



Happiness Report Card  
2021  
Part Two



# Contents

03

---

## Greetings

10 years of data gathering.  
Reflections on sampling.

05

---

## Satisfaction with Life

The role of Satisfaction with Life in the Pursuit of Happiness.  
What you can do for a happy life: decisions, plans and actions.

09

---

## Health

The 2020 happiness theme.  
Keeping your health: an ounce of prevention.

13

---

## Community

How important is it? Very.  
Maslow's hierarchy.  
3 kinds of community.

07

---

## Psychological Wellbeing

A gentle decline.  
Three key lessons for your mind: gratitude, generosity and mindfulness.

11

---

## Time Balance

How low can we go?  
The role of leisure in happiness.  
Vacation laws.

15

---

## Social Support

A dimension of community.  
Social safety networks.  
Happy relationships.

17

---

## Lifelong Learning & Culture

Falling down.  
Discrimination and Representation.  
Commitment to justice.

21

---

## Government

Dipping down.  
The role of government in happiness.  
Influence and control.

25

---

## Work

Just above neutral.  
Your life's work, your calling.

28

---

## What next

What you can do for global happiness.

19

---

## Environment

The air we breathe.  
Enjoying nature and open areas.  
Nobody wants an unsustainable earth.

23

---

## Economy/SoL

High v. lows.  
Oikos and the genesis of the Happiness Movement.  
What is enough?

27

---

## Why not

## Misery?

The surprising difference between happiness and misery metrics

29

---

## About the data

Numbers.

Dear Friend,

We have been measuring happiness for 10 years this year. This makes us one of the longest existing organizations that measure happiness. Our approach is somewhat different from that of other organizations that gather data. We believe in people, We believe in the power of communities. We believe that change happens from the bottom up because, as Margaret Mead said:

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed [people] can change the world: indeed it's the only thing that ever has.

In 2010 we started the Happiness Alliance as a project of Sustainable Seattle, the nonprofit that created the world's first community-based sustainability indicators. We called our project the Happiness Initiative, and eventually had to change our name to the Happiness Alliance because so many places were starting their own Happiness Initiatives. This was in our plan! We designed the Happiness Alliance based on the success of Sustainable Seattle – which you can see in our Happy Community Toolkit and our books, *The Happiness Policy Handbook* and *Happiness, Wellbeing and Sustainability: A Course in Systems Change*.

Core to our work is metrics. Our theory of change is that the metrics we use at a societal level to measure success determine our individual values, which in turn determine individual and collective attitudes and behavior (Compton & Kasser 2009; Maani & Cavana 2007). Over eleven thousand people took our Happiness Index this year to understand their happiness and use our tools for improving personal happiness; we now have over 1 million data points.

Our data is gathered through a convenience sampling. This means that the people who take the survey choose to take it. It also means that we can count on the data reflecting the happiness of those people who took the survey, but we can't say with certainty that the data describes the general population. Traditionally, a random sampling is relied upon to gather data that reliably reflects a population. Random sampling is carried out in a number of ways: telephone calls, face to face interviews (going door to door), by paper ballots, or online.

The way that traditionally has been considered most reliable is the telephone call. However, the adoption of cell phones and the relinquishing of landlines (in the U.S. less than 40% of the population has landlines, and in both India and the U.S. about 90% of the population has cell phones) coupled with the common practice of not answering a call if the caller is unknown gives us pause as to the viability of random sampling gathered through telephone calls. Moreover with Covid-19 extant, face-to-face interviews, at least in 2020 and until a vaccine is ubiquitous and proven, are not wise or viable.

Compton & Kasser 2009;

[assets.wwf.org.uk/downloads/meeting\\_environmental\\_challenges\\_\\_\\_the\\_role\\_of\\_human\\_identity.pdf](https://assets.wwf.org.uk/downloads/meeting_environmental_challenges___the_role_of_human_identity.pdf)

Maani & Cavana 2007 [www.worldcat.org/title/systems-thinking-system-dynamics-managing-change-and-complexity/oclc/174088785](http://www.worldcat.org/title/systems-thinking-system-dynamics-managing-change-and-complexity/oclc/174088785)



This leaves online data gathering and paper ballots. Paper ballots are challenged by the amount of junk mail that people get, and the likelihood that they will be tossed in the recycle before anyone opens them. They can be successful, as demonstrated in Victoria British Columbia in 2010, when there is a great deal of awareness raising among the population.

Gathering data for a random sample online may be viable, but how does one go about contacting the randomly selected people and how does one convince them to take a survey? Survey monkey provides an online data gathering service, but the people it enlists have opted to take surveys and are compensated with the option to donate money.

Another data-gathering system is through social media platforms. This is often called Big Data, because a ton of data is gathered from thousands or millions of posts and then sifted in various ways. Some say this is reliable data, but with the degree of nudging (such as with recommender systems, algorithms that choose whose “friends” posts you see, or malicious bots) we seriously doubt this. Moreover, people who post on social media often post information that reflects a single dimension of their lives, such as accomplishments, rants or vacations, which is not necessarily reflective of how they are actually doing or who they actually are in larger context.

All in all, we think the future in data gathering is convenience sampling, or something similar. We think that when people can choose to contribute, access and then use their data, they are more likely to participate in data collection. More over, when people know they can trust the platform that gathers their data and have a level of control over its governance, they are also more likely to participate in data collection.

Key to gathering data through convenience sampling is awareness raising and engagement. This brings us back to that “small group of thoughtful committed [people]” and the work we are doing. Since 2010, our purpose has been to provide tools, resources and knowledge to support community organizers in the happiness movement, and an important part of that is gathering data with the Happiness Index.

We hope that you will be a part of this effort. We hope that you will raise awareness about the Happiness Index and tell your community – your friends, family, neighbors and co-workers - about this wonderful instrument. We hope that together we do realize a future where all beings flourish.

In gratitude,  
Laura Musikanski, Executive Director of the Happiness Alliance  
James Bradbury, Emeritus Board of Directors Member

The question *How satisfied are you with your life?* is a reflective question. This question is very similar to the Cantril Ladder question, which asks you if your life is the best possible for you. Scores for these questions reveal whether one's life is good or not.

Satisfaction with life is, in one sense, the measurement that matters the most. All the other metrics measure dimensions of happiness that affect how you feel about your satisfaction with life. In other words, if your psychological wellbeing, health or time balance improve, your satisfaction with life will also likely improve. Similarly if the conditions of your life in the areas of community, social support, economics, work, life long learning, culture, the environment and the government improve, your satisfaction with life will probably increase. If various conditions of your life decline, your satisfaction with your life will probably decrease.

Satisfaction with life is important because when you are not satisfied with your life, you are likely to make big life decisions, like moving, changing your job, etc. If you think about it, this makes sense, particularly when you are not satisfied and things will not change unless you do something.

Our Happiness Index scores for satisfaction with life are just above 50, on a scale of 0-100. This means that in general people are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with their lives.

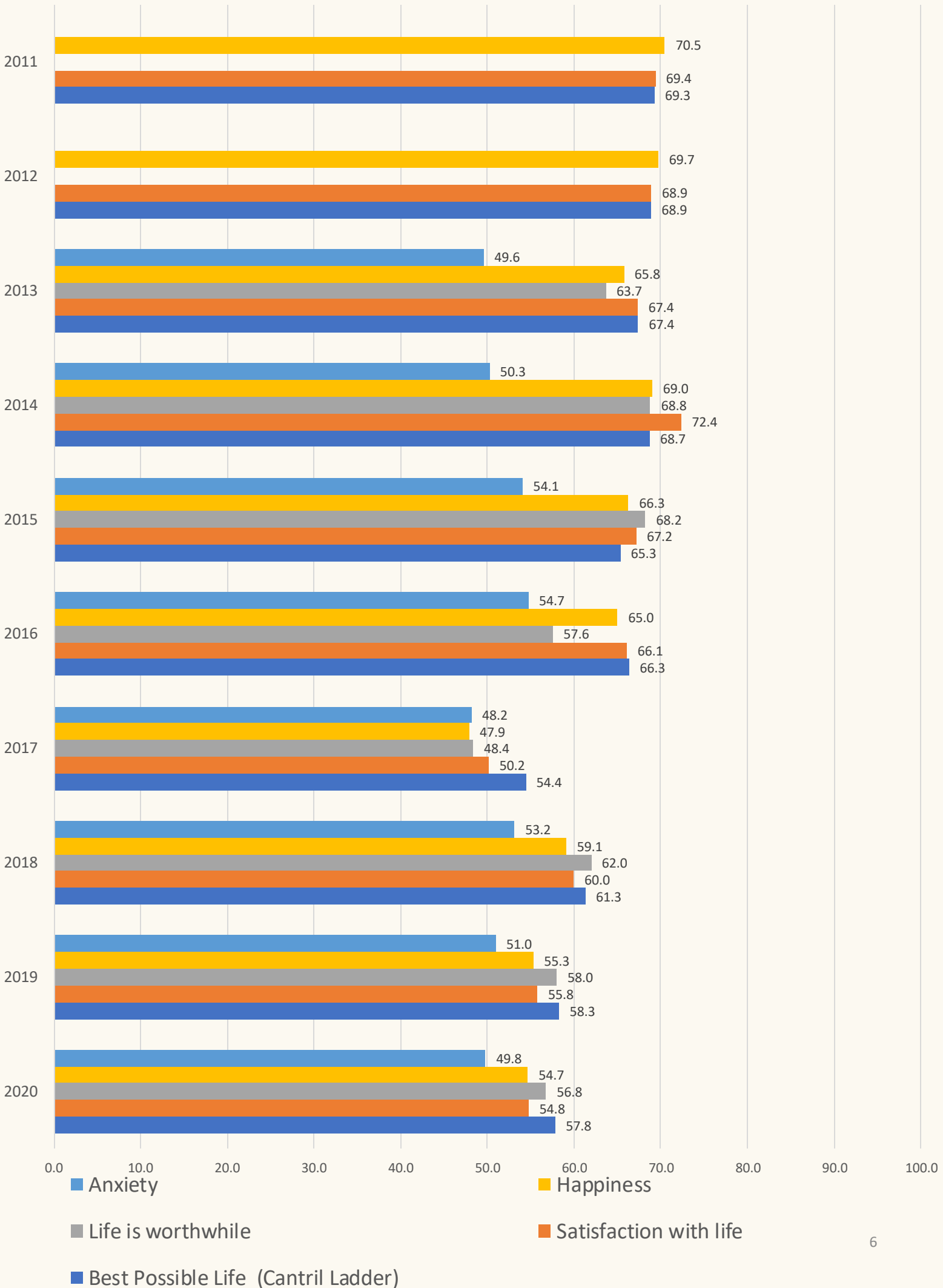
Satisfaction with life scores in the last four years fell by about 10 percent since 2011, but fell only about one point since Covid-19.

