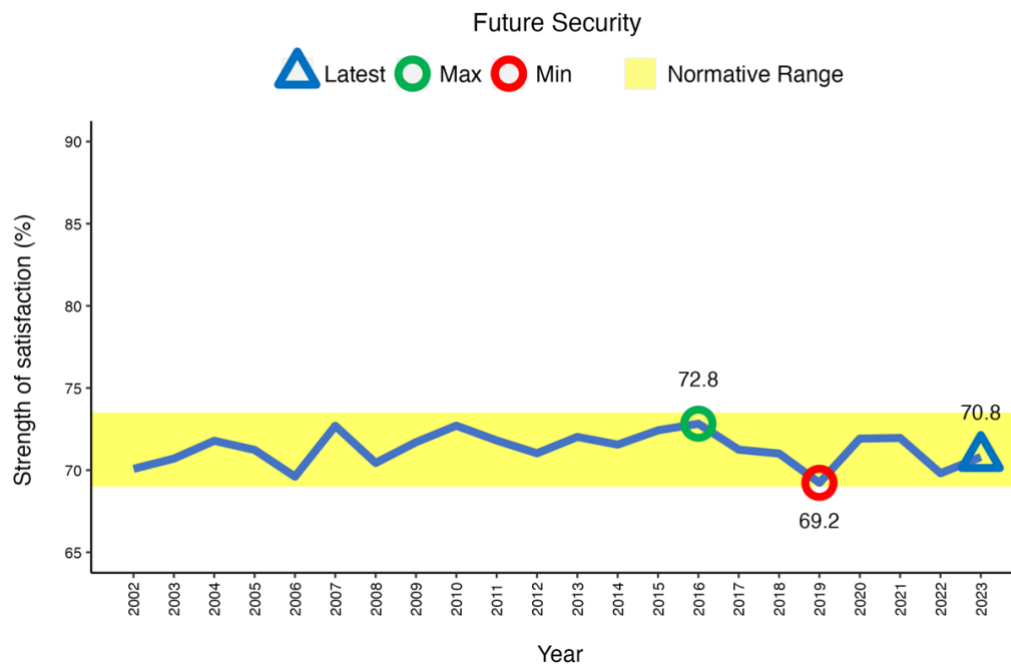


Figure 3-9 Satisfaction with Future Security over time

3.1.3.1.3 Patterns of the PWI over time

In 2023, we saw small increases in almost all domains, with the exception of two. There was no change in Standard of Living compared to last year, while Community Connectedness saw a more substantial increase compared to 2023. Looking at the domains over the 22 years, we see a notable lift across all domains during the first year of the pandemic in 2020, followed by more variability across domains in recent years (see Figure 3-19).

Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI) over time

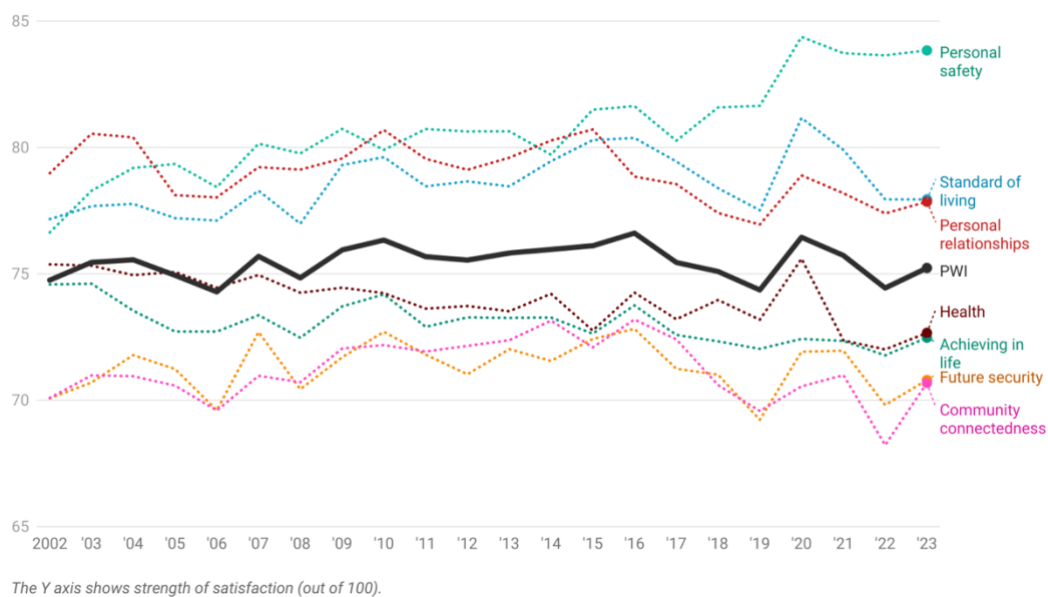


Figure 3-10 All domains of the PWI over time

3.1.3.2 National Wellbeing

National wellbeing (NWB) shows greater variability compared to personal wellbeing, which can be seen from the wider normative ranges. Overall satisfaction with life in Australia (Global National Wellbeing) has been presented on a 70-90 scale. For consistency, we have used the narrowest possible scale (40-80) for the NWI and its domains.

3.1.3.2.1 GNW over time

Average GNW scores remained below the normative range in 2023 and were almost identical to average 2022 scores, which were the lowest on record (see Figure 3-11).

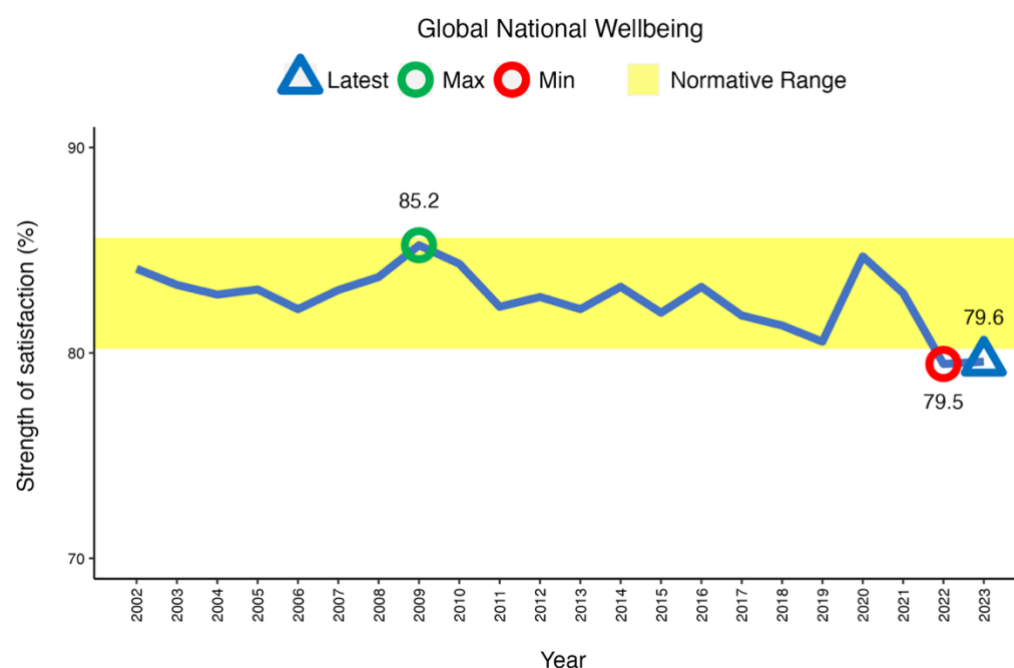


Figure 3-11 Global National Wellbeing (GNW) over time

3.1.3.2.2 NWI over time

The average NWI score was in the lower end of the normative range in 2023 and similar to the lowest recorded level in 2017 (see Figure 3-12). This represents a continued fall since the highest score recorded in 2020.

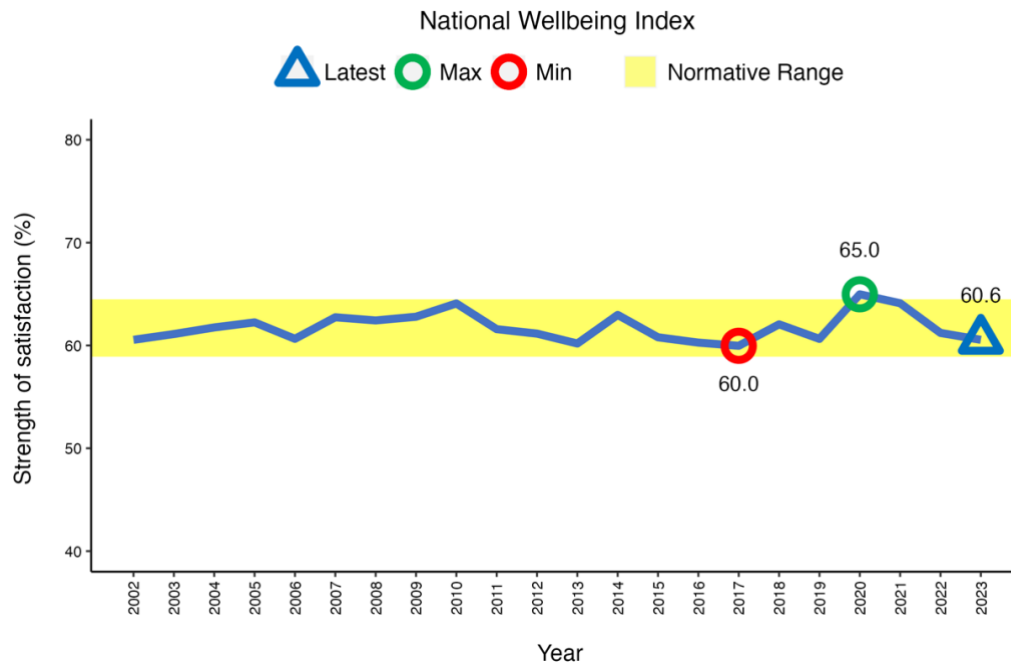


Figure 3-12 National Wellbeing Index (NWI) over time

3.1.3.2.2.1 Economic Situation over time

Average satisfaction with the economic situation in Australia dropped below the normative range in 2023, reaching its lowest score on record (see Figure 3-13). The sharp decline on this domain since 2021 resembles the one following the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) in 2008.

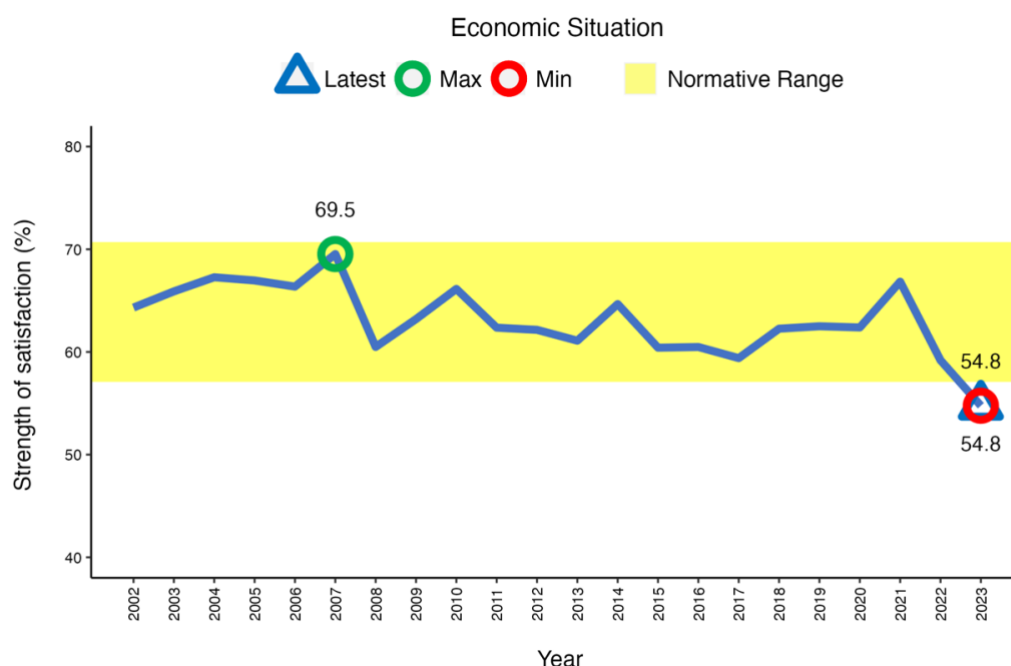


Figure 3-13 Satisfaction with the Economic Situation in Australia over time

3.1.3.2.2.2 State of the Natural Environment over time

Average satisfaction with the state of natural environment in Australia was within the upper-middle normative range in 2023, with levels similar to recent years (see Figure 3-14).

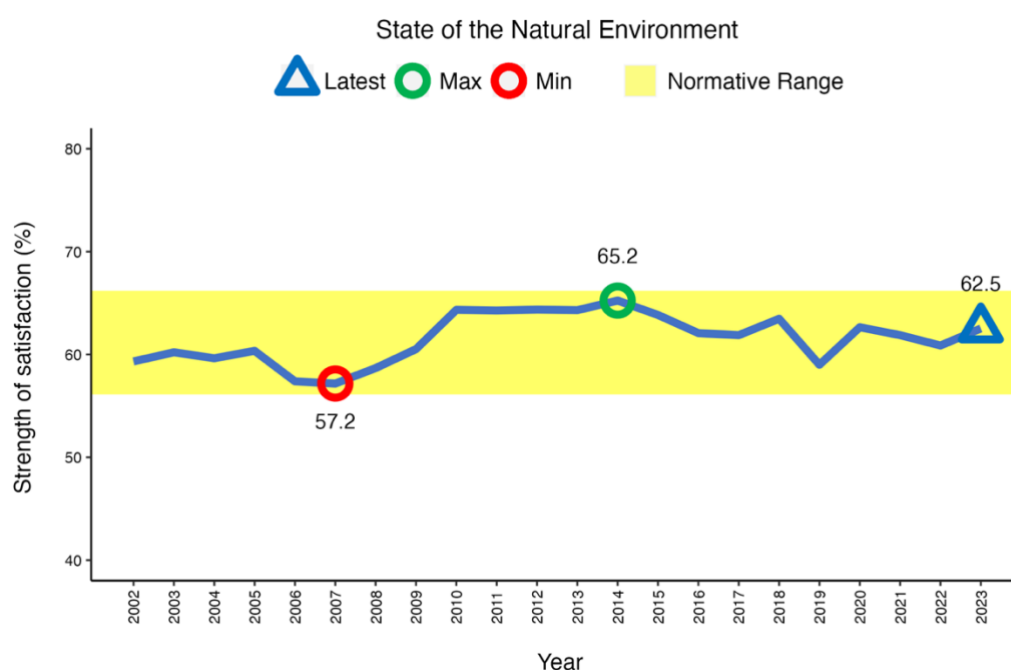


Figure 3-14 Satisfaction with the State of the Natural Environment in Australia over time

3.1.3.2.2.3 Social Conditions over time

Average satisfaction with the social conditions in Australia was in the lower-middle of the normative range in 2023, similar to 2022 and pre-pandemic years (see Figure 3-15).

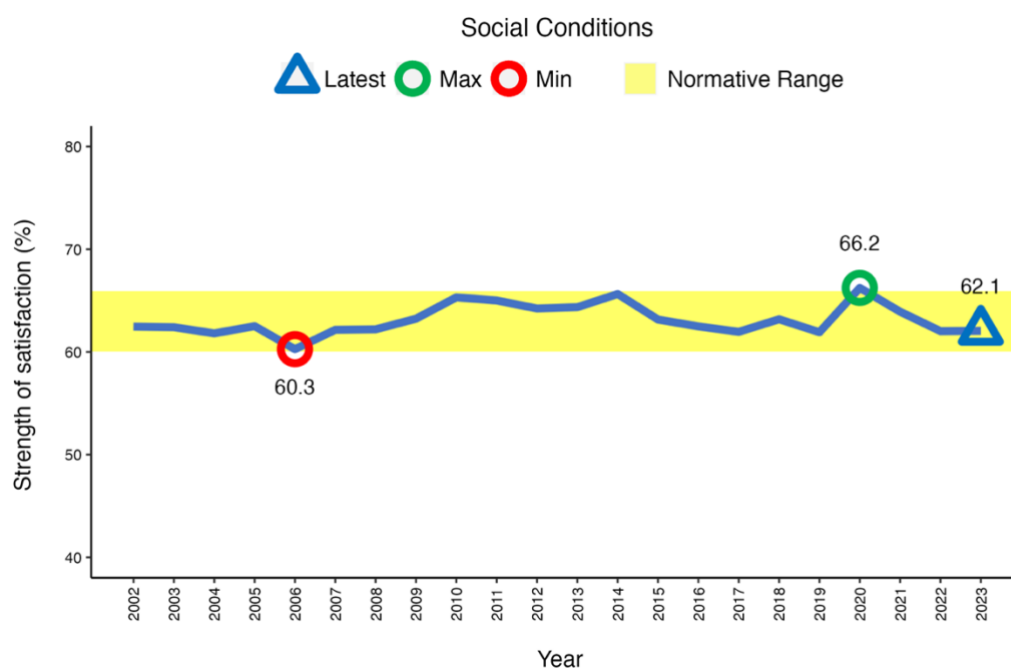


Figure 3-15 Satisfaction with the Social Conditions in Australia over time

3.1.3.2.2.4 Government over time

Average satisfaction with the government in Australia was in the upper-middle of the normative range in 2023, which was lower than the highest score on record in 2020, but still higher than pre-pandemic times (see Figure 3-16).

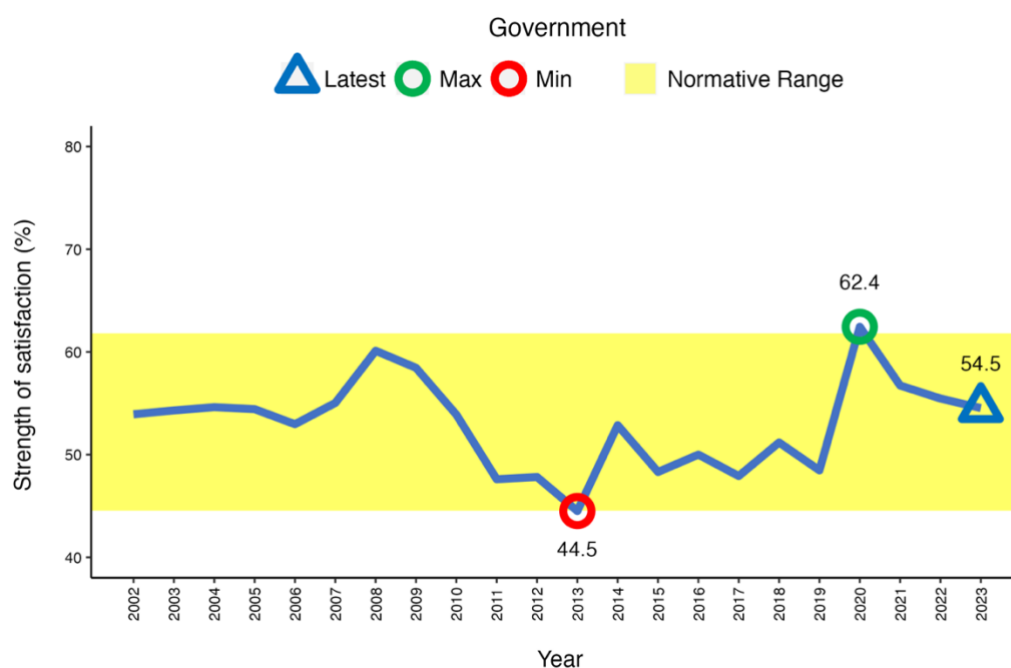


Figure 3-16 Satisfaction with Government in Australia over time

3.1.3.2.2.5 Business over time

Average satisfaction with business in Australia was in the middle of the normative range in 2023 and similar to 2022 levels (see Figure 3-17). This continues a small dip from the higher levels seen in 2020 and 2021.

