

Australian Unity Wellbeing Index

Report 30B: Summary report

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Part A: The Report

Subjective wellbeing and time use - Could we be using our time better?

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30B.1 The importance of connecting with others

We have now conducted 30 surveys measuring the subjective wellbeing of the Australian population using the Australian Unity Wellbeing Index. Over the past 12 years, the importance of two key aspects to wellbeing have been continuously reinforced: personal relationships, and a sense of achieving something useful in life. In the past year, we have explored these two components in more detail, and the results suggest that we do not always spend our time engaged in what is best for our wellbeing.

A consistent finding across our 30 surveys is that married people record the highest levels of wellbeing. The importance of having a close relationship is key.

These results come from Table A 30B.1.

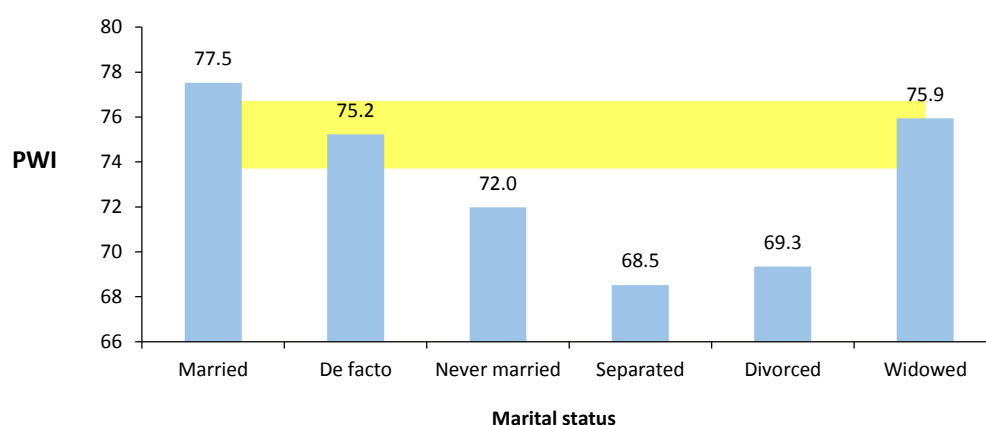


Figure 1: Marital status x PWI

We also know from our 23rd and 28th surveys that people who have children have higher subjective wellbeing ($M = 76.29, SD = 12.50$) than those who do not ($M = 74.39, SD = 12.64$) (See Table A 30B.2). Moreover, enhanced subjective wellbeing extends to parent relationships. In Survey 29 we learned that having frequent contact with one's mother and mother-in-law is associated with higher wellbeing, beyond having frequent contact with only one maternal figure and not the other.

These results come from Table A 30B.3.

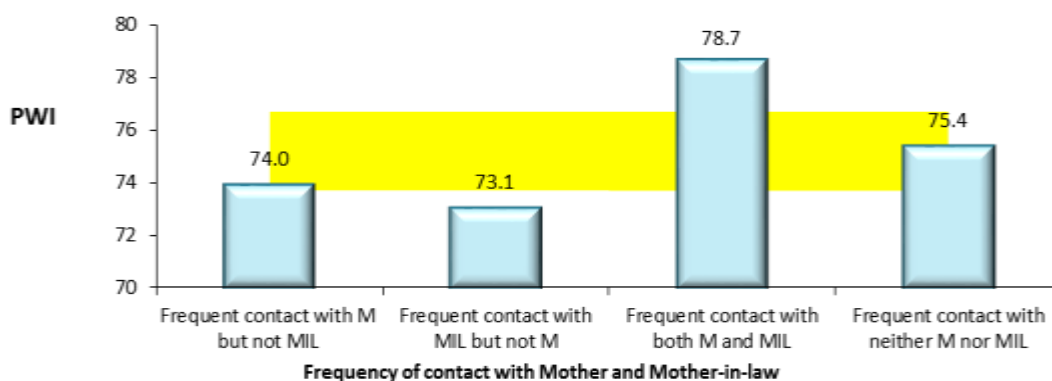


Figure 2: Frequency of contact with Mother and Mother-in-law x PWI

Together, these findings highlight the importance of having a close family unit that includes partners, children, and parents.