The survey also asks questions about feelings: happiness and anxiety. Happiness measurements are not as reflective as satisfaction with life measurements. They give information about how someone feels in the moment. Anxiety measurements also measure your state of mind in the moment. We use anxiety instead of sadness or other negative feelings for two reasons. The first is because we follow the United Kingdom's Office of National Statistics. The other is that anxiety is often a manifestation of depression. Many people who are depressed may or may not feel sad but do feel a lot of anxiety. In this sense, anxiety is the opposite of happiness.

Scores for feelings are important for understanding the effect a place, space, event or situation has on a person. Satisfaction with life scores are based on remembered experiences, and when people have happy experiences that give rise to happy memories, their satisfaction with life increases. The take away: try to plan, design and implement situations and circumstances that give rise to happiness, for your own life, for others, and for populations.

The way the our Happiness Index scores work is that higher scores are always better, so that high scores in anxiety mean someone is not feeling anxious, and low scores mean someone is feeling anxious. Overall, anxiety scores have not changed much over the years, and did not change much with Covid-19, but the scores are not great, at about 51 out of 100. When depression is expressed through anxiety, it often comes out as fear of illness, mishap or death. All of these are inevitable in life, and psychological well-being contributes to the ability to find resilience when dealt the blows of life.

# Satisfaction with Life



Psychological Well-being measures what Positive Psychologists call flourishing or thriving. The field of Positive Psychology changed our understanding of happiness by focusing the entire field of psychology on what makes people mentally healthy, instead of just focusing on causes and cures for mental illness. With this came new measurements.

Our Happiness Index includes five indicators – or questions – for flourishing. They measure (1) sense of purpose and meaning, (2) sense of feeling positive about yourself, (3) optimism, (4) sense of accomplishment and (5) engagement and interest in life. There are many other ways to measure flourishing, some viable and helpful, and others not, but maybe fun (for example, the kind of candy you like might not be the best predictor of your psychological well-being, but you can probably find a survey that will tell you that). A good source for other measures of flourishing is the University of Pennsylvania's Authentic Happiness Questionnaire Center.\*

Over time our Happiness Index has shown a gentle decline in our psychological well-being. This is concerning, as of all the different aspects of happiness that we measure with the Happiness Index, the elements of psychological well-being probably have the highest impact on our satisfaction with life and happiness – and our mood in general. The good news is that this is the one domain where you probably can have the biggest degree of influence and control.

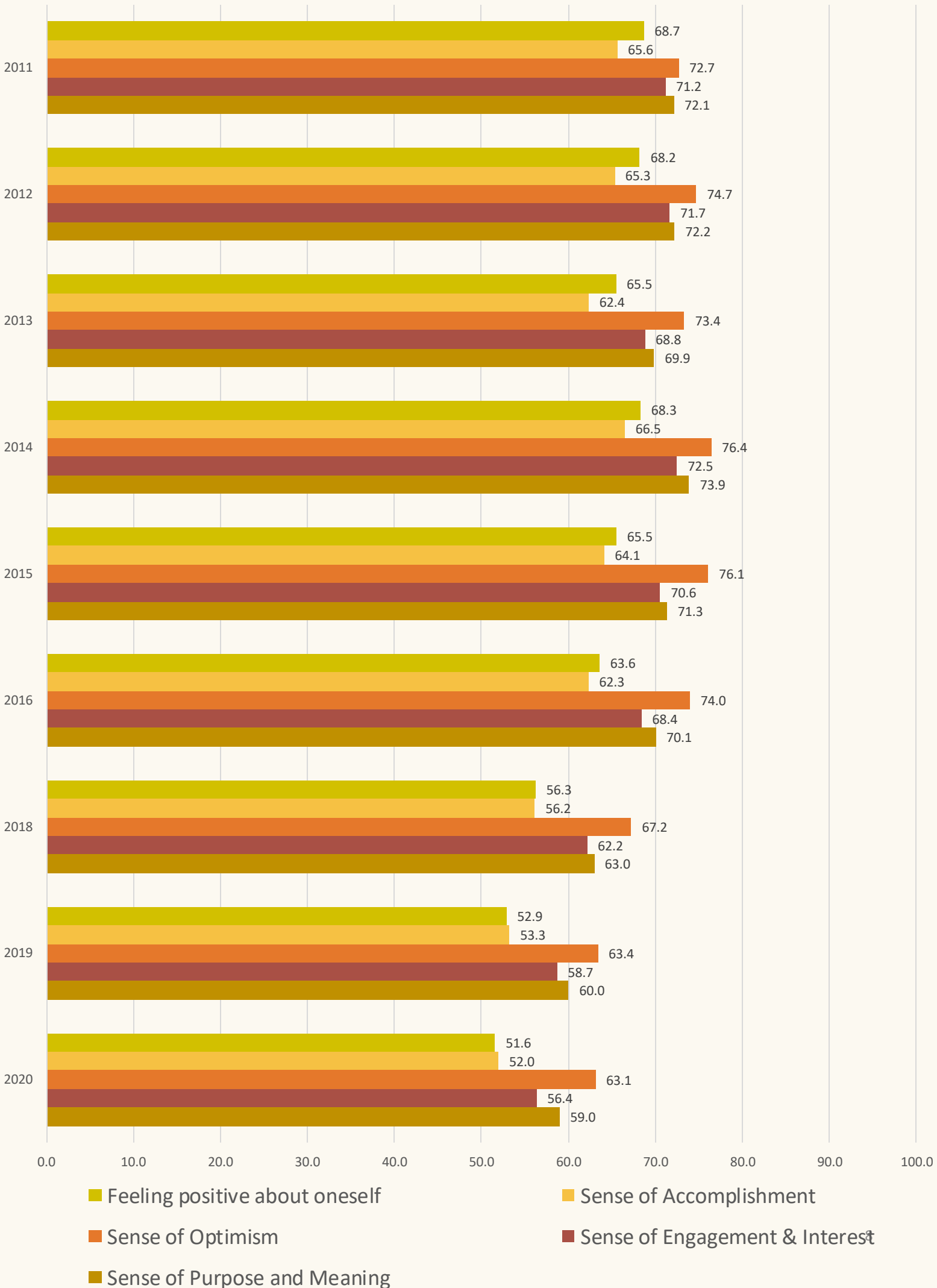
In addition to new metrics, Positive Psychology has also brought us many key lessons about how to be happy. Some of these lessons you probably intuitively knew all along, or maybe your grandmother taught you, or a teacher, when you were little. Others may be new information, or old information presented in a new way so it feels fresh. These lessons boil down to three things you can do to take care of your mind, as well as other things you can do to take care of your body. Practicing gratitude, giving to others, and utilizing mindfulness (called by some contemplation and by others prayer) are the three main ways Positive Psychology researchers have found to increase your happiness – and your psychological wellbeing. Getting good exercise – including about 15 min a day of cardiovascular exercise (always check with your doctor first)- eating healthy foods, getting lots of sleep, and spending time in nature are also scientifically proven ways to improve your psychological well-being and your satisfaction with life.

In the last few years, our psychological well-being scores have fallen by a little over 10%. Also over the last four years, we have edged from 90% of the survey takers coming from the US to about 54%. Over the years, scores in optimism have been higher than any other aspect of our flourishing (psychological well-being) index. While optimism fell by about 10% in the last four years, it remained higher than the other scores. People, in general, do not feel un-optimistic. Where we hurt the most is in our sense of accomplishment and feeling positive about ourselves.

Sense of accomplishment and feeling positive about yourself are highly intertwined. Positive psychology tells us a few things that may be of help: do not compare yourself to others, focus on the good you have done in your life – even if it feels really uncomfortable and hard to do- and practice loving kindness towards yourself.



# Psychological Wellbeing



If we were to name the happiness domain theme for 2020 it would be health. No one escaped concerns for their own and their loved ones health, and many of us suffered loss of loved ones, loss of our own health, and countless losses from living in a pandemic.

2020 was a hard year. We learned how much we take our health for granted, and how hard life is when our health is threatened, or when we are sick. Like many you probably struggled to eat healthily and get good exercise in the face of all the stress, and like many you probably adapted some new habits to safeguard your health, some of which you are glad to have (like taking your vitamins, staying hydrated and getting good sleep) and some of which you would love to no longer have (like wearing a mask – necessary but it's hard).