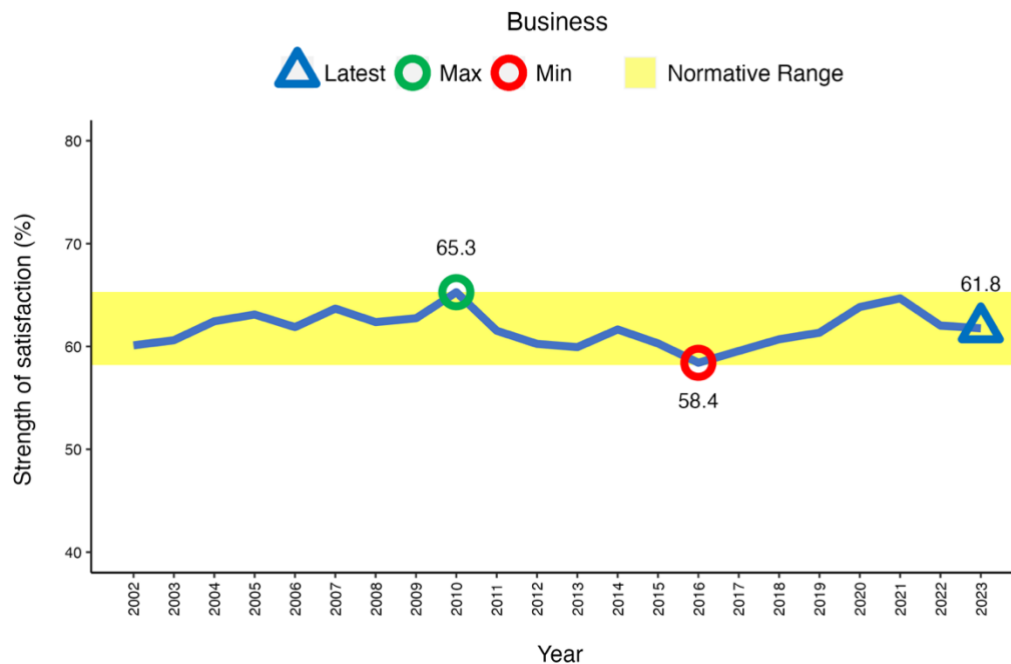


Figure 3-17 Satisfaction with Business in Australia over time

3.1.3.2.2.6 National Security over time

Average satisfaction with national security in Australia was in the middle of the normative range in 2023, rising slightly from the previous year but somewhat lower than in 2020 (see Figure 3-18).

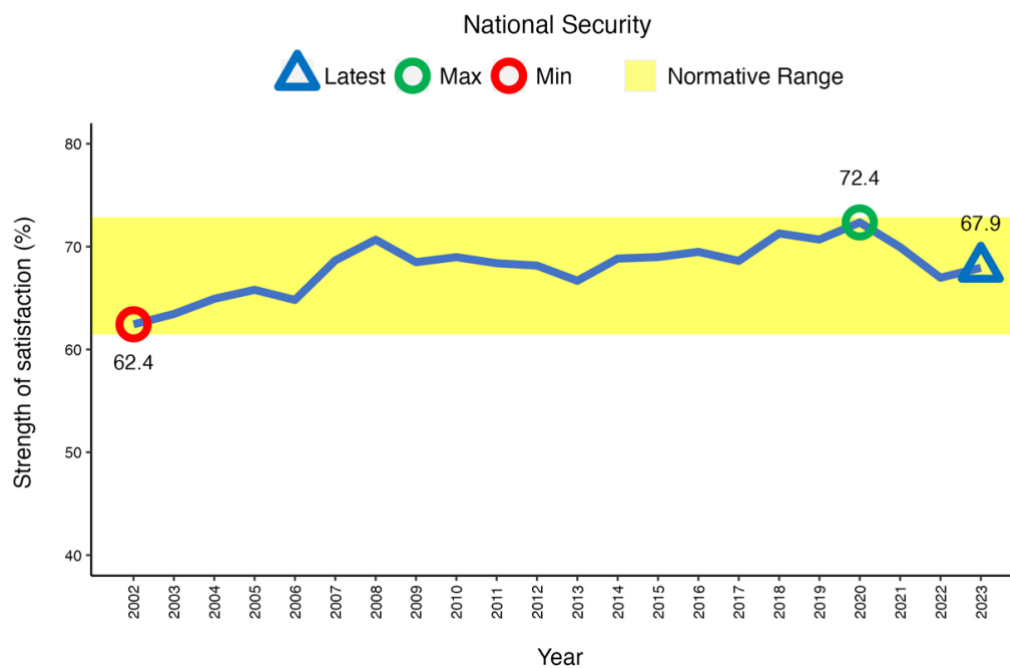


Figure 3-18 Satisfaction with National Security in Australia over time

3.1.3.2.3 Patterns of the NWI over time

In 2023, scores on the NWI were similar to 2022 for most domains except for Satisfaction with the Economic Situation which, since 2021, has plummeted to record lows – well below its scores during other key economic events like the GFC.

The domains within the NWI are more variable than the PWI domains overtime (see Figure 3-19), as they measure national wellbeing and are thus more susceptible to external factors. This is unlike the PWI which is regulated internally by an individual's mood (Lycett et al., 2022). This impact of external factors is particularly apparent for the satisfaction with Government domain, which experiences large fluctuations.

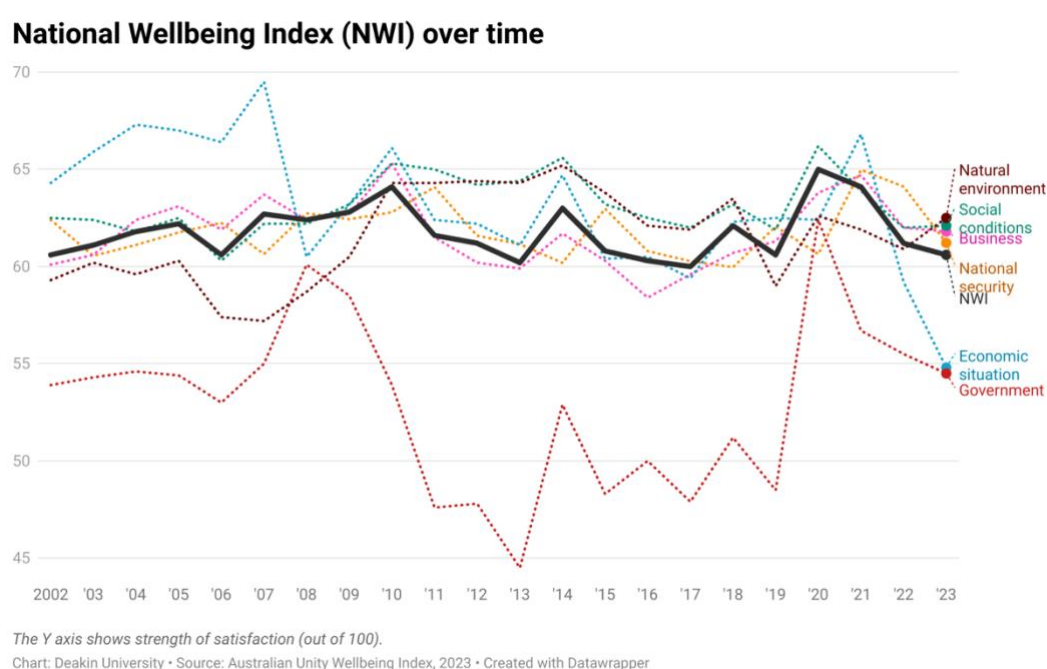


Figure 3-19 All domains of the NWI over time

3.1.4 Average PWI scores by demographic groups in 2023

This section shows average PWI scores by demographic groups in 2023 and compared to the previous year (2022). Descriptive statistics for this section are presented in Appendix Section 1.7.

For consistency, all the PWI scores are presented on a scale from 50 to 90 percentage points (pp). The population normative range for PWI lies within 74.1 – 76.8pp and is shown by the yellow bar on the figures below. The normative ranges for PWI for each demographic sub-group are presented in Appendix Table 1-7. We only present graphs if there is a meaningful difference of ≥ 4 pp between demographic groups. All other graphs are presented in Appendix Section 1.7. For any demographic groups that have experienced their lowest or highest score on record, we also present a graph of their PWI scores over time.

We note that the validity of the core subjective wellbeing measures in our survey (i.e. PWI and NWI) has not been tested in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people whose wellbeing may

also be shaped by connection to ‘country’, culture and ancestry, among other things (Gee et al., 2014). Thus, we have not examined wellbeing differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in this sample.

3.1.4.1 PWI and age

Participants were fairly evenly distributed across age groups (between 13-18%), with the exception of those aged over 76 years, who comprised less than 7% of the sample (see Table 3-2).

In 2023, people between 18-55 years old had average PWI scores below or at the bottom of the normative range, while those aged 66+ had scores above the normative range (see Figure 3-20). Across age groups, adults aged 76 years and older had notably higher PWI scores compared to those aged 18-55 years. That is, average PWI scores were at least 4pp lower for those in the 18-25, 26-35, 36-45- and 46-55-year-old age groups, compared to those aged 76+ years.

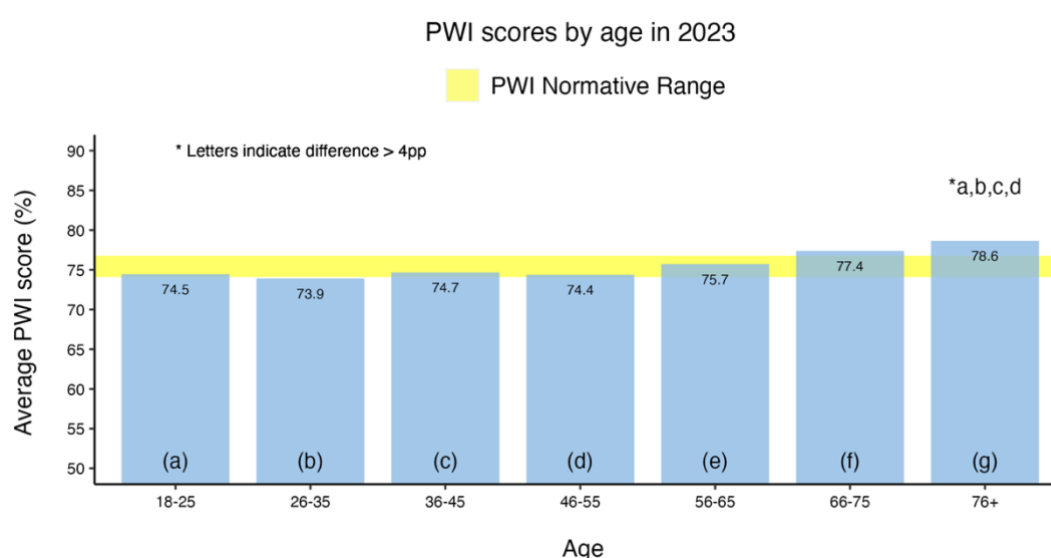


Figure 3-20 PWI scores for each age group in 2023

There were no notable differences in PWI scores of each age groups across the past two years. Thus, the figure comparing PWI scores for each age group to last year was omitted from this report and can be found in Appendix Figure 1-1.

3.1.4.2 PWI and gross household income

In 2023, the most common annual household income brackets were \$151-250k (21%) and \$61K-100K (20%), while the least common were ≥\$251k (10%) and ≤\$30K (14%) (see Table 3-2). Average PWI scores for those with household incomes \$100k and under were below the normative range, while those in households earning over \$150k were above the normative range (see Figure 3-21).

Across income groups, average PWI scores were notably lower at household income levels \$100k and under compared to those with household incomes above \$151k (5-7pp). Average PWI scores were also notably lower for those in the \$101k-\$150k income bracket compared to those in households earning over \$251k.

It is notable that record low average PWI scores were recorded in 2023 for the \$61k-\$100k and \$101k-\$150k groups (see past [reports](#)). However, income scores are not currently indexed, which limits comparability of average scores over the full study lifespan (22 years).

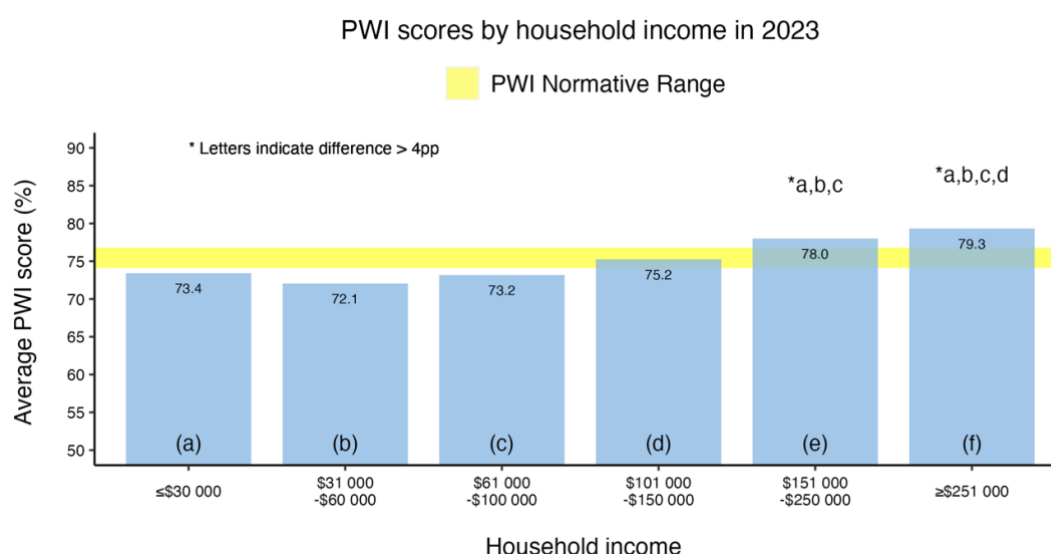


Figure 3-21 PWI scores for gross household income in 2023

Across 2022-2023, the distribution of participants across income brackets was similar. For this period, average PWI scores were also similar for those with household incomes greater than \$60k. However, after dropping to a record low in 2022, average PWI scores for those in the lowest annual household income group (≤\$30k) rose 7pp in 2023 (see Figure 3-22).

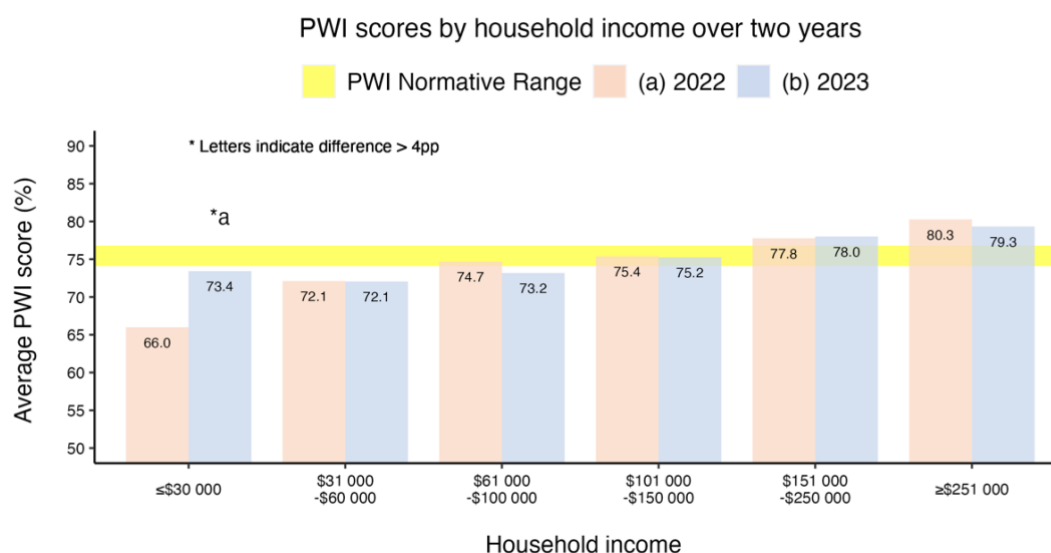


Figure 3-22 PWI scores by gross household income over two years

3.1.4.3 PWI and gender

Males and females were equally distributed in 2023 (females 49%). A small number of participants self-identified in some other way, however, this group was too small (1.7%) for subgroup analyses so was not included when looking at differences in PWI scores by gender. Average PWI scores were similar among males and females in 2023 (see Appendix Figure 1-2) and when compared to 2022 (see Appendix Figure 1-3).

3.1.4.4 PWI and marital status

In 2023, the majority of participants were married (45%), while the smallest number of participants were separated but not divorced (4%) or widowed (5%) (full details in Table 3-2). On average, PWI scores were above or at the top of the normative range for those who were married or in a de facto relationship respectively (see Figure 3-23). Average PWI scores fell below the normative range for people who were separated, divorced or never married and were notably lower (4-11pp) than those who were married or de facto.

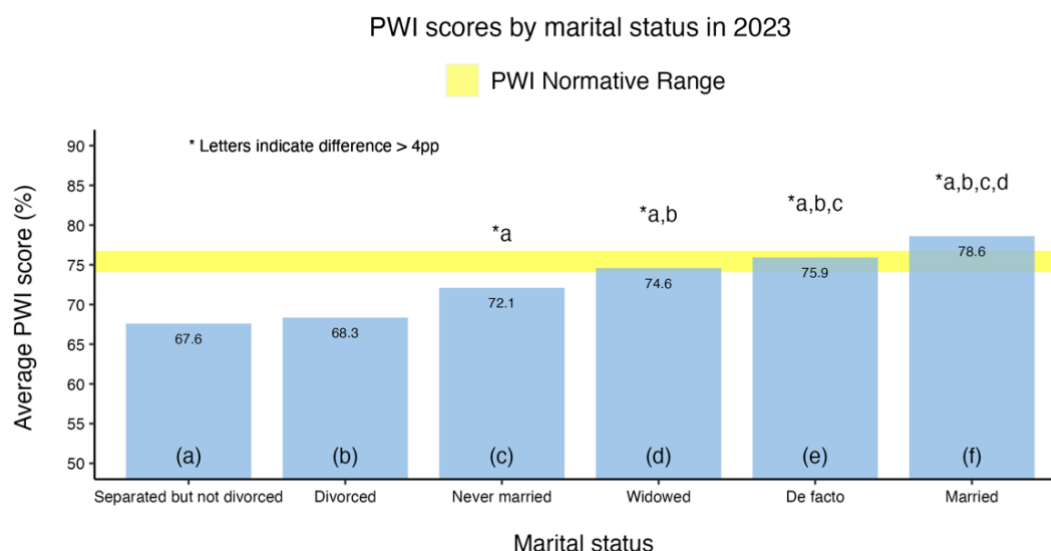


Figure 3-23 PWI scores for marital status in 2023

Across 2022-2023, the distribution of marital status was comparable. Similarly, PWI scores within each marital status group were relatively similar during this time (see Appendix Figure 1-4).