However, all is not lost for those who have never been married. For these people, frequent contact with one’s mother, to the point of living in the same household, keeps subjective wellbeing within the normal range for Australians.

These results come from Table A 30B.4 where we asked ‘How often are you in contact with your mother?’

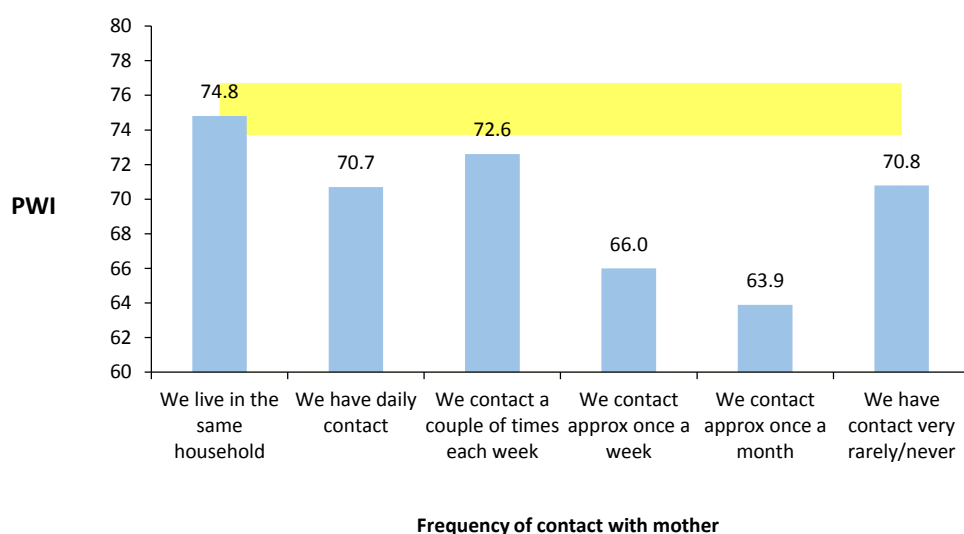


Figure 3: Frequency of contact with Mother x PWI (never married)

Another important aspect of subjective wellbeing is having a sense of personal achievement in life. In our most recent survey, we asked people what gave them the greatest source of personal achievement. The vast majority (85.4%) reported that they gained the greatest sense of personal achievement from their family, their partner, or from connecting with others through volunteer work.

These results come from Table A 30B.5.

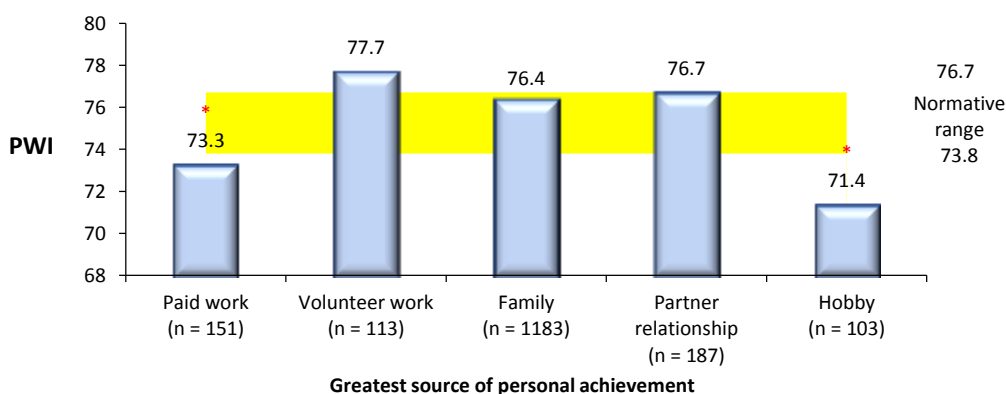


Figure 4: Greatest source of personal achievement x PWI

In summary, spending time with close others is important to subjective wellbeing not just for the social support they provide, but for the sense of achievement and accomplishment that is generated through these relationships.