Our health scores declined by about 7.6% in the last years, but with a lot of differences between the areas of health. The area where we are declined the most is our satisfaction with the quality of our exercise. This would make sense if the decline were all due to 2020 results, but it is not. We fell almost 20 points in the last few years, which is somewhat alarming. We went from an average of about 68 out of 100, meaning we were somewhat satisfied, to 48, meaning we were not unsatisfied, but certainly not satisfied. Scores increased by a little under 4% in satisfaction with ability to perform daily living activities, and overall our scores are about 60%, which is not bad, but obviously not great.

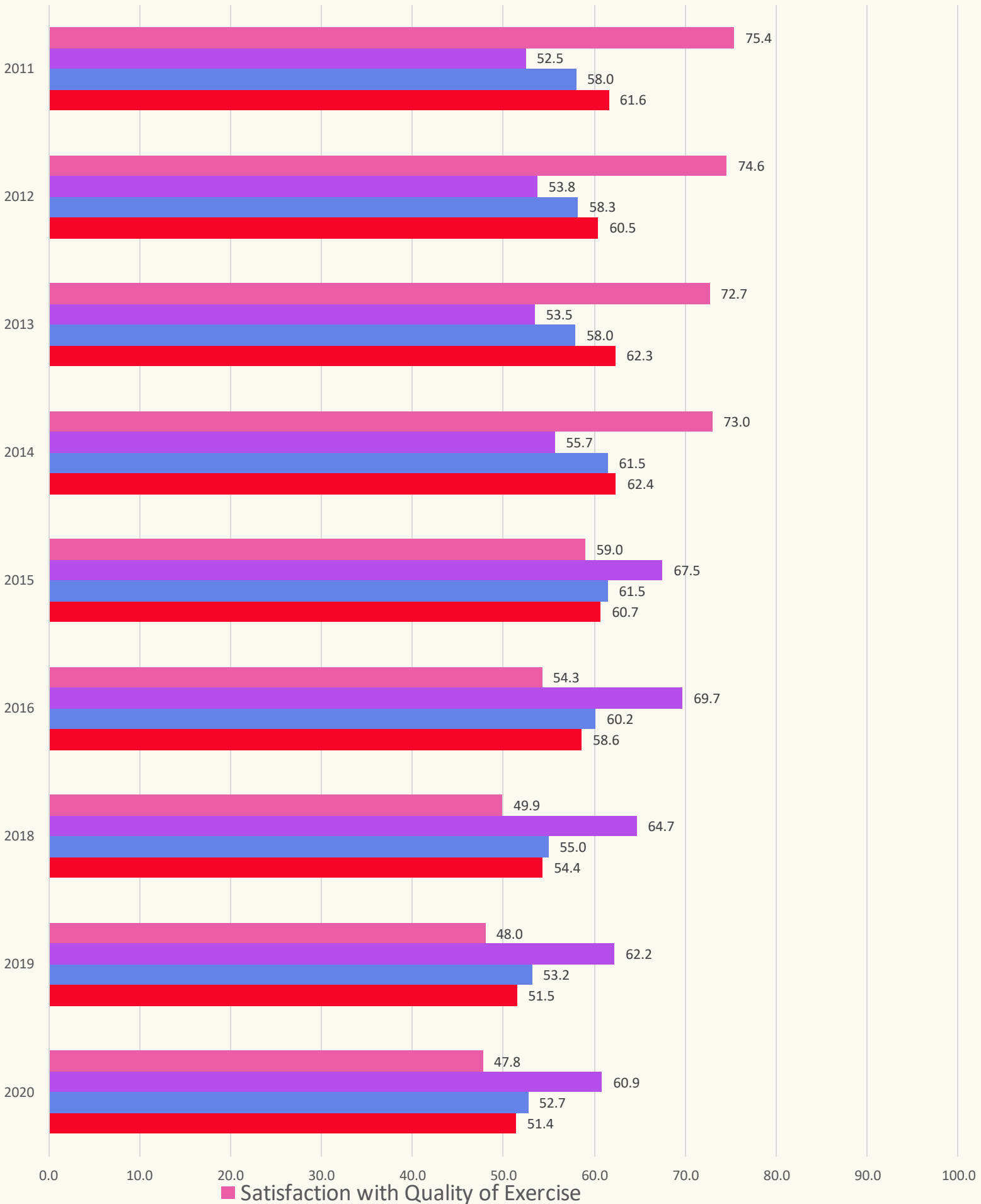
Our perceived health did not significantly change between 2019 and 2020, but were only at about 51% in both years, so in general, we felt neither healthy nor unhealthy. This makes sense for people who are not sick in a pandemic, but the fact that we felt this way before the pandemic is concerning. Our energy level only fell by about 6% in the last few years, but again, hovers at just below 60% out of 100, meaning we don't feel that energetic.

Our health scores suggest that it's a really good idea to focus on what we can do to safeguard our health, especially now when even with vaccines available we are not sure how long the pandemic will last due to mutations and other factors.

An old adage goes "do not put off what you can do today" and perhaps that is particularly true today in terms of preventative health care. With the pandemic, your health insurance will covers online visits, and many health insurance plans allow you one preventative health care visit a year. Preventative health care visits are different from other doctors visits because they give you and your doctor a chance to take a big picture look at your health and talk about things you can do to get healthy and keep healthy.

The pandemic taught us other things we can do to take care of our health: take your vitamins, eat healthy foods (even if you also eat other foods), drink enough water that your urine is light yellow and does not smell strongly, and get lots and lots of sleep. Spend time with people who like you and whom you like, and avoid stressful situations. And of course, take precautions to not get or spread Covid-19.

# Health



■ Satisfaction with Quality of Exercise

■ Satisfaction with Ability to Perform Daily Living Activities

■ Perceived Energy Level

■ Perceived Health Status

Time Balance is the domain for which pretty much every one and every group scores lowest. It is not a surprise in today's world. And yet, over the years, this is one domain where our scores have improved, with an overall climb of just under 5%. We still feel somewhat rushed, but not nearly as much as we used to having improved by almost 10%. Our scores have not changed too much for doing the things we enjoy, but they hover at 50% which means we feel rather neutral about the things we spend our time doing. We feel that we have a little more free time than we used to -- by about 5%-- but our sense of having free time is about 43 out of 100, meaning we are more unsatisfied than satisfied.

One scholar, Biswanger (2006) came up with the idea of the time treadmill. He says that our time saving devices enable us to do more of what we were not doing, so that while we seem to be saving time, we end up spending more and more time doing effective and efficient work, and less and less time doing nothing. Sound true? When was the last time you felt like you had enough leisure time? Or did not feel rushed, not even a little?

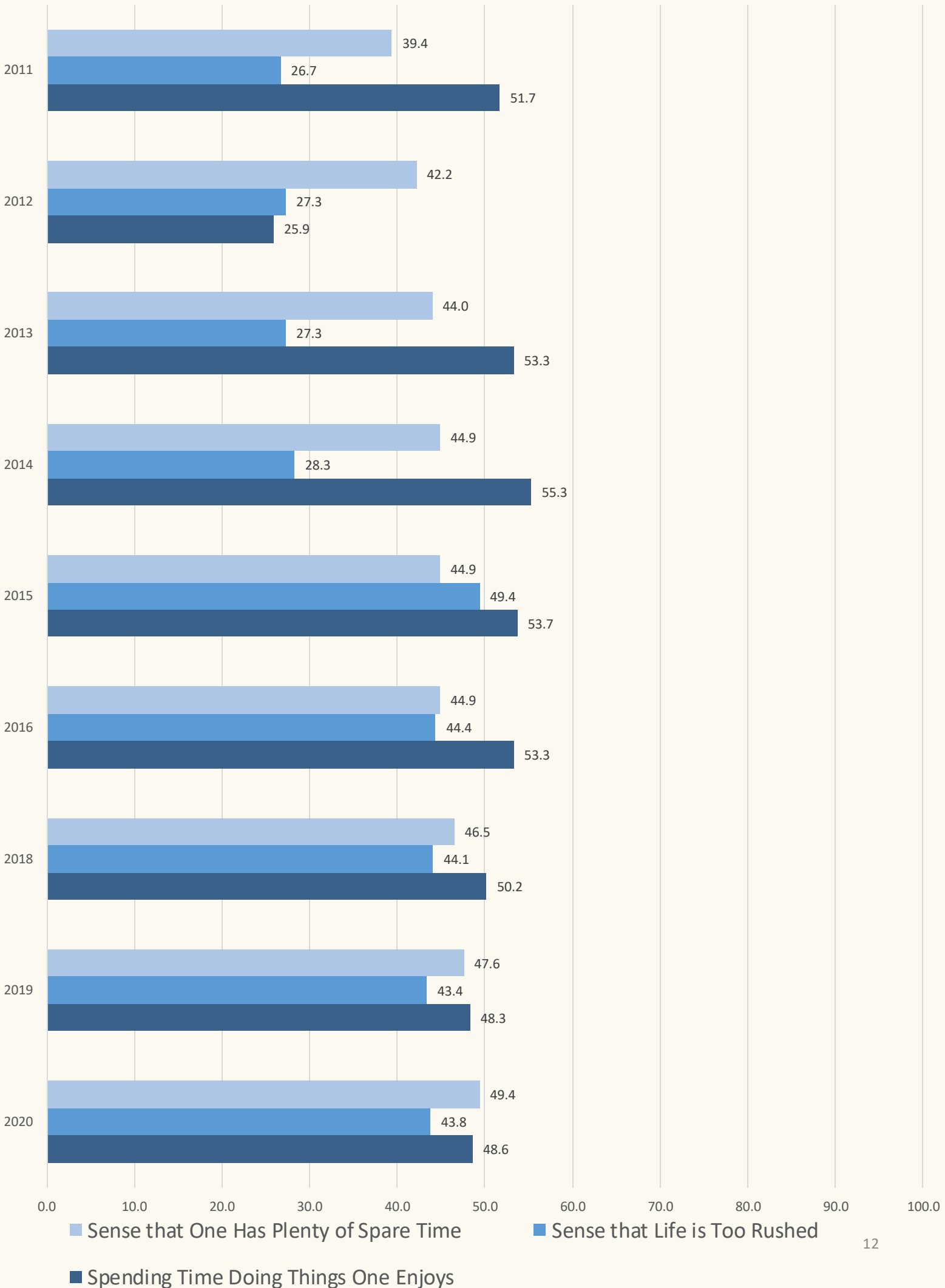
Time balance is different from work-life balance because it embraces more than just work-life balance. We do measure work-life balance, but include the scores for that question in the domain of work. Our scores for work-life balance have decreased over the years by about 4.6%, resting these days at about 52 out of 100. Our overall average for the last few years in time balance is about 47 out of 100, which means that we feel rather neutral about all the aspects of time balance that we measure with the Happiness Index.