3.1.4.5 PWI and household composition

In 2023, households most commonly comprised a partner only (31%) or a partner and children (26%), while the least common household composition was with children only (6%) (see Table 3-2). Average PWI scores were above the normative range for household's comprising a partner and children or a partner only and below the normative range for all other household composition groups (see Figure 3-24). Those living with a partner and children or a partner only, had average PWI scores that were notably higher (5-9pp) compared to those living with children only, with parents, alone, or with other adults.

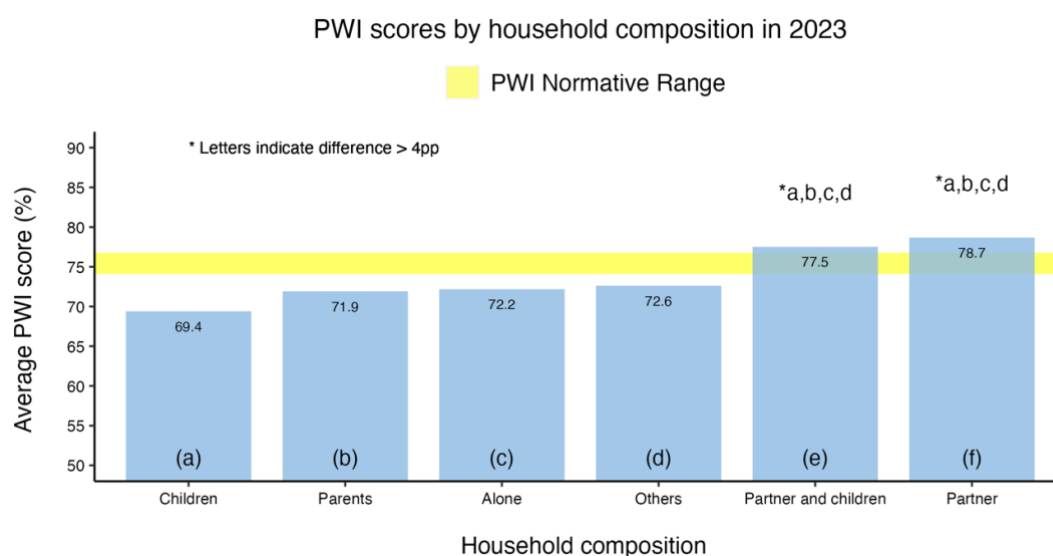


Figure 3-24 PWI scores by household composition in 2023

Across 2022-2023, the distribution of household composition was relatively consistent and average PWI scores within each type of household were comparable across the two years (see Appendix Figure 1-5).

3.1.4.6 PWI and full time occupation

In 2023, the majority (79%) of participants identified as having a full time occupation, most commonly employment (64%) - see Table 3-2. Only a small number were unemployed (2%) and less than 1% were in full time volunteering. As the latter was too small for subgroup analyses, it is not presented below.

Those who were unemployed had average PWI scores that were well below the normative range and notably lower than all other groups (12-20pp) (see Figure 3-36). Those in full time home duties also fell below the normative range and had notably lower average PWI compared to those in full time retirement, study and employment. Those in full time retirement had scores above the normative range.

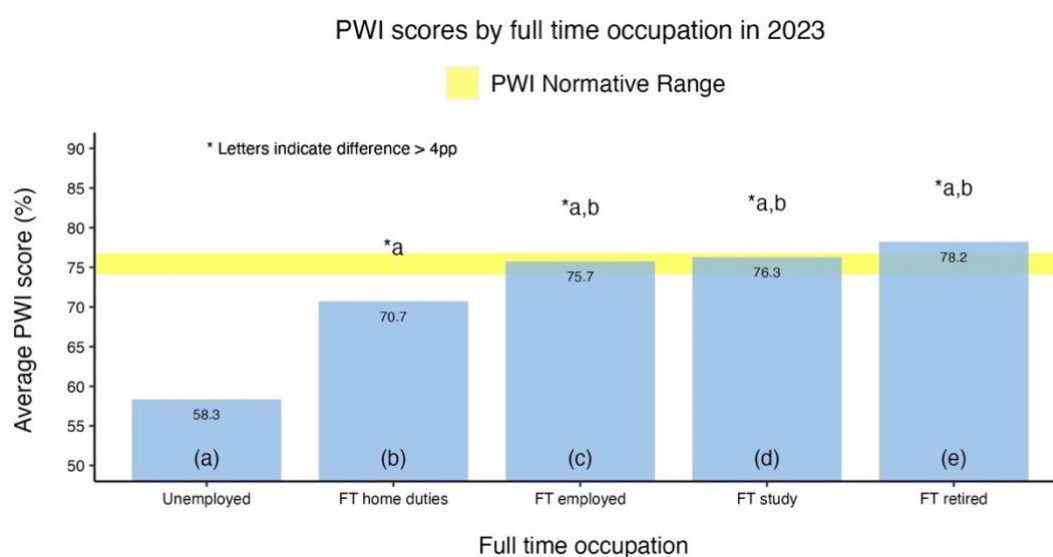


Figure 3-25 PWI scores for full time occupation in 2023

Across 2022-2023, the distribution of full time occupations was relatively consistent, as were average PWI scores within each occupational category (see Appendix Figure 1-6).

3.1.4.7 PWI and part time occupation

In 2023, one-third of participants identified as having a part time occupation and this was most commonly paid part time work (33%), casual work (26%) or part time volunteering (25%), with just a small number of semi-retired participants (5%) (see Table 3-2).

Those who were semi-retired or volunteering part time had average PWI scores above the normative range (see Figure 3-26). These groups also had notably higher PWI scores of 4-5pp compared to those who were in part time/casual work or part time study, although the latter groups were all within the normative range.

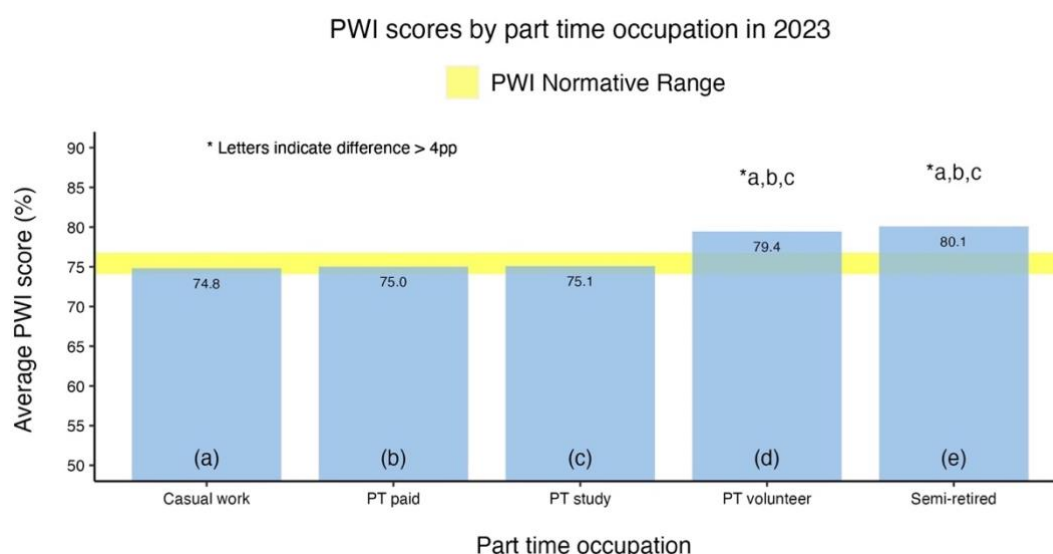


Figure 3-26 PWI scores for part time occupations in 2022

Across 2022-2023, the distribution of part time occupations was similar, as were average PWI scores within each part time occupation group with the exception of those who were semi-retired, whose average PWI score was almost 9pp higher in 2023 compared to 2022 (see Figure 3-27).

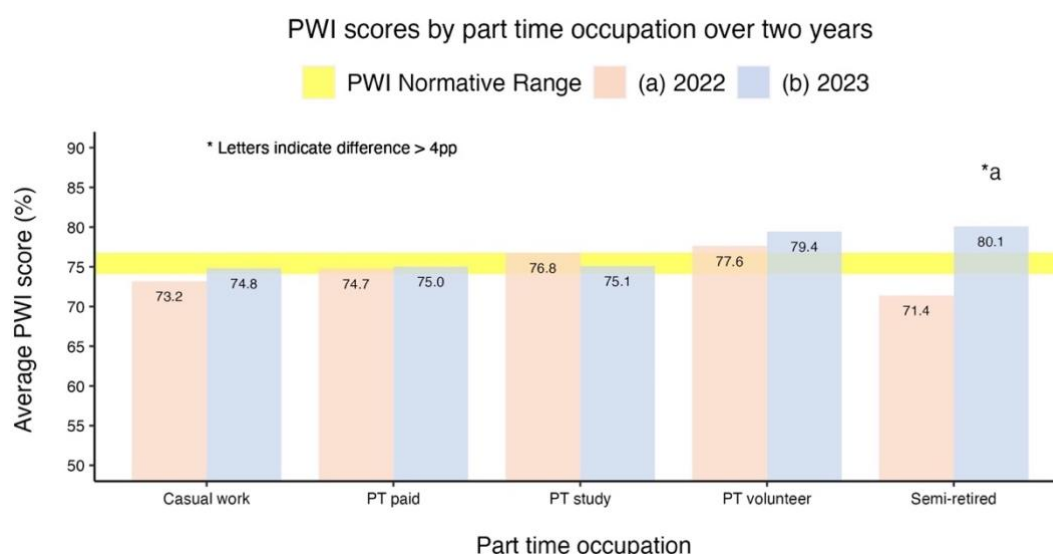


Figure 3-27 PWI scores for part time occupations over two years

The semi-retired group also reported their highest PWI score on record, returning to levels similar to 2021 and continuing a previously seen upward pattern since 2018 (see Figure 3-28). It is noted that this subgroup is consistently small (around 30-35 people) which may account for the variation.

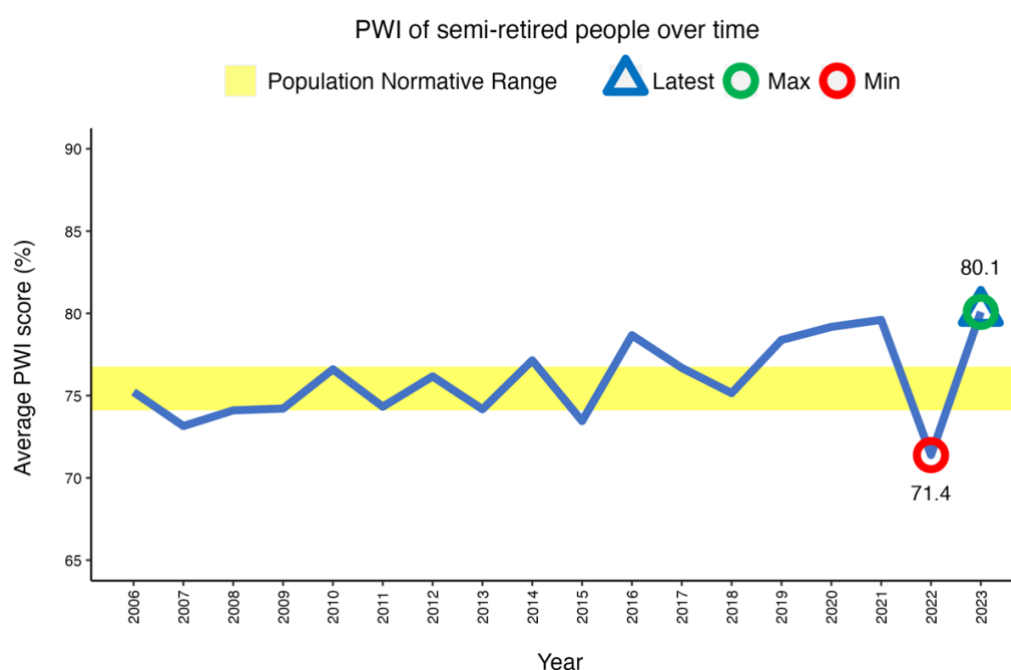


Figure 3-28 Personal wellbeing of semi-retired people over time

3.1.4.8 PWI across states

In 2023, in line with population norms (i.e. geographically representative), participants were most commonly from New South Wales (31%) or Victoria (26%), with the smallest number from the Northern Territory (<1%) and the Australian Capital Territory (2%) (see Table 3-2). Given the small number of participants from the Northern Territory, this group was excluded from subgroup analyses.

All states had PWI scores within the normative range except Tasmania, who scored almost 3pp below the range (see Figure 3-29). Tasmanians also had average scores that were notably lower than those living in New South Wales and Western Australia.

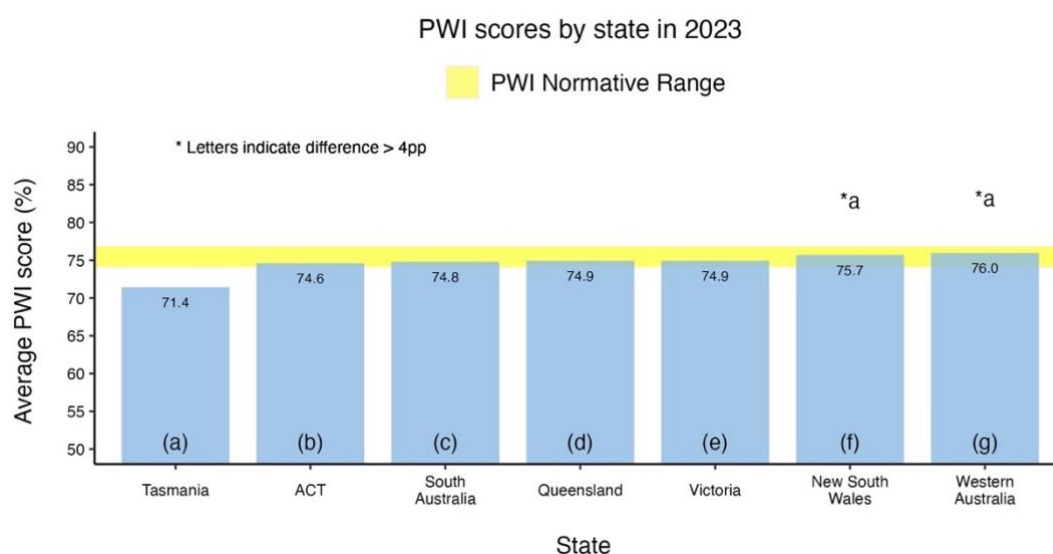


Figure 3-29 PWI scores for states in 2023

Across 2022-2023, average PWI scores were similar for all states except for Tasmania, who had notably lower (4pp) PWI scores compared to 2022 (see Figure 3-30).

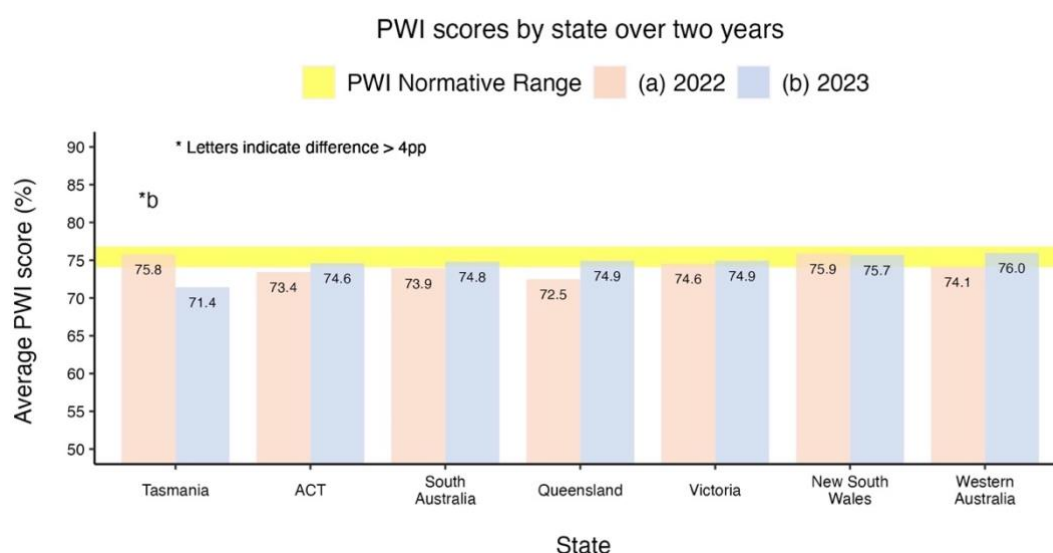


Figure 3-30 PWI scores by states over two years

People living in Tasmania also reported their lowest PWI score on record (see Figure 3-31). It is noted that this subgroup is consistently small (around 40 people), which may account for the variation. However, it is notable that this is only the second time in 22 years that Tasmanians have fallen below the population normative range, and they were also below their own normative range for the PWI (see Appendix Table 1-7).

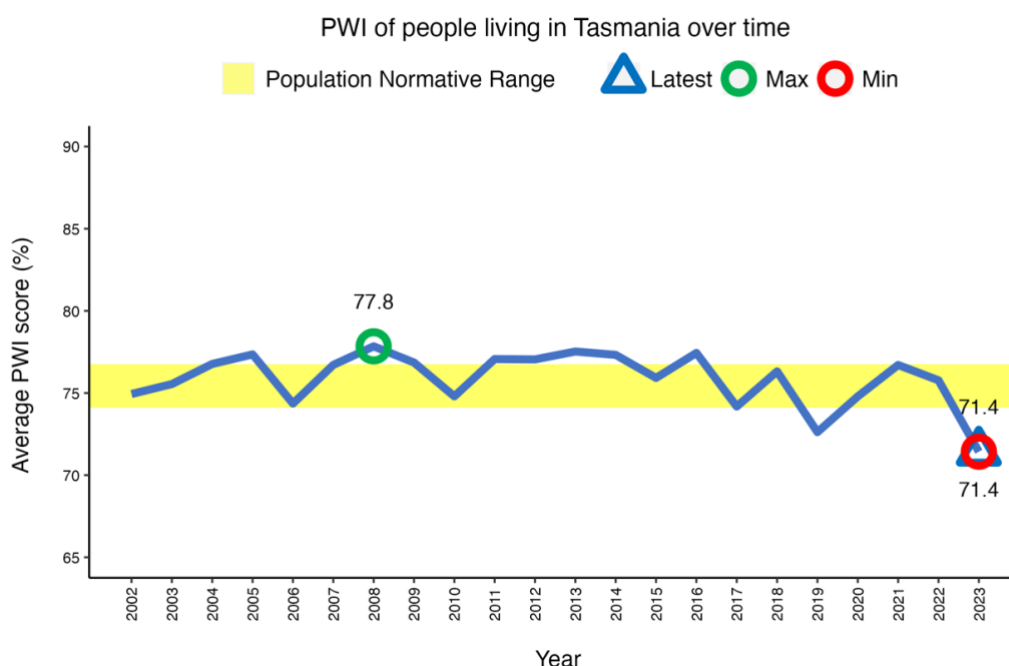


Figure 3-31 Personal wellbeing in Tasmania over time

3.1.4.9 PWI and remoteness

In 2023, the majority of the participants came from major cities (71%), with 19% and 9% from inner and outer regional areas respectively (see Table 3-2). Less than 2% came from remote areas and this group was deemed insufficient in size for subgroup comparisons. Average PWI scores were within the normative range for those living in major cities and outer regional areas and above the normative range for those in inner regional areas. There were no notable differences between each geographic region in 2023 (see Appendix Figure 1-7) or when compared to 2022 (see Appendix Figure 1-8).