So, spending time with family, or with other people (via volunteering), is good for your wellbeing.

30B.2 How well are we spending our time?

In further support of the benefits of volunteering for wellbeing, the combined findings from our series of 30 surveys reveal that when we consider how people are spending their time, the highest wellbeing belongs to those who are full time volunteers.

These results come from Table A 30B.6

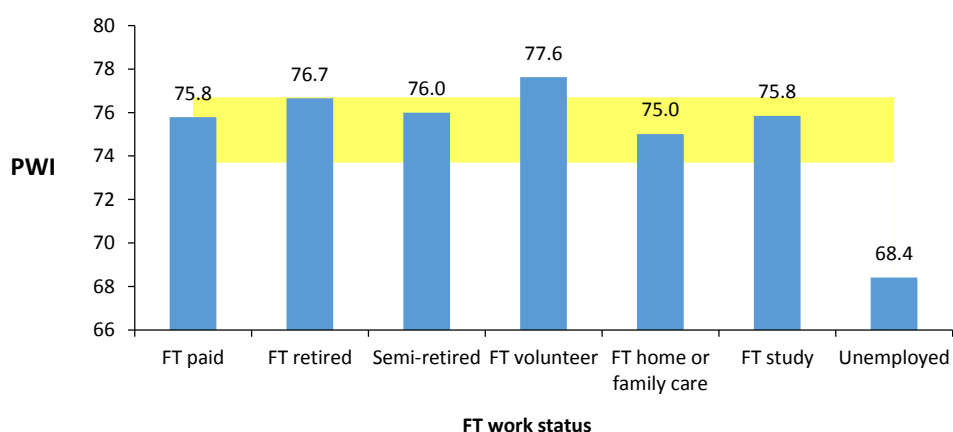


Figure 5: FT work status x PWI

Although the positive effects of volunteering for wellbeing are well recognised, only a very small proportion of the population (0.5%) engage in volunteer work full-time, while around 12% are part-time volunteers. In Survey 29, we asked participants what they would do if they had an extra 2 hours in their week to do anything they wanted, and only 5% reported that they would do volunteer work. This suggests that volunteering is not something that leaps to mind as a way to spend time. The most frequent response was to spend time with family, and the people who responded this way had an average level of subjective wellbeing that was above the normal range for all Australians.

These results come from Table A 30B.7. In this figure, the average wellbeing scores for the participants who endorsed each response are colour coded. The segments shaded in green represent an average wellbeing scores of the group above the normal range (>76.7 points). The blue areas represent responses associated with an average wellbeing score within the normal range (73.7-76.7), and the red areas are responses associated with wellbeing scores that fall below the normal range (<73.7 points).