While a neutral score may not be that bad, it is also not that good. One of the problems with a neutral score is there is not much room for happiness when something changes in your life. This means that when you get busier, more rushed, have less leisure time, and out of balance in your work-life patterns, you are more likely to feel unhappy about your time balance. If you get busier because of a project, or situation that is short term and you know will end, then your lack of time balance will probably not harm your overall well-being and happiness much. However, if your life changes so that you there is no respite in sight, you are at much higher risk of burnout, unhappiness, and eventually may become vulnerable to exhaustion, anxiety, depression and declines in other happiness domains in your life.

The importance of leisure is undervalued in most societies today. Taking time off to rest, sleep, contemplate, have fun, or process grief are all important to your happiness. contribute to your productivity, and support you in your enjoyment of life. Vacation, sick leave and family leave laws or policies are ways to protect and encourage time balance. Yet many people who have vacation leave and other sorts of leave do not take it, or, if they have the option, will trade it for pay or give it away.

If you have vacation time at your work, then take it! It is an investment in your happiness and your health. Most nations, wealthy or not, have vacation laws, but a few do not. The US is the only wealthy nation without vacation laws.

# Time Balance





Community is incredibly important to happiness. When you feel like you belong, you are likely to feel safe, to trust others, and to participate by being generous with your time and your money; these feelings make you happier. If you think about it, this makes common sense. This is also backed by common sense.

In Maslow's definition of human needs, after we meet our substance needs (food and water, housing and clothing), almost all of our needs have to do with community: safety, love, belonging and esteem are all needs met in community. Waldinger's Harvard Study of Adult Development followed people for eight decades and found that elemental to happiness in life is a sense of belonging in community. Another key factor that makes for a happy life is good relationships. We measure relationships and feeling loved in the domain of Social Support, but that domain is really an extension of Community.

Over the years, our Community scores have gone down by about 8%. The areas where we lost the most ground are trust in our neighbors and volunteerism. In Covid-19 times we only lost about 1% since the year before. This means that even in pre-epidemic years we did not volunteer often – a few times a year maybe. We tend to give money to charities a little bit more, but we do not give very frequently. Incidentally, frequency of giving donations is one of the six factors that the World Happiness Report uses to explain the happiness of nations. Donating to a cause you believe in really does have a positive impact on your happiness.

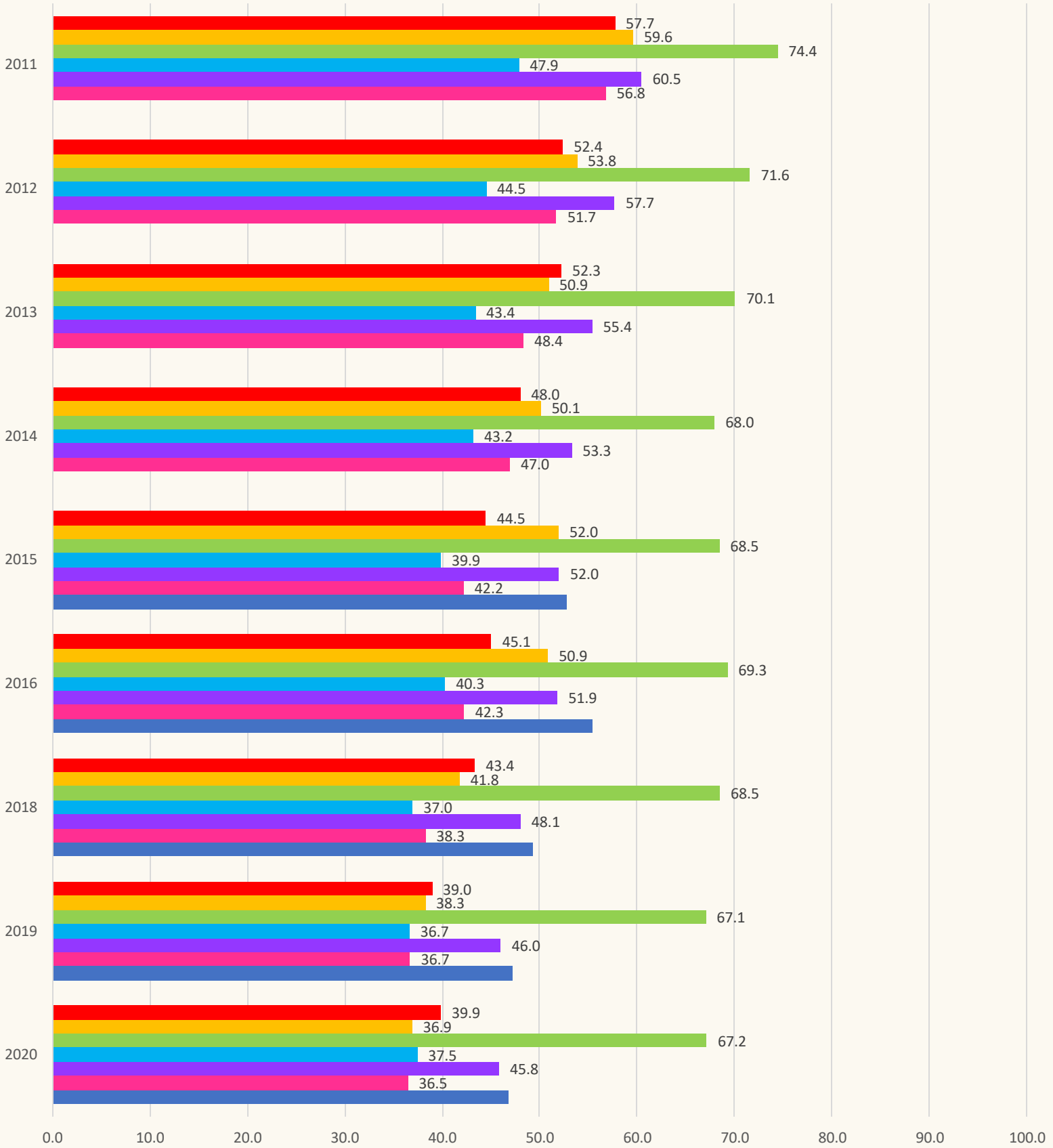
The area where we score the highest is our satisfaction with our safety. More good news is that we have not lost much ground, less than 3%. As Maslow's taxonomy of needs shows us, safety is an important need, so it is good news that on average, we feel pretty safe.

Community is one of the domains where you have a fair amount of control over some of the factors, and also some influence over the others. There are different ways that you experience community. One is place based community. Where you live defines your place based community. Your building or neighborhood is a community, and you may feel that you belong there just because you live there, or how long you have lived there, or your relationships with the people in your building or on your block. One thing you can do to increase your sense of community is get to know your friendly and respectful neighbors.

Another way you experience community is activity based community. The people at your work place are a community. There are lots of ways to contribute to a strong and healthy community at work. A few are (1) never gossip, (2) practice gratitude, and (3) work for a boss you like and who likes you. Other kinds of activity based community include a sports team, dance club, chorus, spiritual or religious organization, or book club. Covid-19 has taught us how to build a stronger sense of belonging to community via online meetings.

A third way you experience community is through purpose based community. When you work together on a project or for a particular goal, you experience community. This kind of community can be very compelling and give you a deep sense of belonging when everyone is really focused on a common cause. It can also cause trouble when that cause becomes more important than anything else.

# Community



- Frequency of Giving Donations
- Volunteerism Participation
- Satisfaction with Personal Safety
- Perception that Money in A Lost Wallet Would be Returned
- Trust in Businesses in One's Community
- Trust in Neighbors
- Sense of Belonging to One's Local Community

Social Support is a really a dimension of Community, but we give it its own domain because it is so important to our happiness and to keep some balance among all the domains.