3.1.5 2021 NWI scores for each demographic group

This section shows average NWI scores by demographic groups in 2023 and in comparison to the previous year (2022). The NWI scores are presented on a scale from 40 to 80 percentage points. The population normative range for NWI lies between 58.9 to 64.5pp and is shown in the yellow bar on the figures below. The normative ranges for NWI for each demographic sub-group are presented in Appendix Table 1-8.

3.1.5.1 NWI and age

In 2023, all age groups had average NWI scores within the normative range except for those aged 56-65 years (see Figure 3-32). This group also had meaningful lower NWI than the youngest age group (18-25 years). When compared to 2022, no notable differences in NWI were observed across age groups (see Appendix Figure 1-9).

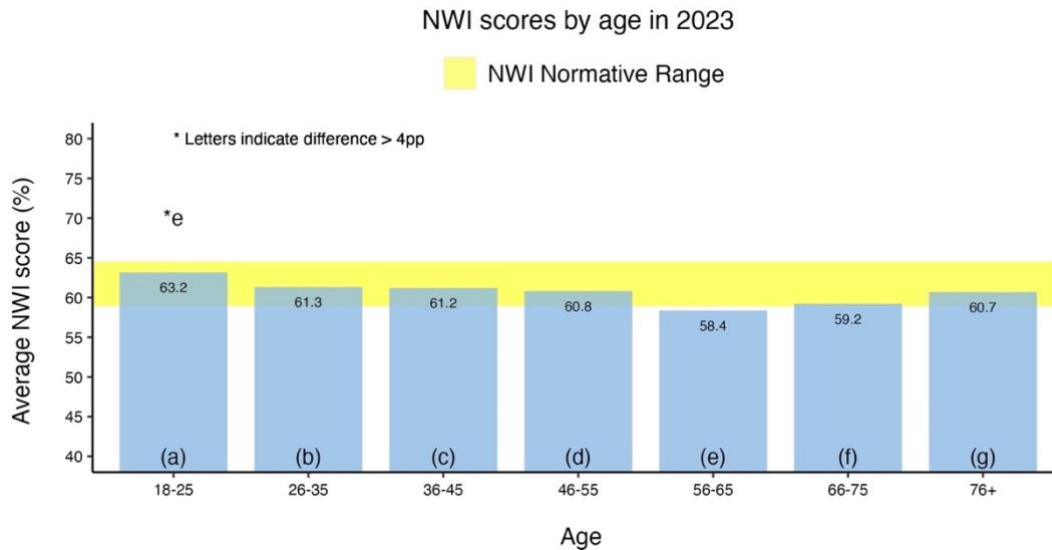


Figure 3-32 NWl scores for each age group in 2023

3.1.5.2 NWl and gross household income

In 2023, average NWl scores were within the normative range for all household income groups except those with household incomes of \$31k-\$60k, who were below the normative range (see Figure 3-33). This group also had notably lower NWl than those in households earning \$151k or more per year. Additionally, people with household income between \$61-\$100k had notably lower NWl than the \geq \$251k household income group. When compared to 2022, no notable differences in NWl were observed across age groups (see Appendix Figure 1-10).

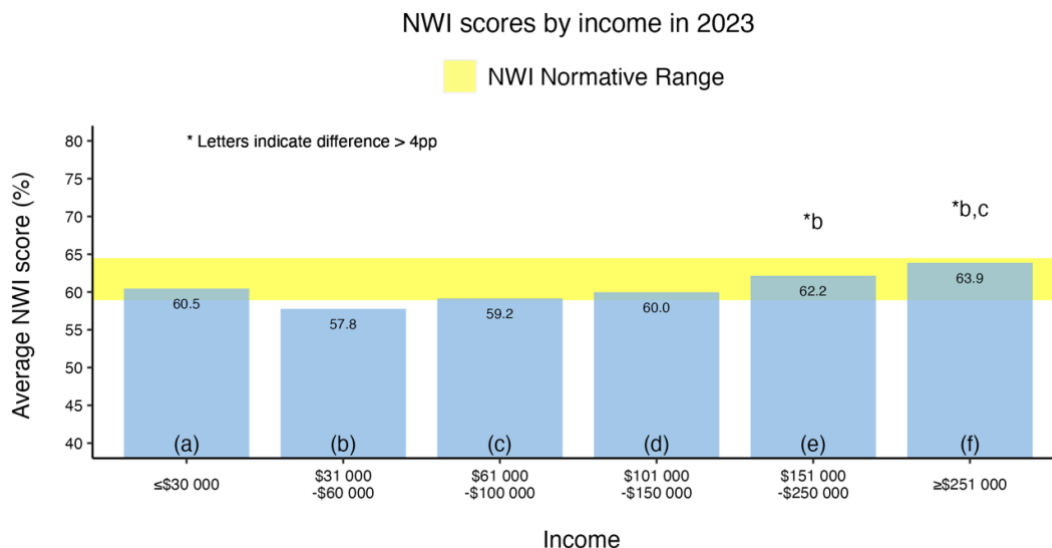


Figure 3-33 NWl scores for gross household income in 2023

3.1.5.3 NWl and gender

NWl scores were similar for males and females in 2023 (see Appendix Figure 1-11) and when compared to 2022 (see Appendix Figure 1-12).

3.1.5.4 NWI and marital status

On average, NWI scores in 2023 were below the normative range for those who were separated, divorced or in de facto relationships (see Figure 3-34). Those who were separated or divorced had notably lower NWI than those who were married or had never been married (4-6pp). People in a de facto relationship also had notably lower PWI compared to people who were married.

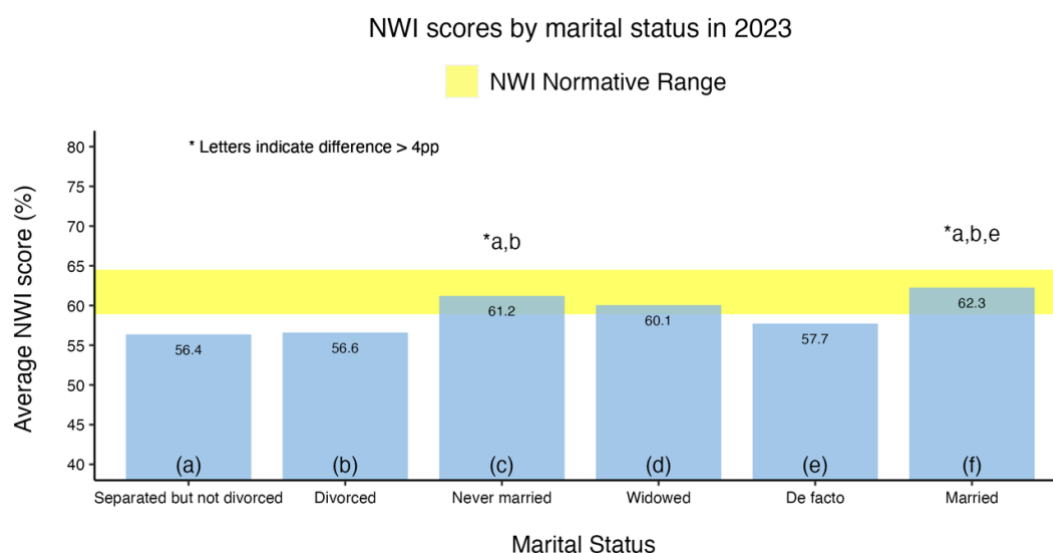


Figure 3-34 NWI scores for marital status in 2023

When compared to 2022, no notable differences in NWI were observed across marital status groups (see Appendix Figure 1-13).

3.1.5.5 NWI and household composition

On average, NWI scores in 2023 were below the normative range for those who lived with children only, while all other household composition groups were within range (see Figure 3-35). Those living with children (without a partner) also had notably lower average NWI scores (4-5pp) than those living with a partner and children, or with other adults (excluding a partner or parents).

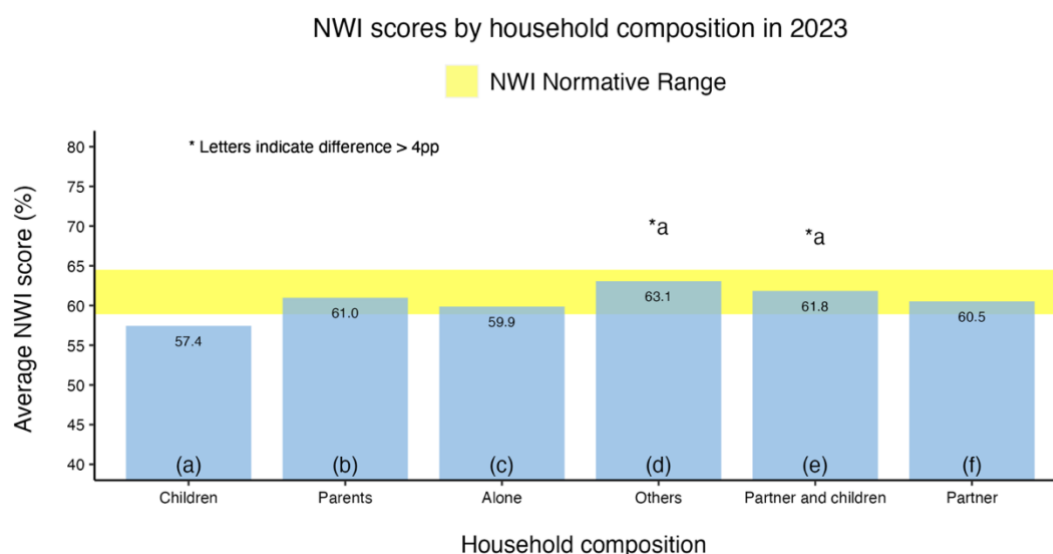


Figure 3-35 NWI scores for each household composition in 2023

When compared to 2022, no notable differences in NWI were observed across household composition groups (see Appendix Figure 1-14).

3.1.5.6 NWI and full time occupation

In 2023, people who were unemployed had average NWI scores well below the normative range and 7-15pp lower than those who were in full time employment, study, or retirement (see Figure 3-36). People occupied in full time home duties also fell below the normative range and scored notably lower than those in full time study or employment. On the other hand, people in full time study scored above the normative range with scores notably higher than all other full time occupation groups (6-15pp).

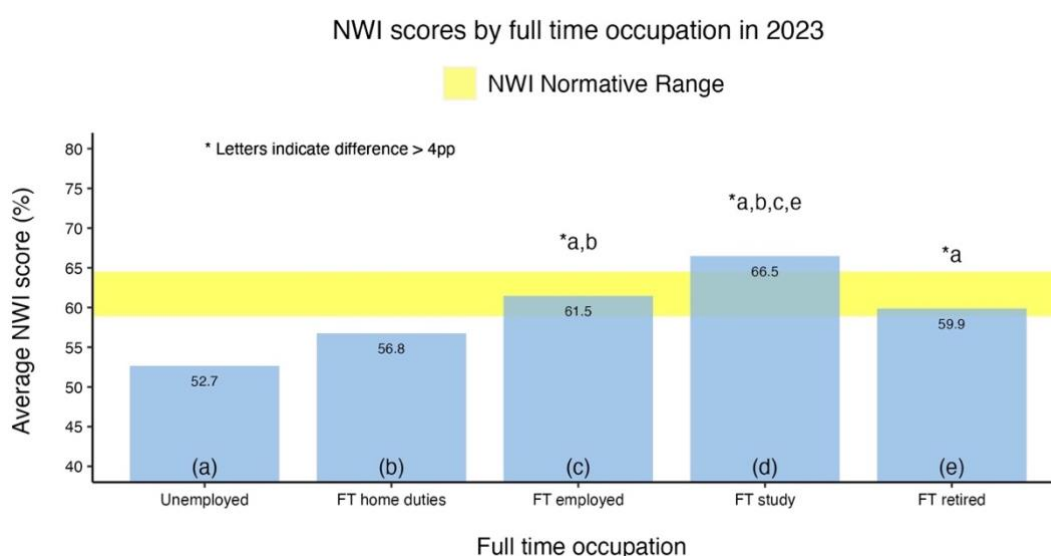


Figure 3-36 NWI scores for full time occupation in 2022

When compared to 2022, no notable differences in NWI were observed across full time occupation groups (see Appendix Figure 1-15).

3.1.5.7 NWI and part time occupation

In 2023, the average NWI scores were similar across all part time occupations with no notable differences between groups (see Appendix Figure 1-16). Similarly, there were no notable differences among groups when compared to 2022 (see Appendix Figure 1-17).

3.1.5.8 NWI across states

All states had NWI scores within the normative range in 2023 except for Tasmania, who scored just below the range, and the Australian Capital Territory, who scored just above the range (see Figure 3-37). Average NWI scores for the Australian Capital Territory were 6-7pp higher than those of Tasmania, South Australia, Queensland and Victoria. Western Australia also scored notably higher on average than Tasmania. When compared to 2022, no notable differences in NWI were observed across states (see Appendix Figure 1-18).

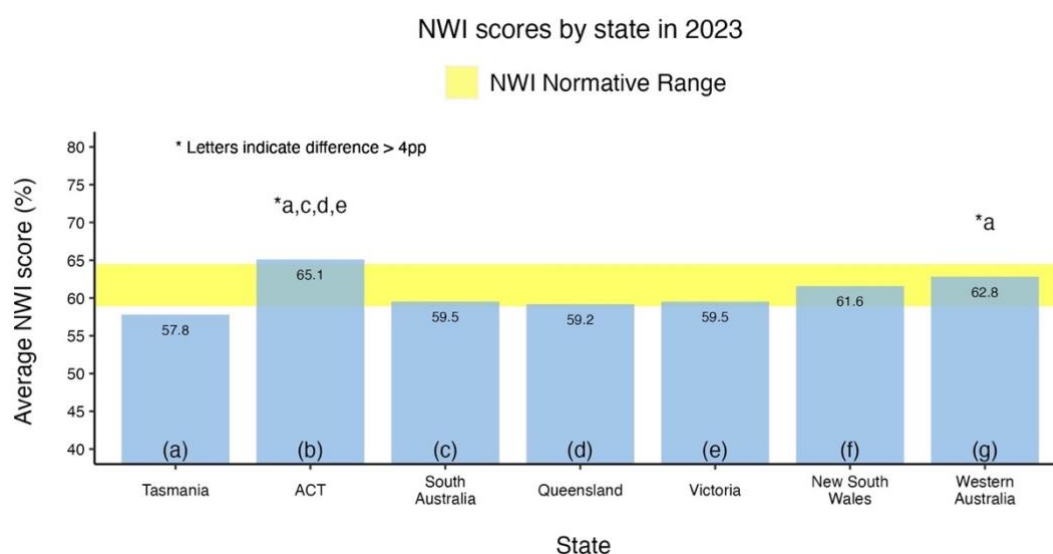


Figure 3-37 NWI scores by states in 2023

3.1.5.9 NWI and remoteness

In 2023, average NWI scores were within the normative range and similar across those who lived in major cities, inner regional and outer regional areas (see Appendix Figure 1-19). Similarly, average NWI scores were similar when compared to 2022 (see Appendix Figure 1-20).

3.2 Part 2: Further analysis of wellbeing by age and income, mental distress, loneliness, time for oneself and carers.

This section summarises the findings relating to questions specific to the 2023 survey, along with additional post hoc analyses.

Similar to Part 1 of this report, we flag notable differences of 0.30 SD pp or greater by a star (*). This threshold is often used at the population level for meaningful differences. See Appendix Table 1-4 for notable difference thresholds for each analysed measure. As in Part 1, we only present figures for analyses showing meaningful differences between group – all other figures can be found in Appendix Section 2.

3.2.1 Topic 1: Generational and income inequities in the Golden Triangle of Happiness domains

In Part 1, the well-established pattern of young adults and those from low-income households scoring low on personal wellbeing (Cummins et al., 2021) was once again observed. However, it was also notable that all age groups 55 years and under scored below or at the bottom of the normative range. Similarly, all household income groups \$100k and under were below the normative range. This suggested more marked generational and income inequities in personal wellbeing compared to our historical data (Cummins et al., 2021). To further understand, we examined how the three Golden Triangle of Happiness domains differed between these age and income groups. These three domains account for the most variance in overall satisfaction with life, thus play a big role in personal wellbeing.

3.2.1.1.1 The Golden Triangle by age groups

RQ1: How do the Golden Triangle domains differ across age groups in 2023?

3.2.1.1.1.1 Standard of Living by age groups

In 2023, average scores for respondents aged 55 and under were either below or at the bottom of the normative range for satisfaction with standard of living, while older adults had average scores above the range (see Figure 3-38).

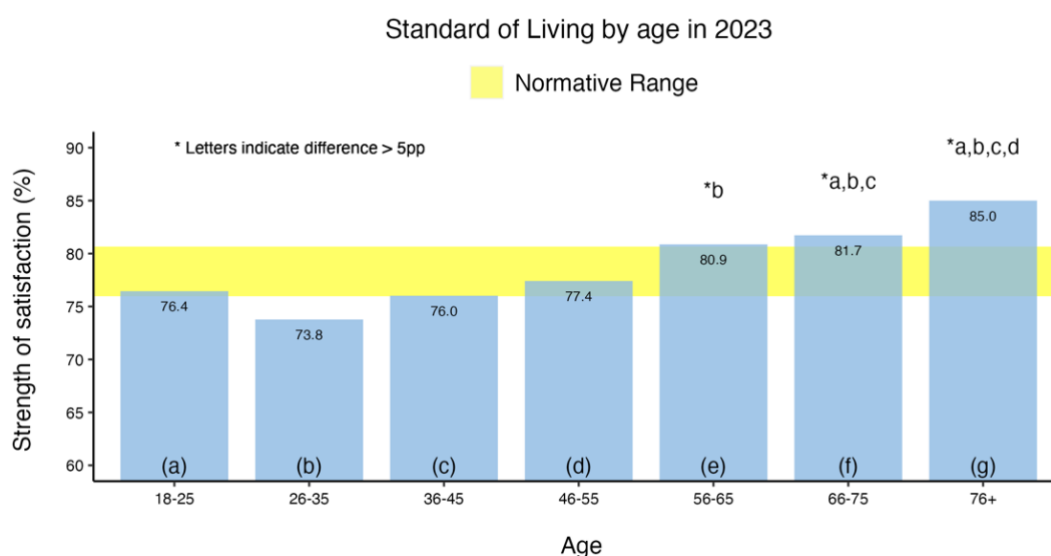


Figure 3-38 Satisfaction with Standard of Living by age groups in 2023

3.2.1.1.1.2 Achieving in Life by age groups

Average scores for satisfaction with achieving in life were below the normative range for 18-35 year-olds and within the range for all other age groups, however no notable differences were observed among age groups (see Appendix Figure 2-1).