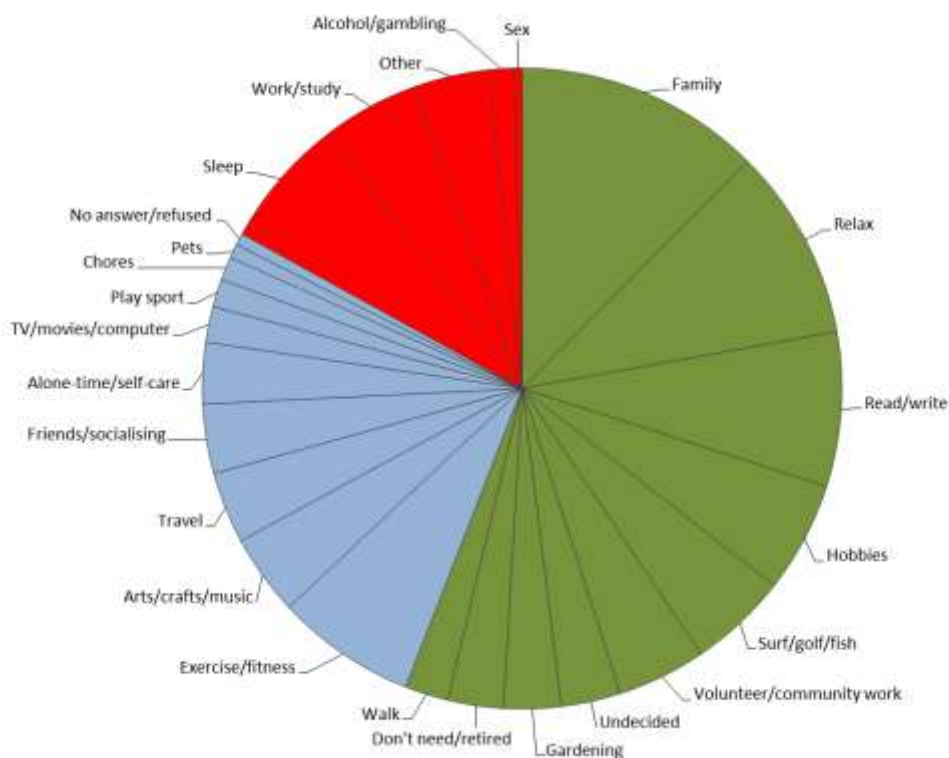


Figure 6: What would you do with two extra hours in your week?

Rather than choosing to spend time with family, over 40% of participants reported that they would spend an extra 2 hours engaged in other activities, like sleeping, working, or spending time alone, that are associated with lower wellbeing. These findings, together with the volunteering findings above, suggest that the priorities for time expenditure for many people may be misdirected, and could be better spent on activities that are more beneficial to wellbeing.

In Survey 30, we asked people how much time they spend engaging in the single activity that gives them the greatest source of achievement. The results are shown in Figure 7.

These results come from Table A30B.8.

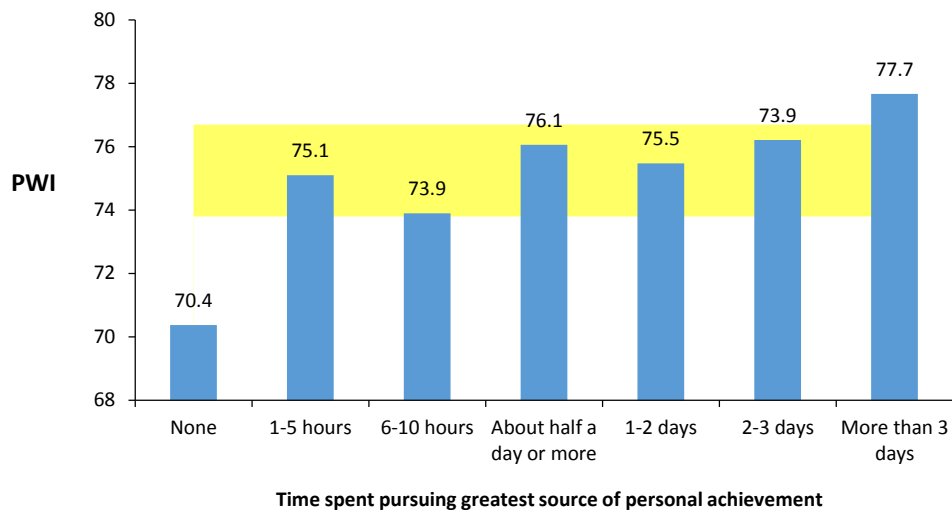


Figure 7: Time spent pursuing greatest source of personal achievement x PWI

Almost half of the participants reported that they spent less than 24 hours of their week engaged in the activity that gives them the greatest sense of achievement. Even when the greatest source of achievement was garnered through connecting with others, the highest wellbeing was experienced by those who spent 3 or more days in that pursuit (see Table A30B.9).

Connecting with others is a great source of higher wellbeing, and this includes spending time with family and volunteer work. However, many people are choosing to spend their leisure time doing things with only weak benefits for wellbeing.