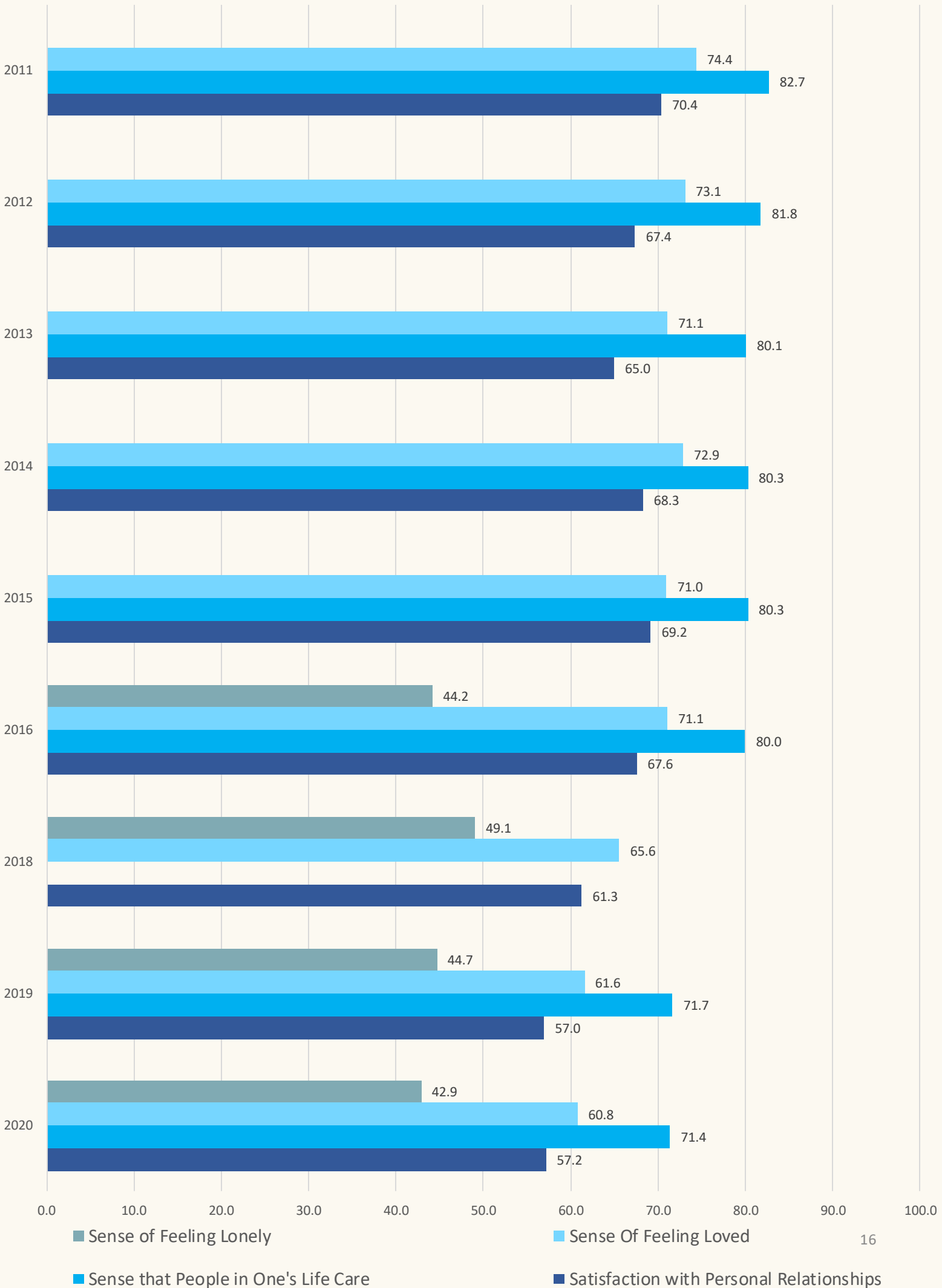
Social Support is similar to but somewhat different from social safety nets. The World Bank defines social safety nets as “programs that protect families from the impact of economic shocks, natural disasters, and other crises.” The pandemic is teaching us the importance of social safety nets in our own lives, the lives of our loved ones, and those less fortunate than us. Versions of Universal Basic Income (UBI) can be a social safety net and many governments have experimented with these during Covid-19 times. Scholar Benjamin Radcliff explains that the reason Northern European countries, such as Finland, consistently rank as the happiest nations in the world in the World Happiness Reports is because they have strong social safety nets. Programs are in place that ensure people who want to have an education get one, people who want to work have jobs, everyone has a place to live, and no one, including children and the elderly, live in poverty or without health care. These countries tax corporations and people at similar rates to those in the United States in the late 1960s. In countries without strong social safety nets, people rely on family and friends when they fall on really hard times and are unable to feed or shelter themselves. This means it is important to have strong healthy relationships. As we noted before in Waldinger’s Harvard Study of Adult Development good relationships are extremely important to happiness.

In the domain of Social Support we measure satisfaction with relationships, including the sense that people in your life care about you and you feel loved or lonely. Overall we score about 64 out of 100 in the domain of Social Support, meaning we are climbing towards satisfied, but not there yet. In the last few years, we lost ground by about 7%. For satisfaction with personal relationships, between 2011 and 2020, we went from 70 out of 100, meaning we were closer to satisfied than neutral, to 57 out of 100, meaning we are closer to neither satisfied or not satisfied. For feeling that someone cares about us we went from 82, meaning we were more than satisfied to 71, putting us right below being satisfied. In the area of feeling loved, we went from almost 75, or almost satisfied to about 61, meaning we are less than satisfied but not neutral. Our loneliness scores indicate that we do feel lonely sometimes. In the last three years, we have gotten lonelier each year, but the change between the year before Covid-19 is smaller than the change between the years before that. This may be due to people investing more in relationships with the advent of Covid-19 - that is one hypothesis.

Relationships really are key to important to happiness, but not every relationship is important. Sometimes relationships can make you miserable. Some of those relationships are ones that society teaches us we should stay with no matter what. Freeing yourself from “should” and learning how not to accept unacceptable behavior can be a long and hard path.

There are things you can do – and not do – for happy relationships. Gary Chapman identified five ways to express love that foster connection: (1) words of affirmation (acknowledging, appreciating, admiring your loved one) (2) quality time (your undivided attention), (3) acts of service (helping out), (4) consensual touch, and (5) gifts. John and Julie Gottman identified four things that break relationships: (1) contempt, (2) criticism, (3) defensiveness, and (4) stonewalling – don’t do these things, or allow them.

# Social Support



Lifelong Learning and Culture are really two different areas that we group into one domain. In Bhutan, the Gross National Happiness (GNH) Index includes a domain for education and a domain for cultural diversity and resilience which include a total of 38 questions such as “What is your knowledge of names of plants and wild animals in your area?” And “How important is Bhutanese code of etiquette and conduct (Driglam Namzha)?”

Our Happiness Index does not go into such detail because a given area has a specific culture and the Happiness Index is used all over the world by people from many different cultures. We do include a question about diversity and inclusion because acceptance and inclusion of diversity is an aspect of a society's culture. In the Happiness Index we gather data for education level in the demographics section, and a question about access to lifelong learning opportunities in this section. One reason we separate the question about education level and lifelong learning is because we learn throughout our lives on many levels – intellectual, social, kinesthetic, emotional, spiritual – until the day we die. While our formal education ends at a certain age, our learning never does. So, when it comes to humans, the adage “you can’t teach an old dog new tricks” is flat out not true. You can teach yourself all kinds of things throughout your life – including how to be happy.

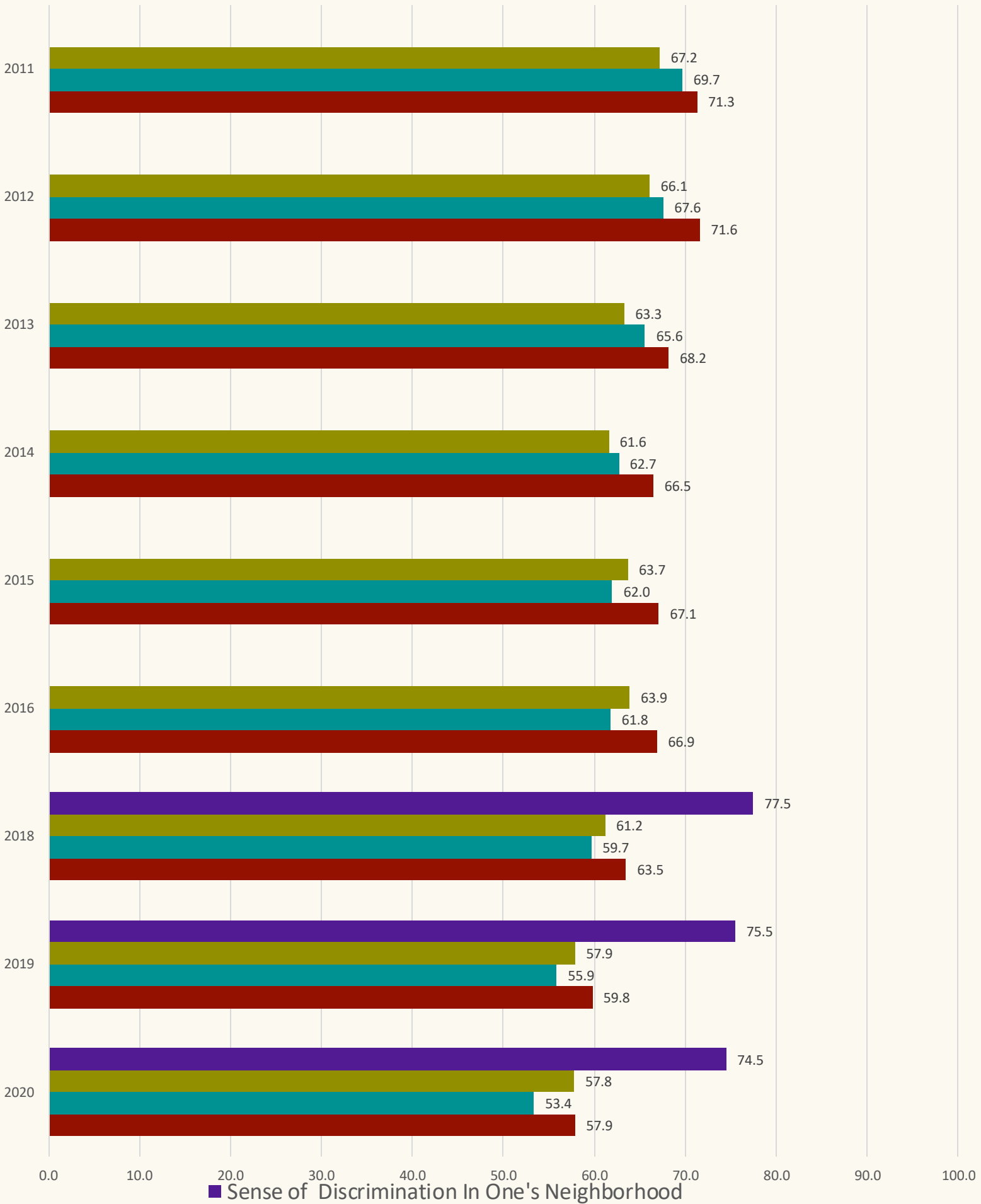
Our scores for access to sports & recreational activities have gone down in recent years a little over eight percent, from close to 69 to about 60, meaning we are not neutral, but not satisfied and getting less. The story is similar for our access to artistic and cultural activities, with a decline closer to 9 percent, and a fall from about 65 to 56. Our satisfaction with access to informal education fell by only about 5 percent, from 64 to just under 60.