3.2.1.1.1.3 Personal Relationships by age groups

Average scores for respondents aged 65 and under were either below or at the bottom of the normative range for satisfaction with personal relationships, while older adults had average scores at the top of or above the range (see Figure 3-39).

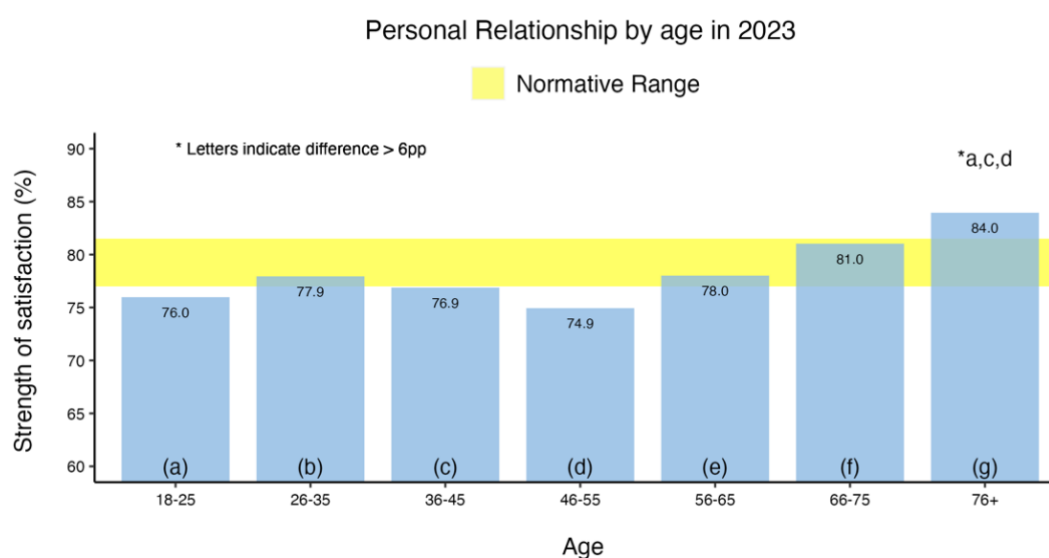


Figure 3-39 Satisfaction with Personal Relationships by age groups in 2023

3.2.1.1.2 The Golden Triangle by income groups

RQ2: How do the Golden Triangle domains differ across income groups in 2023?

3.2.1.1.2.1 Standard of Living by household income

In 2023, average satisfaction with standard of living was below the normative range for people living on household incomes of \$100k or below, who had notably lower (6-9pp) satisfaction than people in households earning \$151k and above (see Figure 3-40).

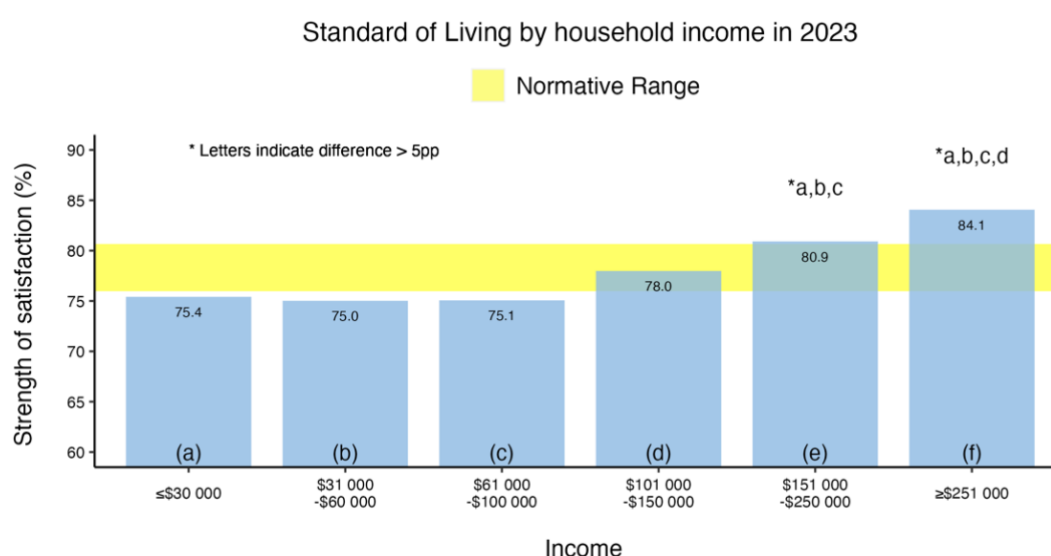


Figure 3-40 Satisfaction with Standard of Living by household income in 2023

3.2.1.1.2.2 Achieving in Life by household income

Average satisfaction with achieving in life was below the normative range for people living on household incomes of \$100k or below and at the top of or above the range for those in higher earning households (see Figure 3-41). The \$31k-\$60k household income group had particularly lower (7-9pp) satisfaction with their achieving in life than those earning \$101k and over.

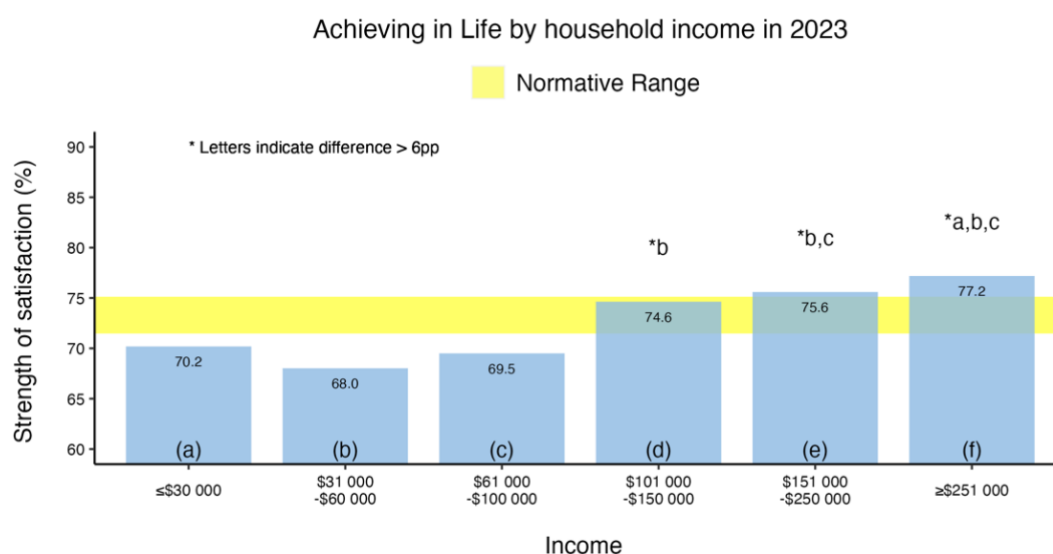


Figure 3-41 Satisfaction with Achieving in Life by household income in 2023

3.2.1.1.2.3 Personal Relationships by household income

Average satisfaction with personal relationships was below the normative range for people living on household incomes of \$100k or below and within range for other income groups, however between group differences were not as notable as with the other Golden Triangle domains (see Figure 3-42).

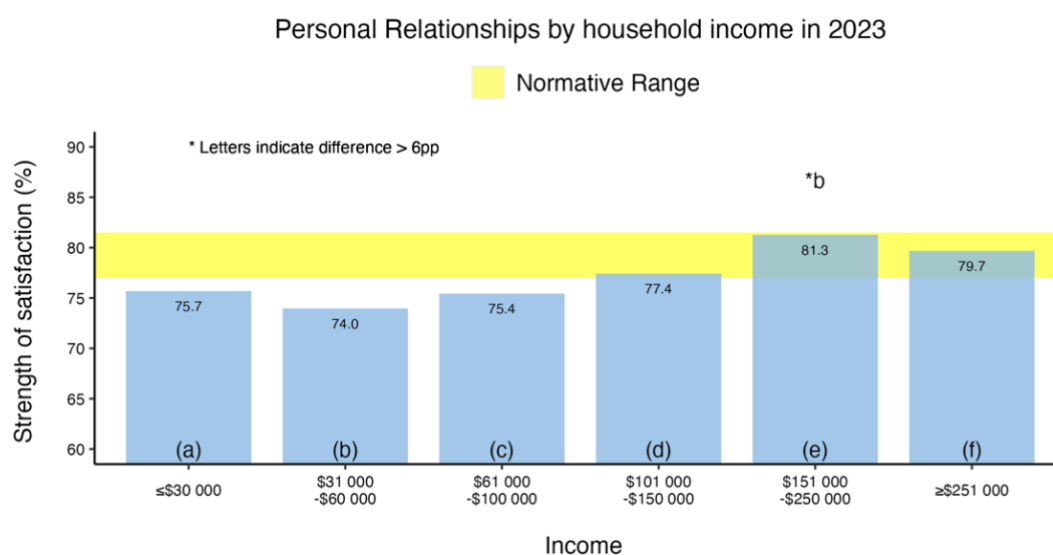


Figure 3-42 Satisfaction with Personal Relationships by household income in 2023

3.2.2 Topic 2: A deeper dive into satisfaction with the national economic situation

In Part 1, we saw satisfaction with the economic situation in Australia drop to its lowest score on record. Amid current economic challenges, such as rising inflation and cost-of-living pressures, we aim to examine whether satisfaction with Australia's economic situation differs by two key demographics – age and income.

RQ3: Did satisfaction with the economic situation in Australia differ across age and income groups in 2023?

3.2.2.1 Economic situation by age

In 2023, average satisfaction with the economic situation in Australia was below the normative range for all respondents aged 65 and below (81% of the sample) - see Figure 3-43. On average, younger adults aged 18-45 years were notably less (6-7pp) satisfied with the economic situation than those aged 76+ years.

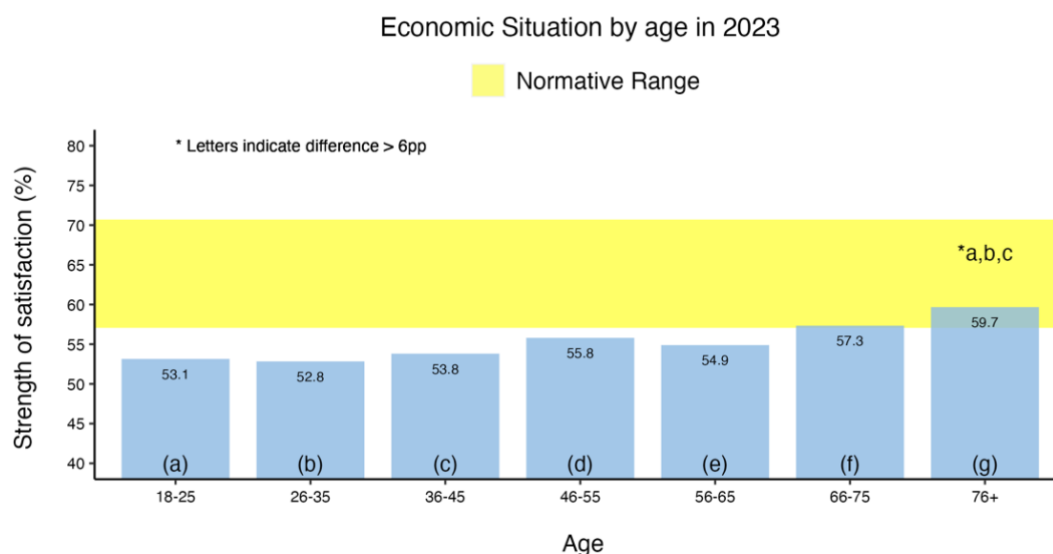


Figure 3-43 Economic situation scores by age groups in 2023

3.2.2.2 Economic situation by income

In 2023, average satisfaction with the economic situation in Australia was below the normative range for respondents in households earning up to \$150k each year (see Figure 3-44). On average, those with annual household incomes between \$31-\$100k were the least satisfied with the economic situation and were notably less (7-9pp) satisfied with the economic situation than those on household incomes above \$251k.

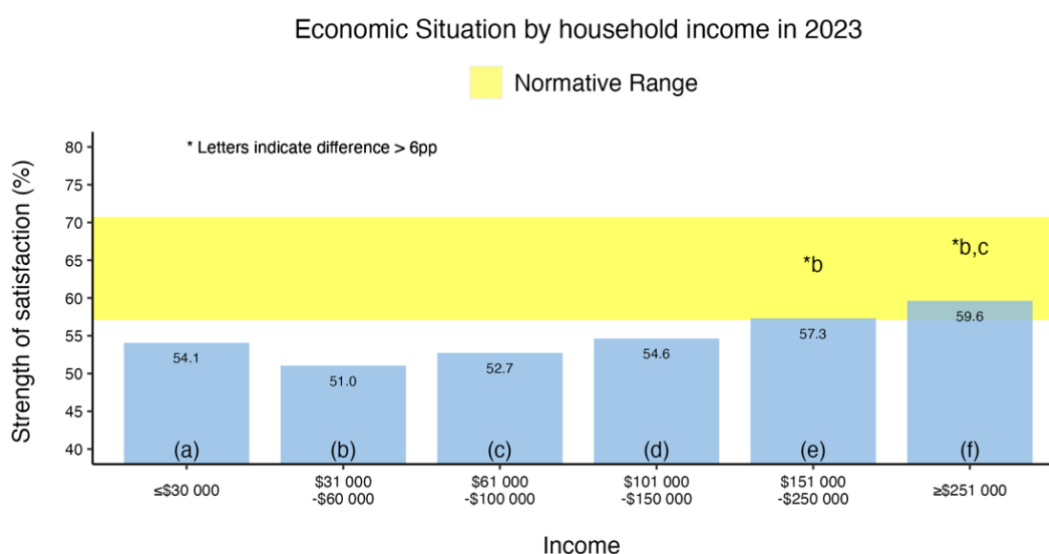


Figure 3-44 Economic situation scores by income groups in 2023

3.2.3 Topic 3: Mental distress and the Personal Wellbeing Index

Mental distress is a term used in this report to refer to questions pertaining to feelings of anxiety, stress and depression. The constructs will be ordered as Anxiety, Stress and Depression for this section of the report.

3.2.3.1 Mental distress across the last four years

RQ4: Did mental distress differ in 2023 compared to the pandemic years (2020-22)?

In 2023, average levels of mental distress decreased across all three measures when compared to 2022 (see Table 3-3). Average feelings of anxiety were notably lower (8pp) than in 2022 and the lowest they have been since we began collecting data in 2020. Average feelings of stress and depression lowered to levels similar to 2021.

Table 3-3 Mean and Standard Deviation (SD) of mental distress levels across the last four years

| | Mental distress (range 0-100) | | |
|----------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| | Anxiety Mean (SD) | Stress Mean (SD) | Depression Mean (SD) |
| Pandemic years | | | |
| 2020 | 44.8 (26.2) | 44.2 (27.2) | NA |
| 2021 | 42.8 (28.1) | 46.4 (27.4) | 30.1 (27.9) |
| 2022 | 48.2 (25.8) | 51.3 (24.5) | 33.8 (25.8) |
| Post-pandemic | | | |
| 2023 | 40.2 (26.4) | 45.5 (25.4) | 30.8 (26.3) |

3.2.3.2 Mental distress by age groups and household income

RQ5: Did mental distress differ across age and income groups in 2023?

3.2.3.2.1 Anxiety

Question: “How anxious do you generally feel?” 0 (Not at all) to 100 (Extremely)

In 2023, average feelings of anxiety were highest amongst younger adults (18-35 years) at mean anxiety levels of 48–49pp (see Figure 3-45). These two youngest age groups had notably higher (8-14pp) average feelings of anxiety compared to those aged 36 years and above.

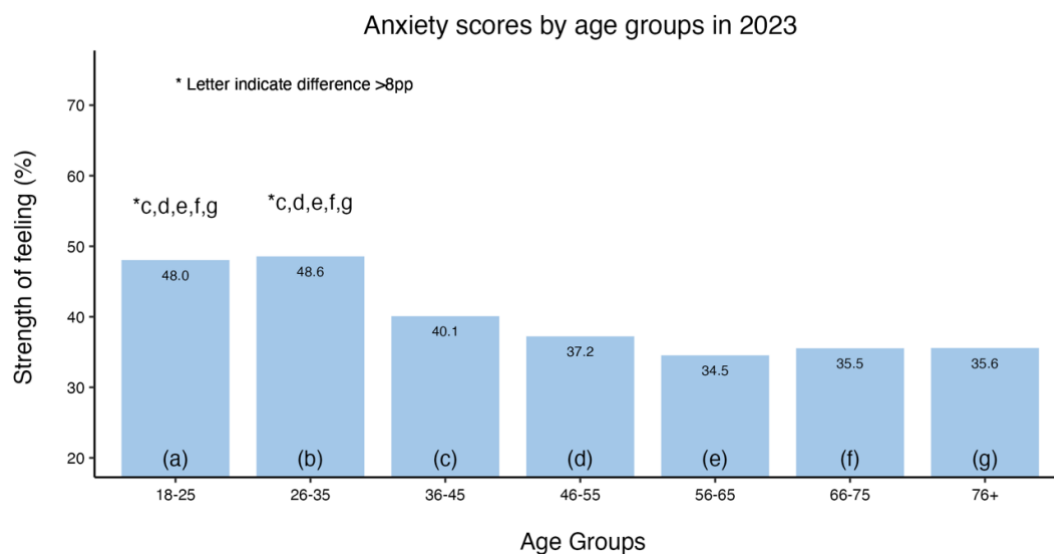


Figure 3-45 Anxiety scores by age groups in 2023

In 2023, people with household incomes of \$30K and under had the highest average feelings of anxiety at a mean level of 44pp (see Figure 3-46). Average levels in this group were notably higher (9pp) compared to those with a household income greater than \$251K.