Scores for discrimination over the last few years hover around 75. This is about the same as the scores for 2011 from data we gathered for our very first report, the Seattle Area Happiness Index. That report included data for Seattle pulled from our larger data bank, and the Seattle data was very similar to data from other areas. These are good scores, indicating people do not often feel subject to discrimination. The problem with our data is that the portion of people who are not Caucasian/European/White who take our survey is quite small. In 2018 and 2019, only 562 people chose Black/African for race, out of over 15,000 people., This is a very small percent and it means that our data is probably not representing portions of populations. We want to change that.

We analyzed what little data we do have for survey takers who chose Black/African and found their scores were lower than other races for every question in two domains: economy/standard of living and government. This makes sense. We have hope that the awareness of racism that the Black Lives Matter movement and the horrific deaths that opened our eyes will not fade. We have hope that we will put an end to racism and its legacy in all nations, but we know this will not happen without concerted action on everyone’s part. We believe that economic equity, equality and justice are necessary to end racism. We believe executive, judicial and legislative bodies of all governments need to be held accountable for ending racism and bringing about truly equal opportunities for all to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. We are committed to<sup>17</sup> doing what is in our power to realize racial equality, equity and justice.



# Lifelong Learning and Culture



■ Sense of Discrimination In One's Neighborhood

■ Satisfaction with Access to Informal Education

■ Satisfaction with Access to Artistic and Cultural Activities

■ Satisfaction with Access to Sports and Recreational Activities

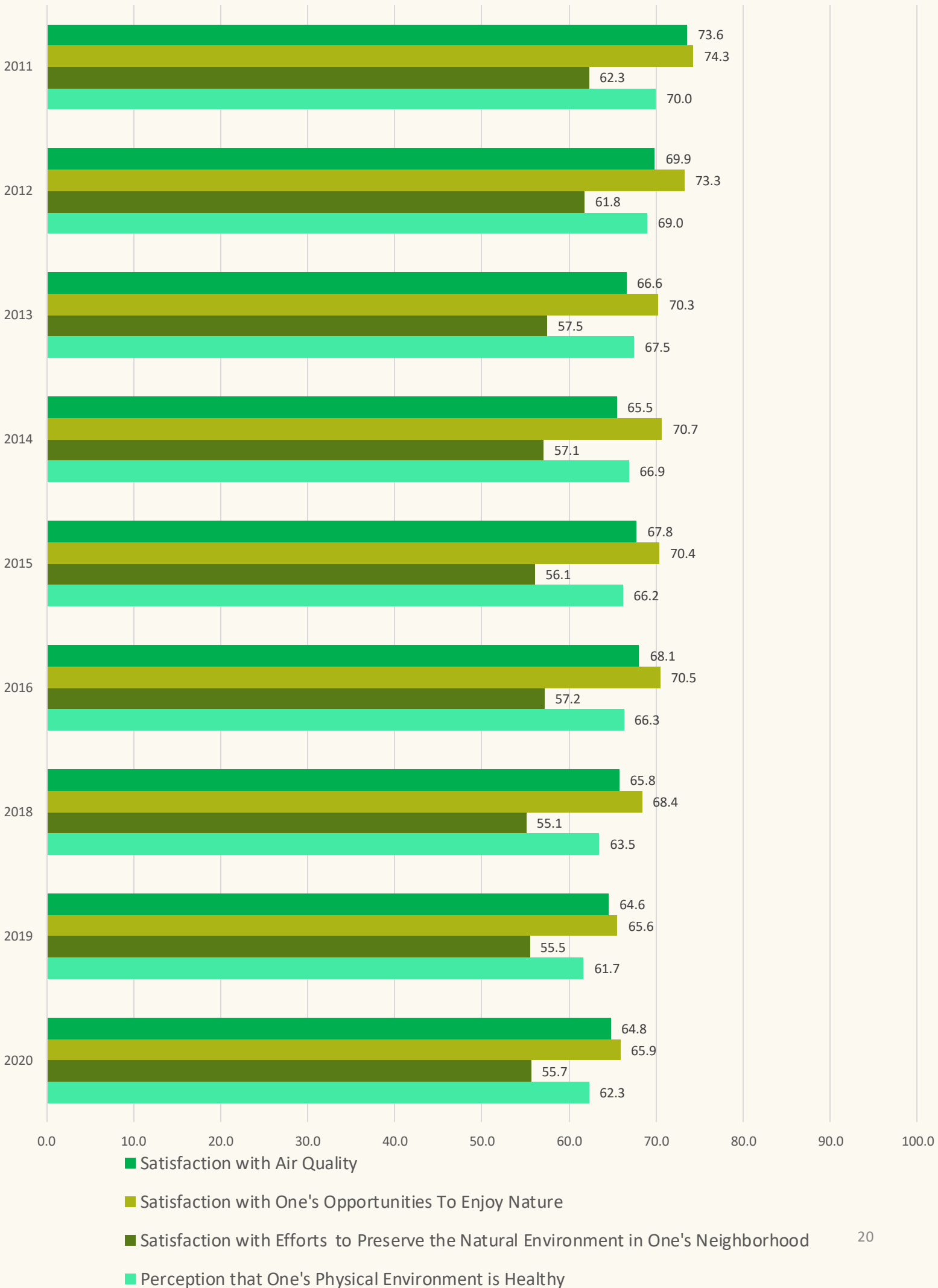
Air is something that every human on our planet shares both in our past and in our future. The same air molecules that you are breathing now were breathed by your ancestors and the ancestors of your friends and enemies, and will be breathed by the children so distant into the future we cannot imagine them. We measure air quality in the domain of the environment as a way of reminding us of how necessary our environment is to our existence. We cannot last beyond three minutes without air. Our scores for satisfaction with air quality have declined just a little bit over the years, 3.5%, and increased by only 0.2% in the times of Covid-19. On average, we rate our satisfaction with air quality at about 67% which means we are between indifferent and satisfied. When the air is smoky and unsafe with fires, we feel differently. When we go into the wilderness and breathe in the sweet smell of air free of pollution, we feel differently.

Our score for satisfaction with opportunities to enjoy nature average at about 70 out of 100 over the years, and have declined by 5% from about 72 to 66 in recent years. This means we are somewhat satisfied, and not neutral. According to the United Nations, 55% percent of the world's population lives in cities (urban areas), and by 2050, this will rise to 68%. As urban areas become more densely populated, they can lose their natural attributes unless parks, open spaces and greenways are planned. Another threat to nature itself, and so to our opportunities to enjoy nature, is the decimation of species and their habitats. We can reverse the trends that have led to endangerment and extinction of other life forms on our planet and the replacement of forests, prairies, grasslands and flood plains with human habitats by re-thinking our relationship to nature, and linking our human well-being to the well-being of wildlife. In 2020, we worked with wildlife conservationists to form a way to measure human well-being and wildlife conservation, and are dedicated to helping to change the perspective – and measurements – for wildlife conservation.

In general, people are not particularly satisfied with efforts to preserve the natural environment in their neighborhood. These efforts can range from maintaining or putting in parks, planting and tending trees and other plants along streets, and restoring streams or rivers, protecting greenfields (areas that have never been developed), and encouraging small farms and urban agriculture. Some efforts may be volunteer and community driven, like removal of invasive species on a river bank by neighbors, while other efforts are policy-based, like urban sprawl laws and yet other efforts may be undertaken by individuals or nonprofits such as conservation easements that protect large pieces of land from development in perpetuity.

An unhealthy physical environment does not support plant, animal or human life. David Attenborough stated in his documentary “A Life On Our Planet” that nobody wants an unsustainable earth - we all want nature to be healthy and bountiful. And this is true. Our sense that our physical environment is healthy hovers above neutral, at an average of 68 out of 100 over the years, and falling by about 5% these last years. With an emphasis on economic growth and an economic theory that assumes unlimited natural resources due to technological advances, we continue to decimate our natural environment in the pursuit of happiness through increased consumption of goods and services. If we cut to the chase, and use metrics for happiness to measure our happiness instead of using economic metrics, we could change our path, and find that we can meet our needs in ecologically sustainable ways – and maybe even be happier.

# Environment



Sometimes people ask why government is included as a domain in the Happiness Index. The happiness-government connection has its modern roots in the US Declaration of Independence which states:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all [people] are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among [People]...

More recently when the nation of Bhutan became a democratic constitutional monarchy in 2008, Gross National Happiness was written into its constitution in a clause in the Principles of State Policy:

The State shall strive to promote those conditions that will enable the pursuit of Gross National Happiness.

Scholar Jan Ott's (2008) analysis tells us that good governance is indeed important to happiness. If you look at the nations that are the most unhappy in the World Happiness Reports over the years, you will find that many of them are suffering civil wars.

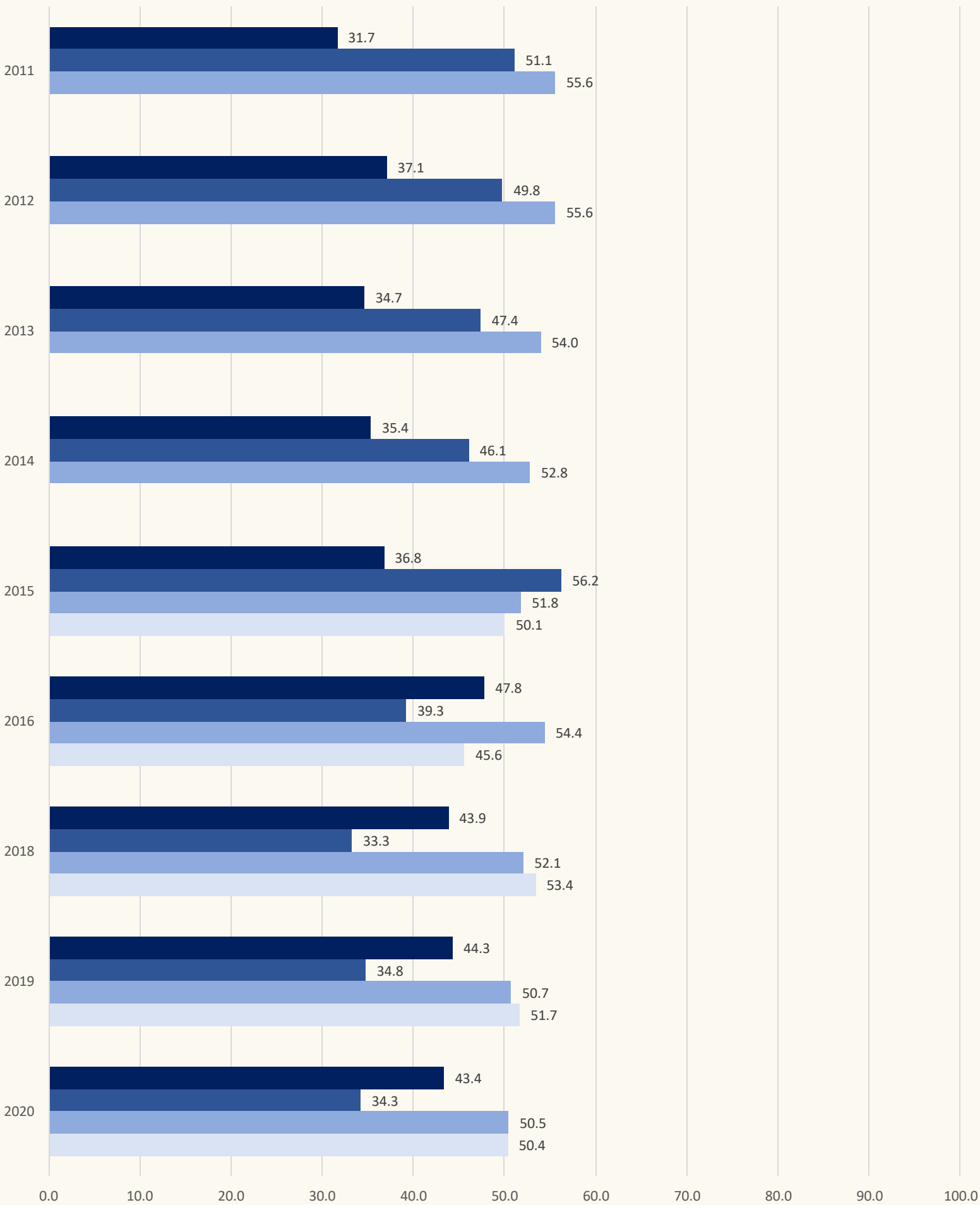
Overall Happiness Index scores in the domain of government have hovered just below 50 since we began. This means that we are less than neutral, but not, for the most part, overall unsatisfied.

When we look at our scores for confidence in local and national government, we get a different story. In the last few years, we have fallen by about 14% in our confidence in national government, going from about 48 out of 100 to 34, meaning we do not have much confidence. Our scores for confidence in local government have increased by over 6% from about 37 to about 44. This is a flip-flop which may have many explanations, but what is important to note is that scores for confidence in both national and local government are low.

Our scores for sensing that local public officials pay attention to what people think have not changed much over the years, hovering at just above neutral. This also is not good news. In recent years, our scores for sense that local governments are corrupt have also hovered at neutral – also not good news.

The domain of government is one of the hardest ones when it comes to the circumstances of life that you can control or influence. Yet, there are things you can do, and one of them is to raise awareness about the importance of the use of happiness and well-being metrics and goals by governments to uphold their purpose. Check out our Happy Community Toolkit on our website at [happycounts.org](http://happycounts.org) and purchase our book, *The Happiness Policy Handbook* to find out how.

# Government



- Confidence in Local Government
- Confidence in National Government
- Sense that Public Officials In One is City or Town Pay attention to What People Think.
- Sense of Corruption In One's City or Town



We use both of the terms Standard of Living and Economy because Bhutan uses the first term and we feel that including the term “economy” is important to convey the connections between the economy of a household and the economy of a nation. The Oxford dictionary defines standard of living as “The level of material well-being of an individual or group, in terms of goods and services available to them.” Standard of Living is often used as a quality of life measurement by governments and researchers. However, for the most part, standard of living measurements are limited to economic factors. The term economy comes from the Greek word “oikos”, and means the stewardship of all dimensions of a household, not just financial. In this sense, a standard of living and an economic metric could include all of the dimensions of happiness and well-being. The Happiness Movement today has its genesis in economics. Richard Easterlin, Joseph Stiglitz, John Helliwell, Richard Layard, Carol Graham and many others brought to the forefront the need for economic theory, policy, and metrics to encompass more than material and financial factors. There is no doubt that the financial situation matters to happiness and well-being, it is just not all that matters.

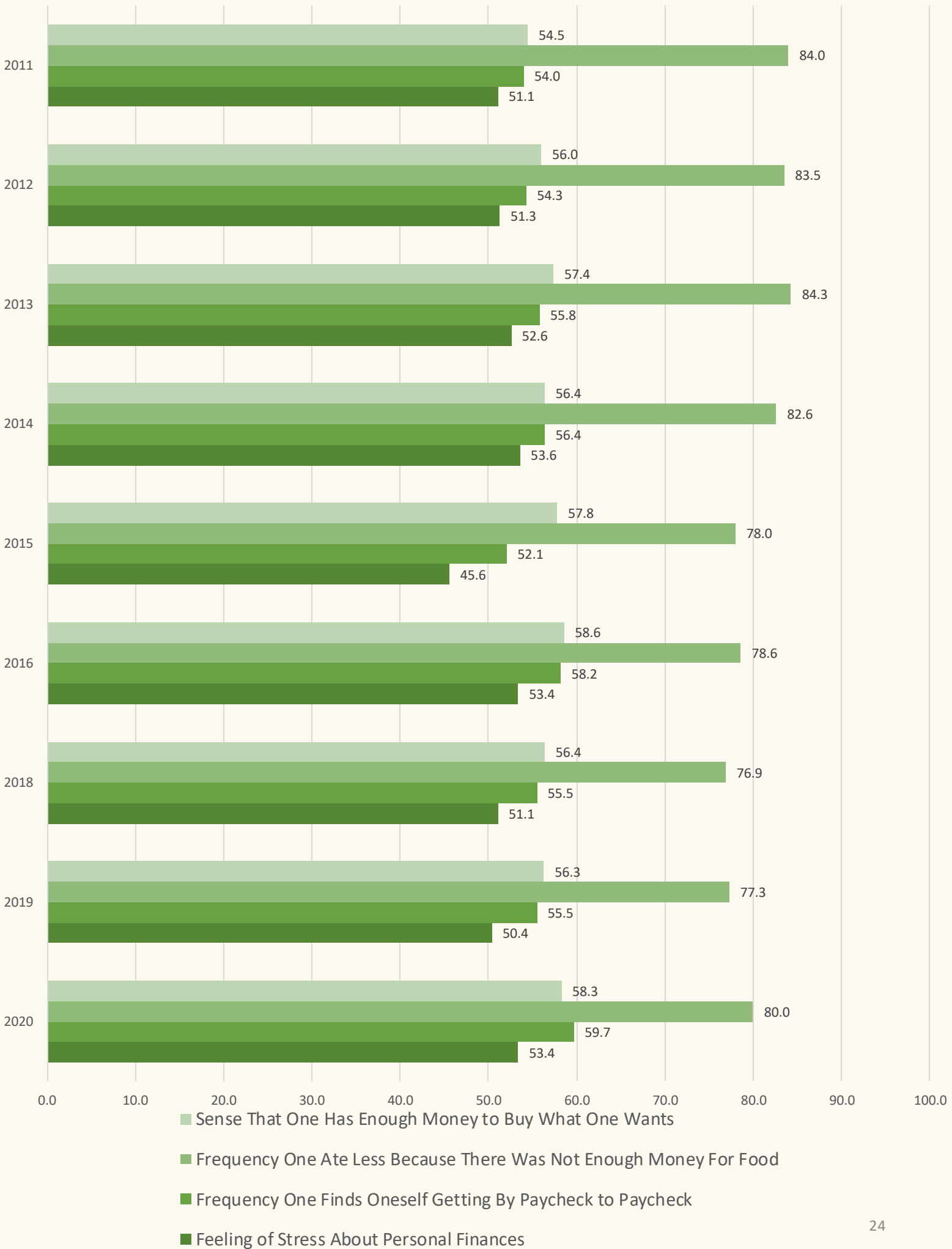
Of the dimensions of standard of living/economy that we measure, the one area in which we consistently do well is our access to food. Over the years, we ate less because there was not enough money for foods less than once a year. We hover just over neutral for sense that we have enough money to buy everything we want, with a very slight increase over the last few years.