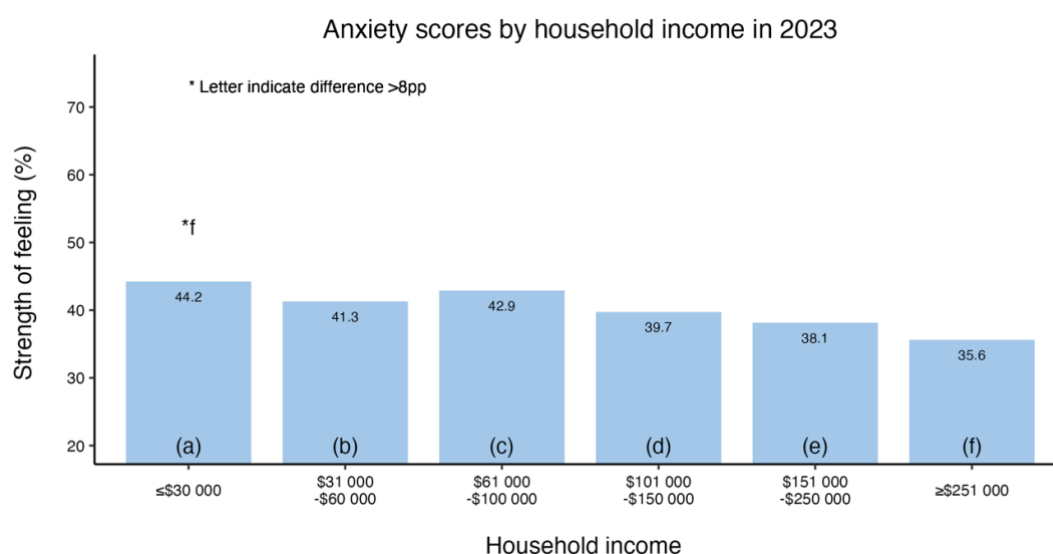


Figure 3-46 Anxiety scores by household income in 2023

3.2.3.2.2 Stress

Question: “How stressed do you generally feel?” 0 (Not at all) to 100 (Extremely)

In 2023, average feelings of stress were highest amongst younger adults (18-35 years) at mean stress levels of 53-54pp (see Figure 3-47). Those aged 18-45 had notably higher (9-18pp) stress levels than those aged 56 years of age and above. Average stress scores for people aged 26-34 were also notably higher than those aged 46-55.

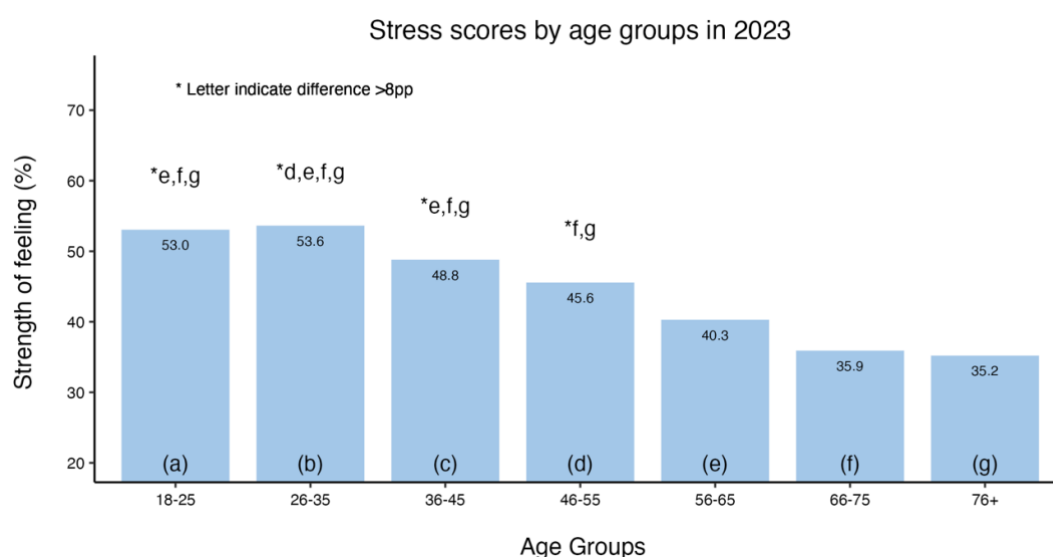


Figure 3-47 Stress scores by age groups in 2023

There were no notable differences in stress scores between different household income groups in 2023 (see Appendix Figure 2-2).

3.2.3.2.3 Depression

Question: “How depressed do you generally feel?” 0 (Not at all) to 100 (Extremely)

In 2023, average feelings of depression were highest amongst the youngest adults (18-25 years) at a mean depression level of 37pp (see Figure 3-48). Their depression levels were meaningfully higher (9-10pp) than those aged 36-45 and 56 years and above.

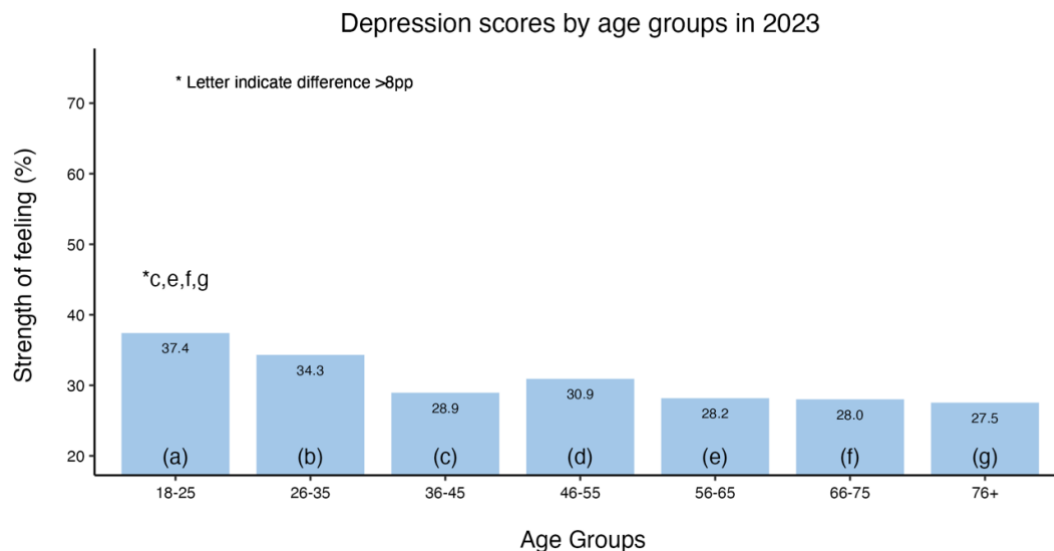


Figure 3-48 Depression scores by age groups in 2023

Feelings of depression were highest in those with lower household incomes ($\leq \$100k$) and decreased as annual household income rose beyond \$100k (see Figure 3-49). Feelings of depression were notably higher (8pp) in the \$31k-\$60k income group compared to those in the highest household income group $\geq \$251k$.

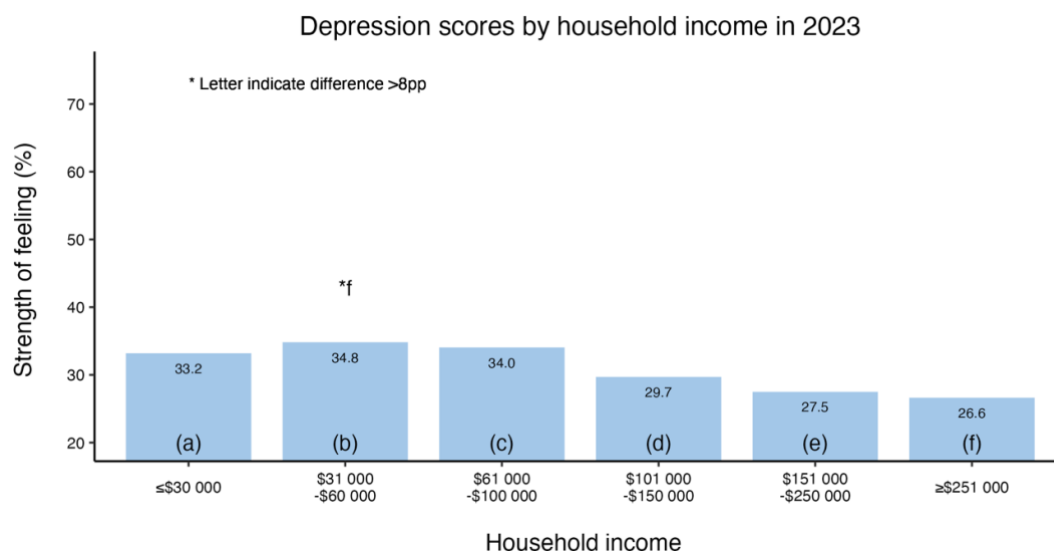


Figure 3-49 Depression scores by household income in 2023

3.2.3.3 Personal wellbeing by mental distress

RQ6: Was mental distress related to the Personal Wellbeing Index in 2023?

3.2.3.3.1 Anxiety

In 2023, those people with the highest feelings of anxiety (i.e., the top 25th percentile) had notably lower (7pp) PWI scores compared to other respondents with feelings of anxiety (see Figure 3-50). Those with high feelings of anxiety scored well below (6pp) the PWI normative range, while all others scored within the normative range.

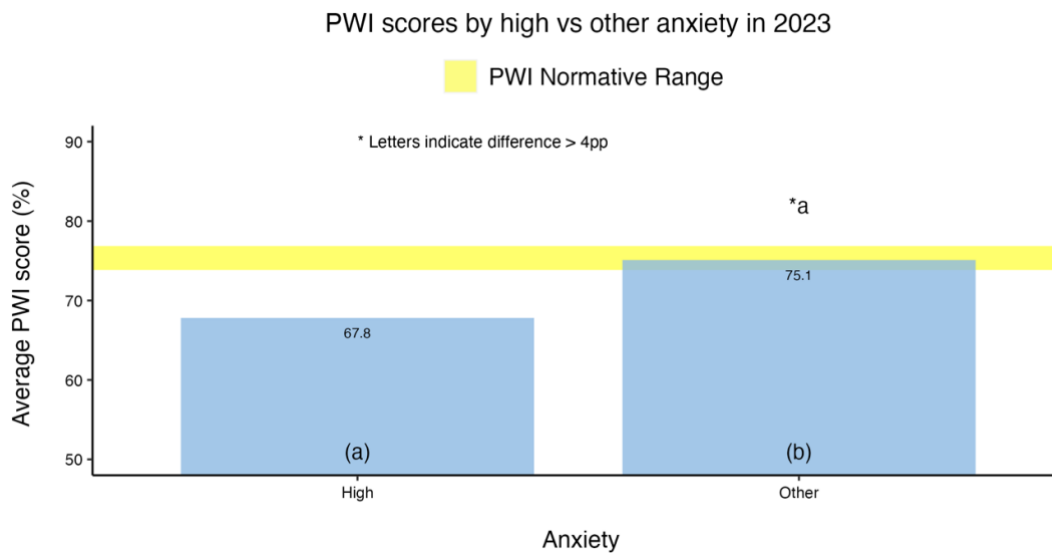


Figure 3-50 PWI scores by high (top 25th percentile) feelings of anxiety in 2023

3.2.3.3.2 Stress

In 2023, those people with the highest feelings of stress had notably lower (9pp) PWI scores compared to other respondents with feelings of stress (see Figure 3-51). Those with high feelings of stress scored well below (7pp) the PWI normative range, while all others scored within the normative range.

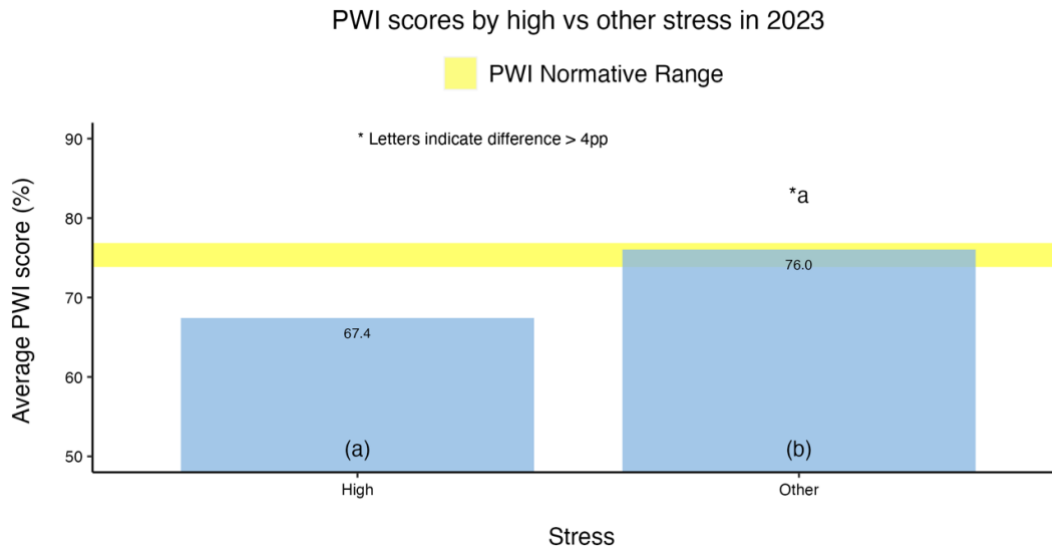


Figure 3-51 PWI scores by high (top 25th percentile) feelings of stress in 2023

3.2.3.3.3 Depression

In 2023, those people with the highest feelings of depression had notably lower (8pp) PWI scores compared to other respondents with feelings of depression (see Figure 3-52). Those with high feelings of depression scored well below (7pp) the PWI normative range, while all others scored within the normative range.

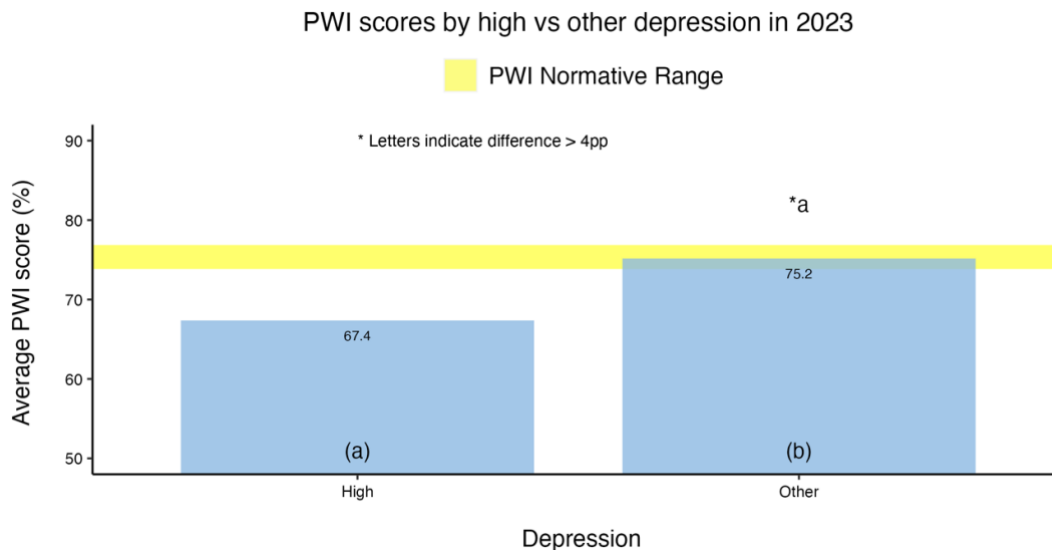


Figure 3-52 PWI scores by high (top 25th percentile) feelings of depression in 2023

3.2.4 Topic 4: Loneliness and the Personal Wellbeing Index

Question: “How lonely do you generally feel?” 0 (Not at all) to 100 (Extremely)

3.2.4.1 Loneliness by age groups and household income

RQ7: Did loneliness differ across age and income groups in 2023?

In 2023, average feelings of loneliness were highest amongst the youngest adults (18-25 years) at a mean loneliness level of 36pp. However, there were no meaningful differences between age groups (see Appendix Figure 2-3).

Average feelings of loneliness were highest in those with lower household incomes (\$0-\$100k) – see Figure 3-53. Feelings of loneliness were notably higher (9-12pp) for those on household incomes between \$60k and below compared to those in households earning \$101k and over.

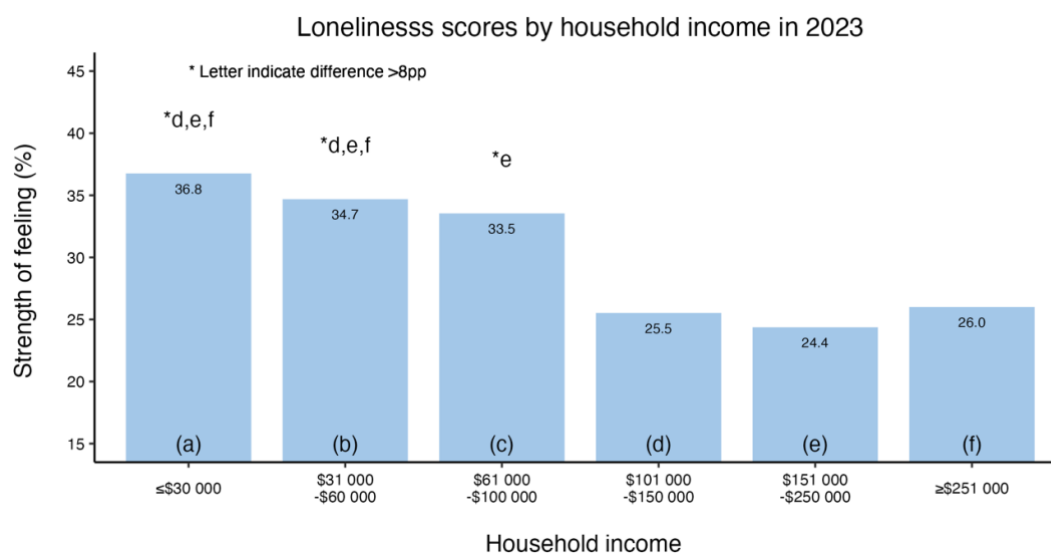


Figure 3-53 Loneliness scores by household income in 2023

3.2.4.2 Personal wellbeing by loneliness

RQ8: Was loneliness related to the Personal Wellbeing Index in 2023?

In 2023, people with the highest loneliness scores (i.e., the top 25th percentile) had notably lower (9pp) PWI compared to other respondents (see Figure 3-54). Those with high feelings of loneliness scored well below (8pp) the PWI normative range, while all others scored within the normative range.

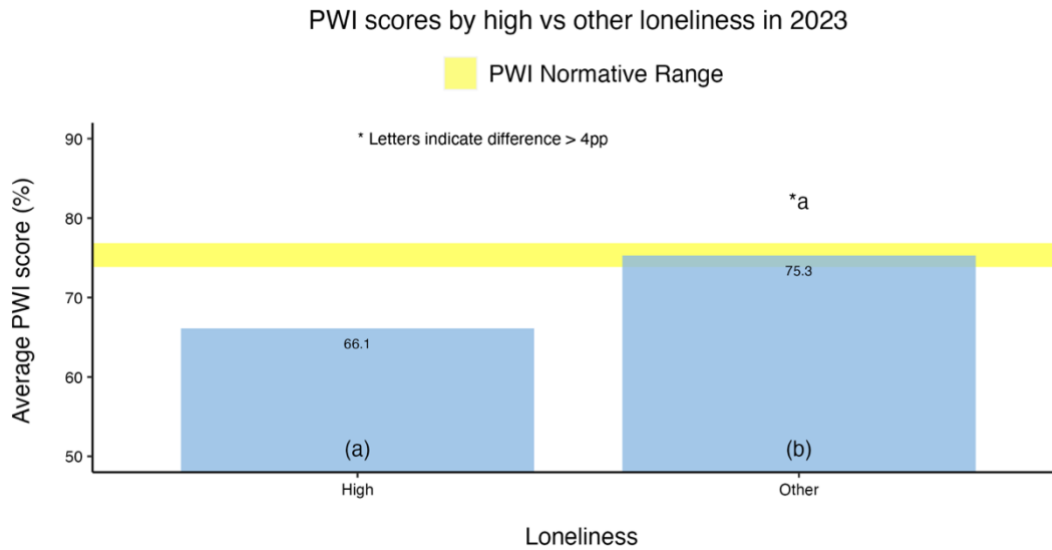


Figure 3-54 PWI scores by high (top 25th percentile) feelings of loneliness in 2023

3.2.5 Topic 5: Satisfaction with time for oneself and the Personal Wellbeing Index

Question: “How satisfied do you generally feel with the amount of time you have for yourself?” 0 (Not at all) to 100 (Extremely)

3.2.5.1 Satisfaction with time for oneself by age groups and household income

RQ9: Did satisfaction with time for oneself change across age and income groups in 2023?

In 2023, average feelings of satisfaction with the amount of time for oneself were lowest for adults aged 36-45 years (mean score of 52pp) – see Figure 3-55. This group had meaningfully lower (9-21pp) satisfaction levels than those aged 18-25 years and those aged 46 years and above. Adults aged 26-35 years were also notably less satisfied (11-17pp) with free time for themselves than those aged 56 years and above.

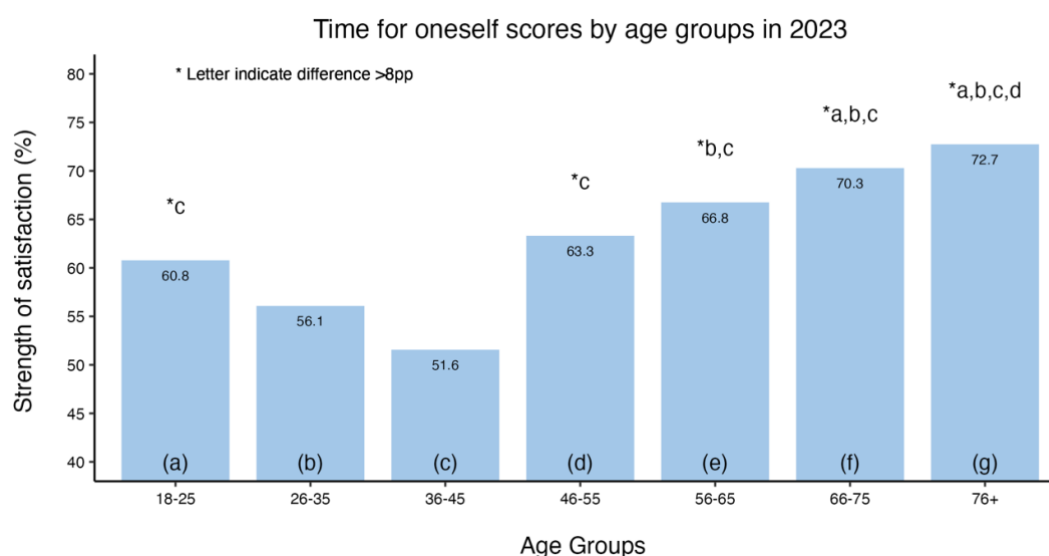


Figure 3-55 Satisfaction with time for oneself scores by age groups in 2023

Average feelings of satisfaction with the amount of time for oneself were highest in the lowest household income group ($\leq \$30k$) – see Figure 3-56. This group was notably more satisfied (9pp) with their time for oneself than those on household incomes earning over \$150k.

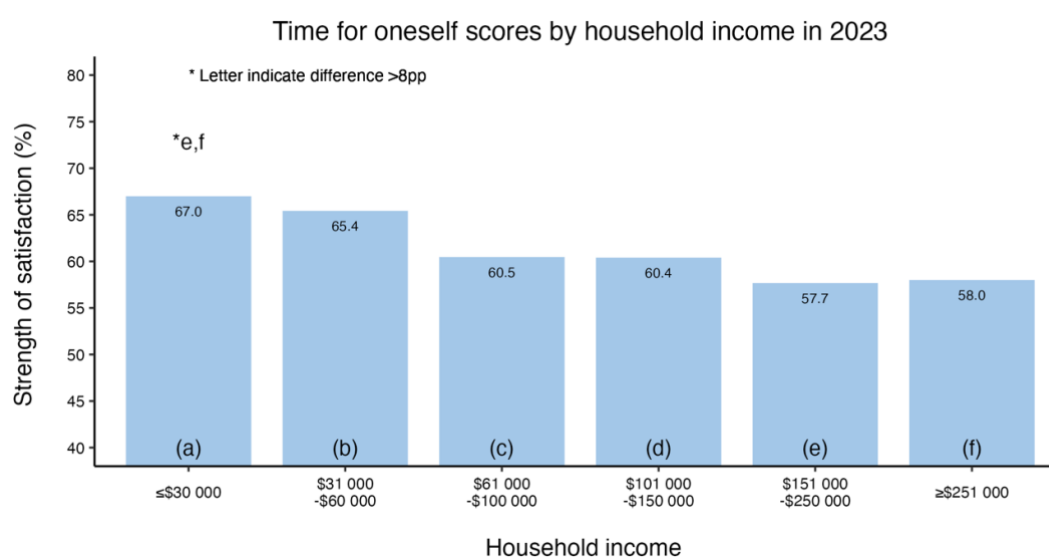


Figure 3-56 Satisfaction with time for oneself scores by household income in 2023

3.2.5.2 Personal wellbeing by satisfaction with time for oneself

RQ10: Was satisfaction with time for oneself related to the Personal Wellbeing Index in 2023?

In 2023, people with the highest satisfaction with time for oneself scores (i.e., the top 25th percentile) had notably higher (5pp) PWI compared to other respondents and scored well above the normative range (see Figure 3-57).

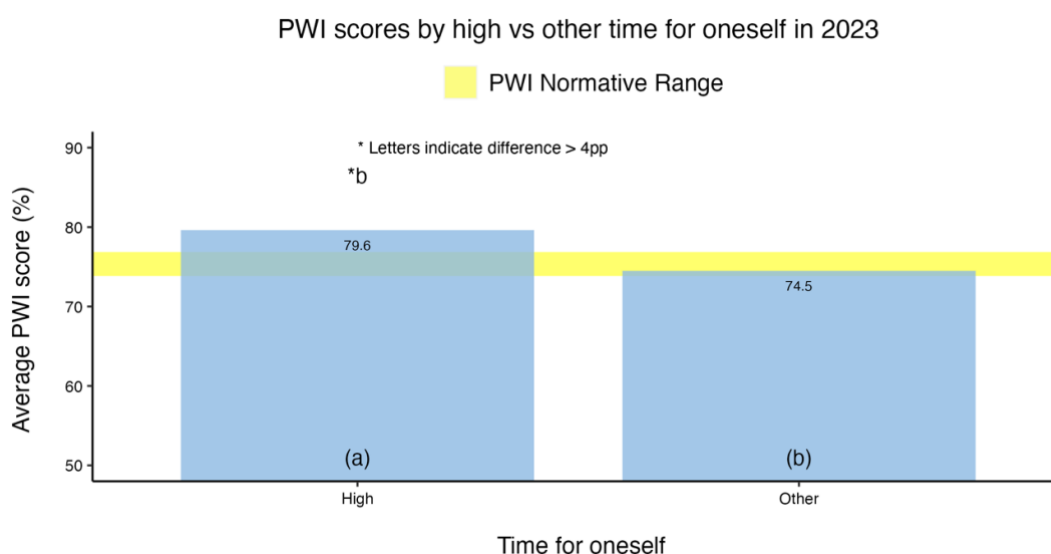


Figure 3-57 PWI scores by high (top 25th percentile) satisfaction with time for oneself in 2023

3.2.1 Topic 6: Carers wellbeing in 2023

In the 2023 survey, all respondents were asked whether they provided unpaid and/or paid care to someone due to their ongoing illness, disability or old age to enable further examination of the wellbeing of carers within the sample. Additional questions were asked about the characteristics of informal and professional carers to examine characteristics within caring groups, as well as questions about their satisfaction with access to certain carer supports. Refer to Section 2.3.2 of this report for details on the exact wording, response options and scales used to ask these questions.

3.2.1.1 Carer sample demographics

In 2023, 21% of the sample identified as informal carers and 8% as professional carers. Of these, there was a crossover of 49 people (2% of full sample) who held both informal and professional carer roles. For the purpose of comparison, we have broken down the sample into four groups: informal carers, professional carers, both, and non-carers.

A summary of key demographics (gender, age, and income) by carer status are presented in Table 3-4. There were a higher number of female carers (informal and professional; 63%) compared with non-carers (44%). The average age of carers was 51 years of age (SD: 16; Range: 18 to 86 years), although informal carers tended to be older (M: 54 years; SD: 15) and professional carers younger (M: 41 years; SD: 13).

Informal carers tended to be from lower earning households (56% earned \$100k and below), compared with professional carers (48% earned \$100k and below), informal/professional carers (both; 50% earned \$100k and below) and non-carers (49% earned \$100k and below). All informal carers were from more disadvantaged socioeconomic areas than professional carers and non-carers.

A complete summary of demographics can be found in Appendix Table 2-13.

Table 3-4 Summary of key sample characteristics by carer status for 2023

| | Proportion (%) | | | |
|---|---------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| | Informal carer (n=362) | Professional carer (n=110) | Both (n=49) | Non-carer (n=1445) |
| Gender | | | | |
| Male | 38.7 | 30.9 | 18.4 | 54.5 |
| Female | 59.4 | 69.1 | 79.6 | 43.7 |
| Non-binary / gender diverse | 1.9 | 0.0 | 2.0 | 1.7 |
| Age Group (years) | | | | |
| 18 – 25 | 4.8 | 13.9 | 8.2 | 15.6 |
| 26 – 35 | 9.4 | 23.2 | 10.2 | 19.3 |
| 36 – 45 | 11.1 | 31.5 | 20.4 | 17.7 |
| 46 – 55 | 23.0 | 12.0 | 30.6 | 14.7 |
| 56 – 65 | 28.4 | 13.0 | 24.5 | 13.2 |
| 66 – 75 | 16.2 | 6.5 | 6.1 | 12.4 |
| 76+ | 7.1 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 7.1 |
| Household Income | | | | |
| ≤\$30,000 | 15.2 | 4.4 | 4.8 | 14.1 |
| \$31,000 - \$60,000 | 22.2 | 17.8 | 16.7 | 15.4 |
| \$61,000 - \$100,000 | 18.5 | 25.6 | 28.6 | 19.7 |
| \$101,000 - \$150,000 | 18.5 | 22.2 | 23.8 | 18.0 |
| \$151,000 - \$250,000 | 16.9 | 15.6 | 21.4 | 22.6 |
| ≥\$251,000 | 8.6 | 14.4 | 4.8 | 10.1 |
| Socioeconomic advantage and disadvantage | | | | |
| SEIFA-IRSAD (M, SD) | 998 (76) | 1019 (75) | 994 (78) | 1014 (77) |

3.2.1.2 Caring role characteristics

3.2.1.2.1 Informal carers

Characteristics of all informal carers are presented in Table 3-5 below. The majority of informal carers held only one informal caring role (85%), with the most common person they cared for being a parent or parent-in-law (31%) or a child or grandchild (21%). Most had been an informal carer for between 3 to 9 years (45%), with only a small amount caring for less than 6 months (4%). Almost two-thirds (62%) of the informal caring sample provided less than 20 hours of weekly informal care, while 18% cared for 40 or more hours per week.

Table 3-5 Summary of informal carer characteristics for 2023

| Informal carer characteristics (n=411) | Proportion (%) |
|--|----------------|
| Number of people caring for | |
| 1 person | 84.9 |
| Child or grandchild | 20.5 |
| Partner or spouse | 13.7 |
| Sibling | 3.4 |
| Parent or parent-in-law | 31.0 |
| Grandparent | 2.4 |
| Other | 13.9 |
| 2 people | 12.9 |
| Child & partner | 2.7 |
| Child & parent | 4.9 |
| Other combination | 5.4 |
| 3+ or more people | 2.2 |
| Length of time as an informal carer | |
| Less than 6 months | 4.4 |
| 6 months to 2 years | 19.0 |
| 3 years to 9 years | 45.1 |
| 10 years to 19 years | 17.6 |
| 20 or more years | 13.9 |
| Hours per week spent caring | |
| Less than 5 hours | 22.1 |
| 5 to 9 hours | 19.2 |
| 10 to 19 hours | 21.1 |
| 20 to 39 hours | 19.7 |
| 40+ hours | 17.9 |

3.2.1.2.2 Professional carers

Characteristics of all professional carers are presented in Table 3-6 below. Those who saw themselves as a professional carer held a wide range of occupations, the most common of these were carer/support workers (31%) or nurse/assistant nurses (22%). Respondents provided their occupation via open response and a number of occupations (13%) were not interpretable or categorisable.

The majority of professional carers had been in their profession for between 3 to 9 years (35%), with only a small amount working for less than 6 months (6%). Almost two-thirds (61%) of the paid caring sample worked part time hours in their role, with the remaining working a full time equivalent load (35+ hours per week).

Table 3-6 Summary of professional carer characteristics for 2023

| Professional carer characteristics (n=159) | Proportion (%) |
|---|----------------|
| Professional occupation | |
| Carer/Support Worker | 30.8 |
| Nurse/Assistant Nurse | 21.8 |
| Medical Practitioner | 8.3 |
| Counsellor/Psychologist | 3.9 |
| Allied Health Practitioner | 10.9 |
| Social/Family Worker | 2.6 |
| Spiritual Leader | 2.6 |
| Teacher/Educator | 6.4 |
| Not interpretable | 12.8 |
| Length of time as a professional carer | |
| Less than 6 months | 5.7 |
| 6 months to 2 years | 17.7 |
| 3 years to 9 years | 35.4 |
| 10 years to 19 years | 17.7 |
| 20 or more years | 23.4 |
| Hours per week working as a carer | |
| 1-19 hours | 24.2 |
| 20 to 34 hours | 36.3 |
| 35 to 44 hours | 30.6 |
| 45 to 59 hours | 7.0 |
| 60+ hours | 1.9 |

3.2.1.3 Wellbeing by carer status

This section of the report compares the personal wellbeing, mental distress, loneliness and satisfaction with time for oneself among the four carer status groups: informal carers, professional carers, both and non-carers.

3.2.1.3.1 Personal wellbeing by carer status

RQ11: How does personal wellbeing differ in carers versus non-carers?

3.2.1.3.1.1 PWI by carer status

In 2023, average PWI scores were just below the normative range for informal carers and just above the normative range for professional carers (including the both group) – see Figure 3-58.

However, there were no notable differences between the four groups.

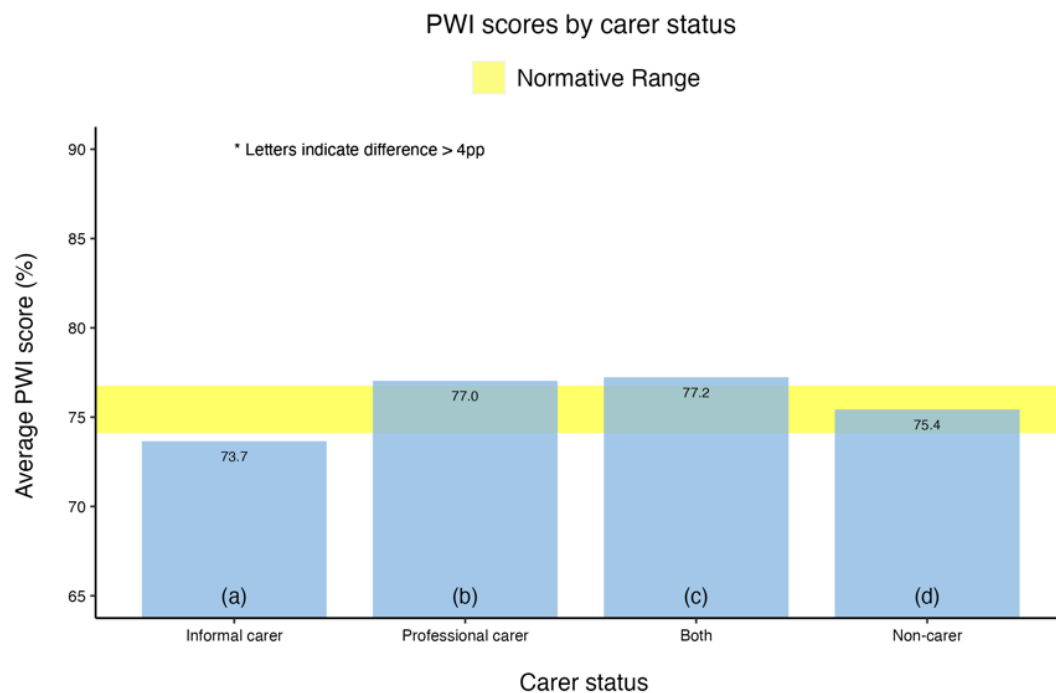


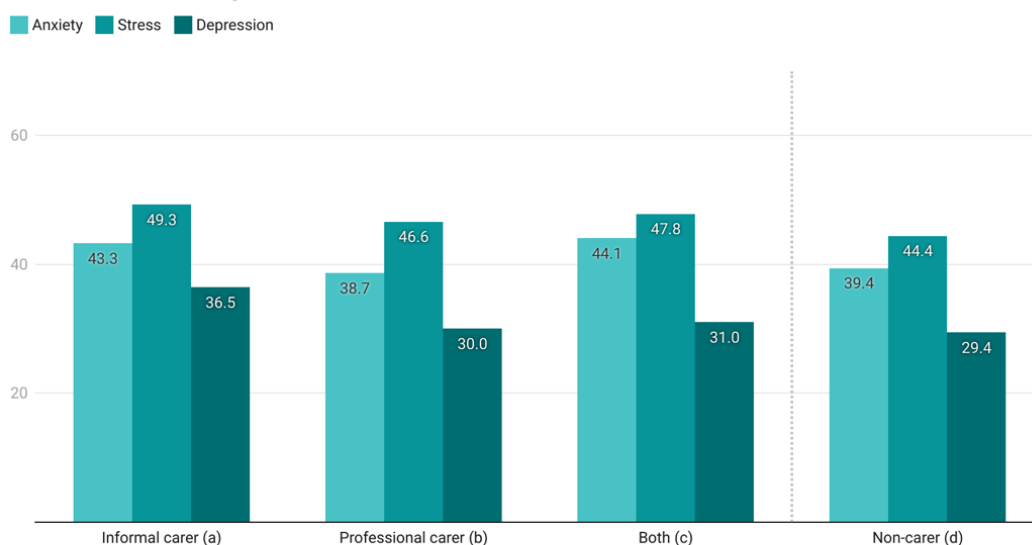
Figure 3-58 PWI scores by carer status in 2023

3.2.1.3.2 Mental distress by carer status

RQ12: How does mental distress differ in carers versus non-carers?

Average scores for feelings of anxiety, stress and depression by carer status are presented in Figure 3-59. Informal carers showed a pattern of higher feelings of anxiety, stress, and depression than professional carers (3-7pp) and non-carers (4-7pp), however these differences did not reach our threshold of being meaningfully different. The difference in feelings of depression between informal carers and other participants was close to being meaningfully different.

Mental distress by carer status



The Y axis shows strength of feelings (%).

Chart: Deakin University • Source: Australian Unity Wellbeing Index, 2023 • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 3-59 Mental distress by carer status in 2023

3.2.1.3.3 Loneliness by carer status

RQ13: How does loneliness differ in carers versus non-carers?

Average feelings of loneliness were slightly higher for informal carers when compared to other carers (5-6pp) and non-carers (3pp), although these differences did not reach our threshold for being meaningfully different (see Appendix Figure 2-4).

3.2.1.3.4 Satisfaction with time for oneself by carer status

RQ14: How does satisfaction with time for oneself differ in carers versus non-carers?

Average feelings of satisfaction with the amount of time for oneself were slightly lower (3-6pp) for professional carers compared to informal carers and non-carers but these differences were not deemed meaningful (see Appendix Figure 2-5).

3.2.1.4 Carer satisfaction with access to supports

The next section of the report compares satisfaction among informal and professional carers on three key carer supports. All carers were asked:

When thinking of your caring role or roles, on a scale from zero to 10, where zero means 'Not satisfied at all' and 10 means 'Completely satisfied', how satisfied do you feel with your:

- Access to carer training and skills courses
- Access to psychological support for carers

c) *Ability to connect with other carers to share experiences and advice*

RQ15: How does satisfaction with access to supports differ in informal versus professional carers?

A comparison of satisfaction with access to supports for the two carer groups is presented in Figure 3-60. Informal carers were the least satisfied with their access to psychological support. When compared to respondents who worked as a professional carer, informal carers had notably lower satisfaction with access to carer training and skills courses (21pp), psychological support for carers (16pp), and ability to connect with other carers to share experiences and advice (23pp).

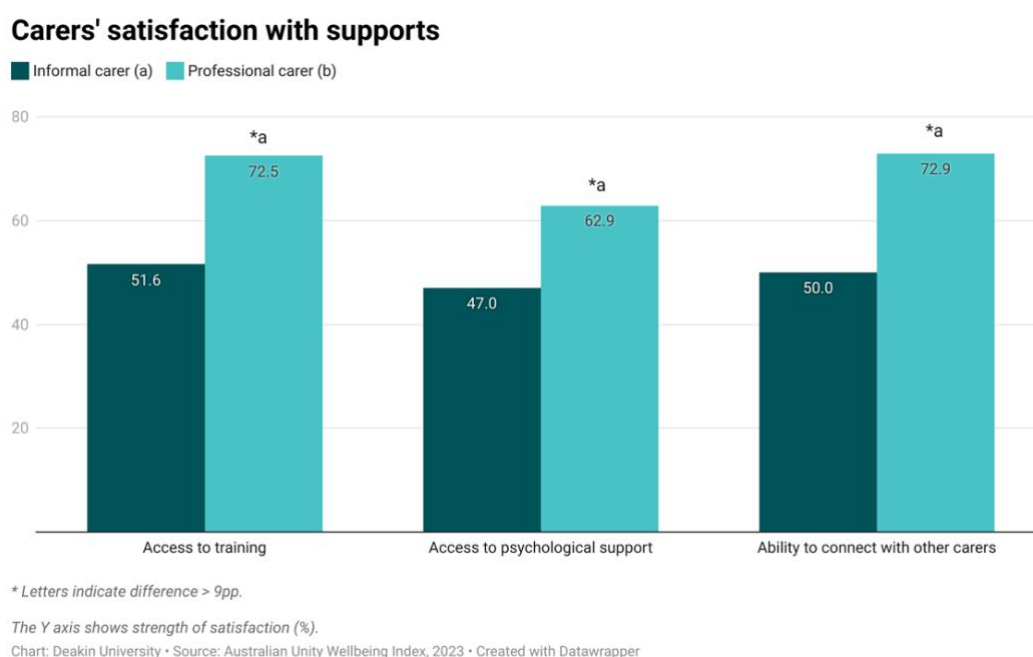


Figure 3-60 Satisfaction with supports by carer status in 2023

3.2.1.5 Wellbeing of informal carers

The informal carer group fell below the normative range on the PWI and showed a pattern of higher levels of mental distress and loneliness than professional carers and non-carers. Additionally, this group was overwhelmingly less satisfied with their access to certain carer supports than professional carers.

As such, we decided to examine if wellbeing differed for informal carers based on their caring load. For the purpose of analysis, carers have been split into three groups for time spent caring each week: less than 20 hours (62%), 20-39 hours (20%) and 40+ hours (18%). These groupings were chosen to match previous carer samples (e.g., AUWI Report 17.1, Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2018-19, 2022 Carer Wellbeing Survey).

Within-group comparison for informal carers based on their caring load are presented for PWI, mental distress, loneliness and satisfaction with time for oneself.

3.2.1.5.1 Informal carer sample demographics compared to population norms

The demographics of the informal carer group are compared to available population norms (ABS 2021) for in Table 3-7. It is notable that the informal carer sample is well matched on gender and state. When comparing age groups, our caring sample is slightly older than the population norms.

Table 3-7 Informal carer demographics (group proportions for the AUWI 2023 survey compared against ABS norms)

| Carer sample characteristics | Proportion (%) | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| | Informal carers (n=362) | ABS Census, 2021 |
| Gender | | |
| Male | 38.7 | 39.8 |
| Female | 59.4 | 60.2 |
| Non-binary / gender diverse | 1.9 | N/A |
| State | | |
| TAS | 2.2 | 2.4 |
| VIC | 28.3 | 27.8 |
| NSW | 33.1 | 30.7 |
| ACT | 1.1 | 1.8 |
| QLD | 19.9 | 19.4 |
| NT | 0.0 | 0.7 |
| WA | 10.6 | 9.3 |
| SA | 4.8 | 7.8 |
| Age Group | | |
| 18 – 24* | 4.0 | 6.4* |
| 25 - 34 | 9.1 | 10.5 |
| 35 - 44 | 11.7 | 16.6 |
| 45 - 54 | 21.0 | 21.7 |
| 55 - 64 | 26.7 | 22.7 |
| 65 - 74 | 18.2 | 14.3 |
| 75+ | 9.4 | 7.7 |

* ABS age group includes 15-24 year olds

3.2.1.5.2 Personal wellbeing by weekly hours spent as an informal carer

RQ16: How does personal wellbeing differ in informal carers by weekly caring load?

Average PWI scores were below the normative range for people who spent 20 or more hours providing informal care each week (see Figure 3-61). These carers had notably lower (3.7-6pp) PWI than non-carers and carers who provided less than 20 hours of care per week.

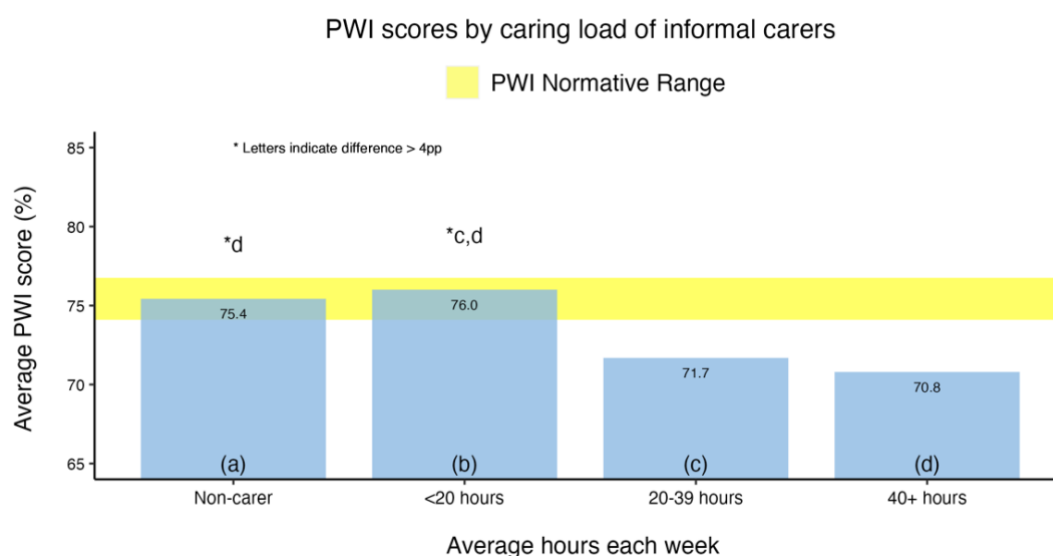


Figure 3-61 PWI by caring load of informal carers in 2023

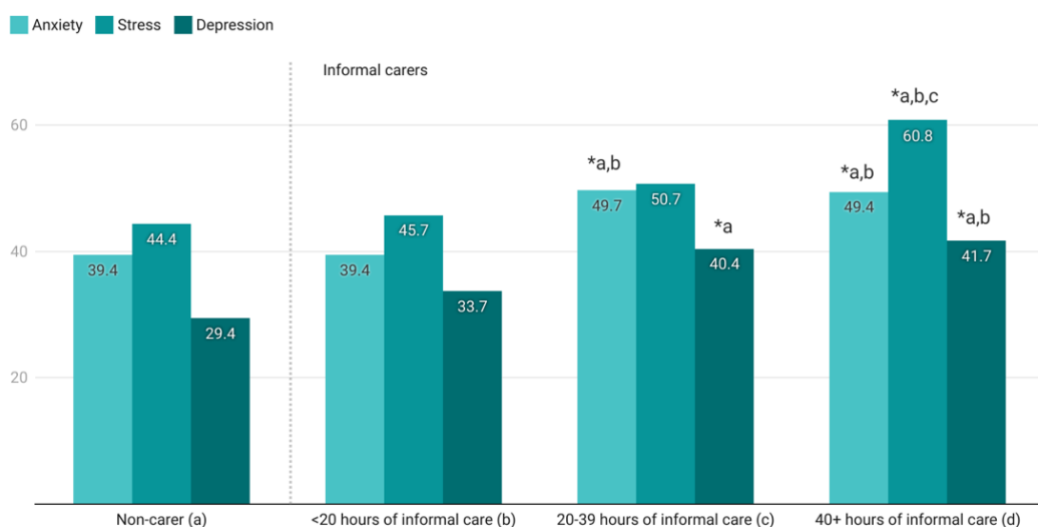
3.2.1.5.3 Mental distress by weekly hours spent as an informal carer

RQ17: How does mental distress differ in informal carers by weekly caring load?

Average scores for feelings of anxiety, stress and depression by caring load of informal carers are presented in Figure 3-62. Informal carers with caring loads of less than 20 hours per week reported similar average levels of mental distress to non-carers. However, as respondents' weekly caring load increased, so did average levels of mental distress.

Informal carers caring for over 20 hours per week had notably higher feelings of anxiety (10pp) and depression (7-12pp) than those with lower caring loads and non-carers. Those caring for over 40 hours per week also had notably higher feelings of stress (10-16pp) than those with lower caring loads and non-carers.

Mental distress of informal carers in 2023



*Letters indicate a meaningful difference (i.e., 0.3 standard deviations or 8 percentage points) between groups. The Y axis shows strength of feelings (out of 100).

Chart: Deakin University • Source: Australian Unity Wellbeing Index, 2023 • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 3-62 Mental distress by caring load of informal carers in 2023

3.2.1.5.4 Loneliness by weekly hours spent as an informal carer

RQ18: How does loneliness differ in informal carers by weekly caring load?

In 2023, informal carers providing less than 20 hours of care each week had similar average loneliness scores to non-carers (see Figure 3-63). Average feelings of loneliness were notably higher (8-9pp) for informal carers caring more than 20 hours per week compared to carers with lighter loads and non-carers.

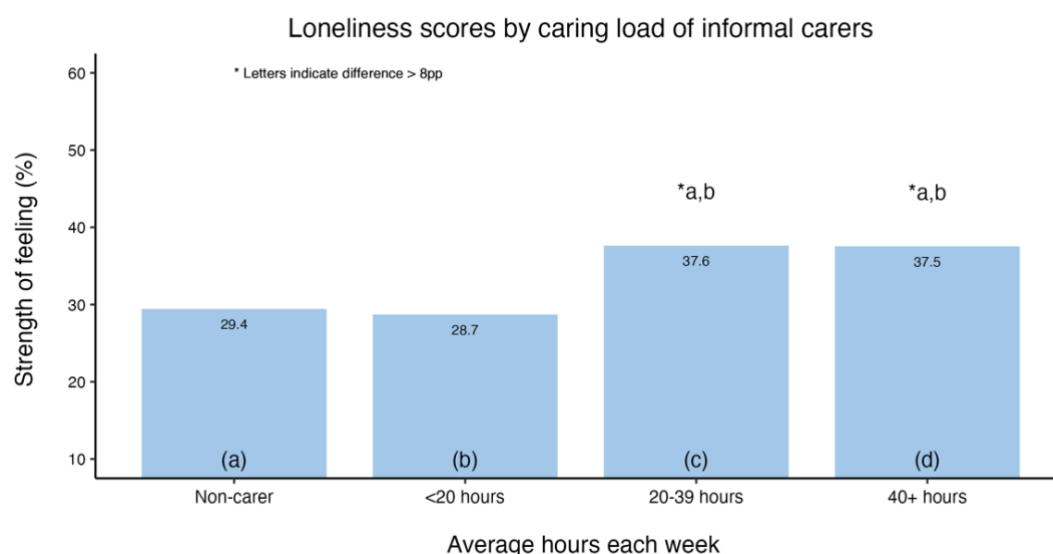


Figure 3-63 Feelings of loneliness by caring load of informal carers in 2023

3.2.1.5.5 Satisfaction with time for oneself by weekly hours spent as an informal carer

RQ19: How does satisfaction with time for oneself differ in informal carers by weekly caring load?

In 2023, average satisfaction with the amount of time for oneself decreased with time spent providing informal care each week (see Figure 3-64). Informal carers providing 40 or more hours of care each week had notably lower (8-9pp) satisfaction than those providing less than 20 hours per week or non-carers.

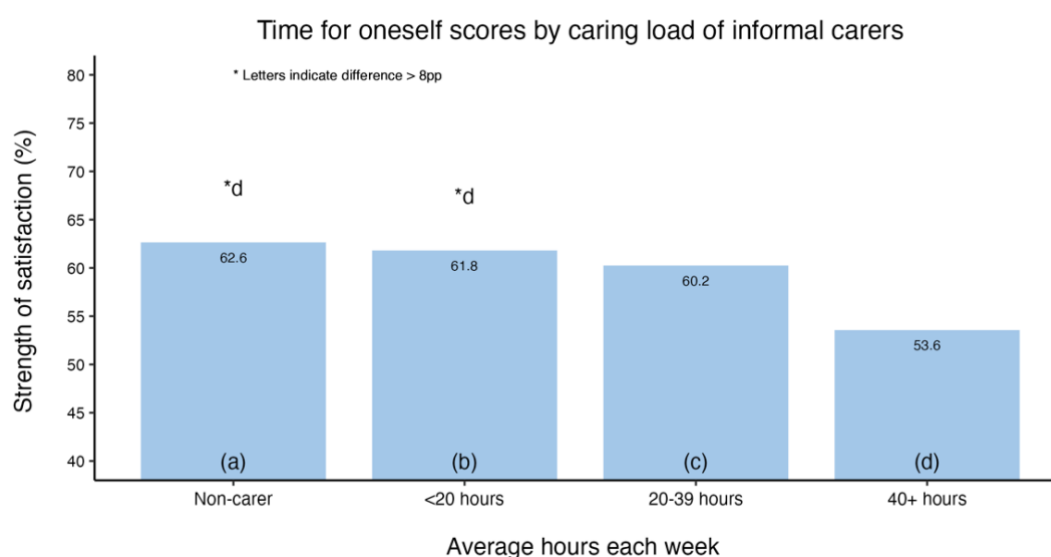


Figure 3-64 Satisfaction with time for oneself by caring load of informal carers in 2023

4 CONCLUSION

Australians' wellbeing in 2023

Australians' satisfaction 'with life as a whole' in 2023 remained below normal levels, while Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI) scores remained within the normal range. Most PWI domains showed small signals of improvement from the downward pattern observed on all domains since 2020.

The rise in satisfaction with 'Community Connectedness' was substantial and may reflect a boost in connections within communities as life returned to near normalcy after the COVID-19 pandemic health emergency. Satisfaction with 'Standard of Living' didn't change in 2023. This is hardly surprising given the cost-of-living pressures that many Australians continue to face.

When we compared average PWI scores for socio-demographic groups to the previous year, people on a household income of \$30,000 or less and semi-retired people had notably higher PWI scores in 2023 compared to 2022. The boost in semi-retirees' wellbeing could be due to interest rate rises increasing savings and superannuation balances (Janda & Chalmers, 2023) and a return to normal life post pandemic. However, the boost in wellbeing for those with low household incomes was unexpected.

One possible explanation could be the Federal Budget cost-of-living relief package announcements just weeks before data collection. Even though many of the policy announcements came into effect after data collection, they may have led to boosts in wellbeing. Interestingly, a similar boost was seen in this group in 2020, when many pandemic government supports were in place. Nonetheless, this group remained below normal population levels of personal wellbeing.

Clear age and income divides were apparent in personal wellbeing. This divide was also evident last year and suggests changing inequities in wellbeing. Notably lower PWI scores were observed in those aged 55 years or under compared to older age groups, and those with household incomes of \$100,000 or under compared to higher income households. Age and income divides were particularly apparent for satisfaction with 'Standard of Living'. This fits with recent data showing increasing savings and spending in older age groups and less spending and more debt in younger age groups (Janda & Chalmers, 2023).

These age and income divides were less apparent for national wellbeing. Australians' satisfaction with 'life in Australia' and scores on the National Wellbeing Index (NWI) remained low. For the NWI, the small decline in 2023 was largely driven by a sharp fall in satisfaction with the 'Economic Situation in Australia'. Average scores in this domain dropped to a record low, well beneath levels recorded during the Global Financial Crisis of 2008.

Carers' wellbeing in 2023

As our population rapidly ages, so does demand for informal and formal care. Over one in four respondents reported holding some form of caring role and were more likely to be female. Of these, over two-thirds were informal carers.

Informal care can take on many forms – from supporting a neighbour a few hours a week, to providing round the clock care to a family member. Informal carers with lighter caring loads (less than 20 hours per week) showed little difference in wellbeing and mental distress compared with non-carers. On the other hand, informal carers providing unpaid care for over 20 hours per week,

and especially those caring for 40+ hours per week, had lower personal wellbeing and higher mental distress than non-carers – highlighting they are doing it tough.

Informal carers also felt far less satisfied with their access to carer training and skills courses, psychological support and ability to connect with other carers compared to professional carers. Increasing access to carer specific supports may boost wellbeing and improve mental distress in informal carers.

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