Our level of stress about our personal finances has remained in the moderate range since we started measuring happiness. Of course this is an average, and some people feel a lot of stress, others hardly any, but on average the level of stress is less than light and more than low. We also find that we get by only paycheck to paycheck occasionally, but not often.

We ask the question about income in our demographics section, and we do find that there is more variation between levels of income. However, what is noticeable is that a person with a high level of income may find themselves as stressed about their personal finances as a person living at or below poverty, and may also feel that they do not have enough money to buy the things they want and frequently get by paycheck to paycheck. For some people, too much is never enough. Studies found that the very wealthy do not feel satisfied with their standard of living because they compare themselves to others who have even more (Donnelly et al 2018).

In Bhutan, where both subjective and objective data are gathered, people in the objectively wealthiest region (Thimphu) and one of the poorer regions (Gasa) self-assessed themselves as similarly satisfied with their income levels. This is potentially a goldmine for understanding how to meet material needs in a resource constrained world. If you were a policymaker and had this data, you might want to find out how people in Gasa met their financial needs and what their expectations are in terms of material well-being. Another key finding for sustainable development in terms of meeting our needs through economic means is the Easterlin Paradox, which states that we are happier only up to a certain point by gains in money (between the equivalent of 35-75K USD a year), and after that we get more happiness from other pursuits.

## Economy/Standard of Living



Other than sleep, we spend more time in our lives working than in any other single activity. Work is something we do to earn a living. It is one way that we contribute to society. It can be how we define ourselves. Happiness research tells us that when we lose a job, it has a lasting negative impact on our happiness (Clark et al, 2017).

Michael Meade, a mythologist, says that everyone has their own genius, their own unique way of perceiving and being in the world, and that each person's job is to find their genius and live the life that is their own unique calling. Joseph Campbell, another mythologist, called this the hero's (or heroine's) journey. This journey is not the path of least resistance. It is not easy but it does lead you to realizing your life's purpose. Another way of thinking about this is the top level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs: self actualizing.

Work domain in the Happiness Index is one of the largest because work is so important to happiness and well-being. We define work to include non-compensated work, such as volunteering and care taking, because that is work also.

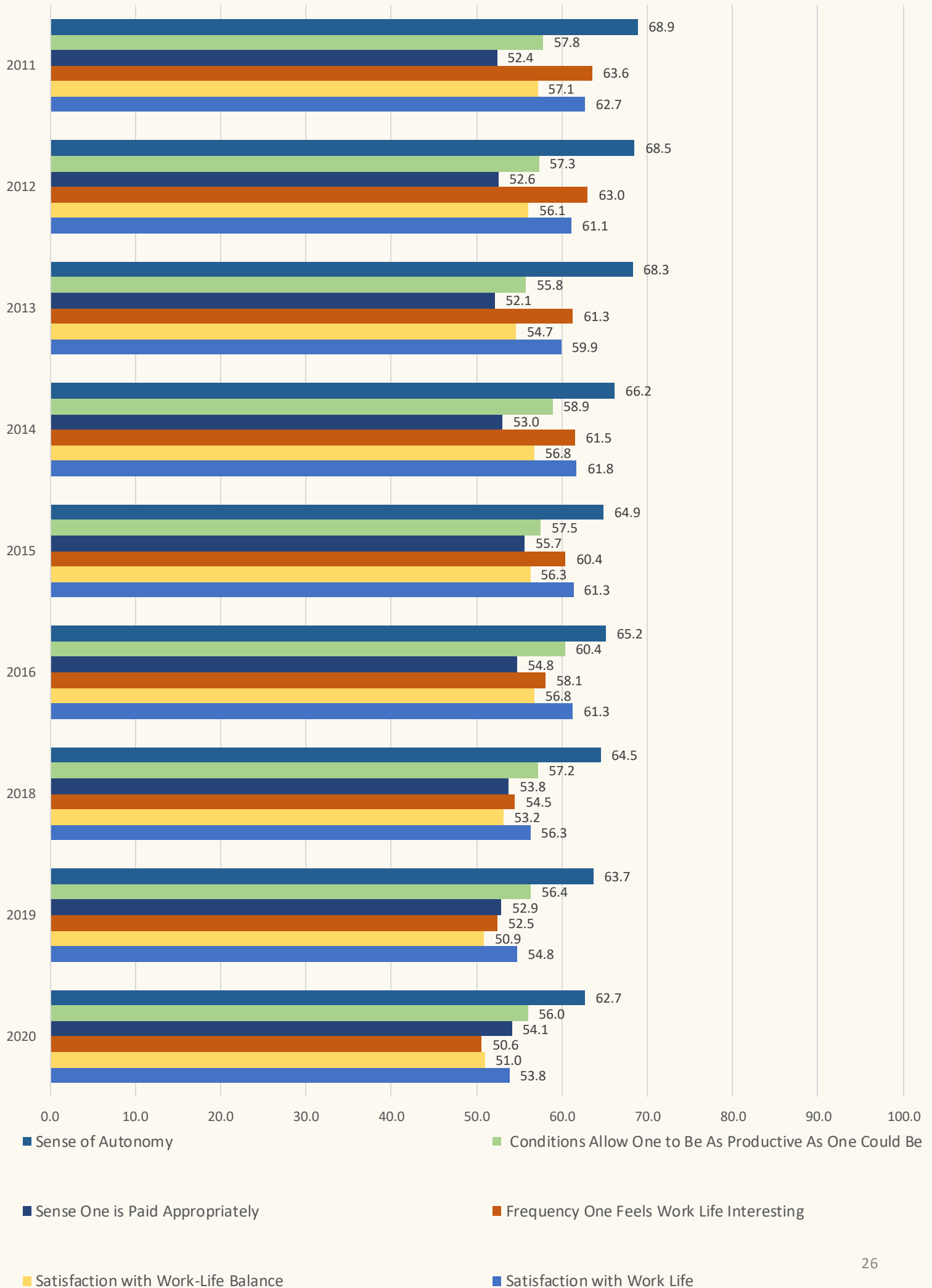
Over the years our satisfaction with work life is about 59 out of 100, meaning we are just above neutral. In recent years we have fallen by a little over 6%. We have also fallen in our scores for finding our work life interesting, from about 61 out of 100 to about 53. Sense of autonomy at work, meaning you get to decide how to do your work, has also fallen by about 3 points, from 67 to about 64. The falls in autonomy at work and interest in work might contribute to explaining the fall in satisfaction with work. Moreover, happiness research indicates that when people find their work interesting and feel they have autonomy they are happier with their work and more productive.

Our scores for feeling that we are paid appropriately hover at about neutral over the years. Happiness science tells us that the amount we are paid in comparison to others who do the same or similar job is as important as our actual pay. Our scores for our sense that work conditions allow us to be as productive as we could average about 58 out of 100 over the years, with a small fall in recent years. This means we don't feel that conditions are optimal, but are a little more than neutral.

Our work-life balance scores went from about 61 out of 100 to 55, meaning we went from closer to satisfied to closer to neutral. The Time Balance domain of the Happiness Index measures feeling about being rushed, amount of leisure time, and time spent doing enjoyable things, The overall average score for Time Balance is 47 out of 100, and overall work-life balance is higher at about 59. This is important because it tells us that work-life balance is not necessarily the most important factor at work or in life that makes for time balance, and that the conditions at work (interest in work, autonomy at work) may have a big impact on time balance.

If your work is also your calling, then you are in good stead. If you hate your work, then there are a few things you can do, One is to work for a boss you like and who likes you. Another is to never gossip at work. Most importantly is to do some soul searching to discover your genius, and then dedicate your self to the long haul of making your passion, purpose and genius your work.

# Work



## **Why don't we measure misery instead of happiness?**

In a sense, we do measure misery. With our Happiness Index, we are able to identify in what ways people perceive themselves to be thriving, and in what ways they perceive themselves to be suffering. This perception is important because misery is more than what can be measured with objective indicators. How you feel about your life matters.

Some of the objective metrics that can be used to measure misery – and well-being – are income, purchasing power or inflation rates, employment, healthy life expectancy (the number of years you can expect to live a healthy life), crime rates and other indicators. For example, living in a nation where the average income is barely enough to survive, inflation is on the rise, people often get sick and die early in life, crime rates and unemployment are high would objectively be miserable. If you were living in this kind of objective misery, your subjective scores on the happiness index would probably be very low, from your satisfaction with life to your trust in your neighbors and the government.

However, if you lived in a nation where the average income level was relatively high, as were employment rates, and healthy life expectancy, and both crime and inflation were low, then should you be not miserable? Our Happiness Index helps to understand how different portions of populations are actually feeling about their lives. It gives us perspective on people of different races, gender identification, ages, income levels and employment status.

We can use the Happiness Index to define racial equality and social justice in terms of tangible impacts and data. One of our first projects, in 2011-2012, we worked with immigrant and refugee communities to measure racial equality (Happiness Alliance 2012). Our work gave us important insights into how deeply people were suffering – beyond what objective metrics could measure. As part of that project, the communities examined the data, and together made decisions based on it. They took action to improve their happiness and well-being. We are proud of that work, and aim to continue it to further the Black Lives Matter movement in the US and to further social justice globally.

As mentioned previously, in the United Kingdom, where the Office of National Statistics gathers data for satisfaction with life, sense of worthiness, happiness and anxiety since April of 2011 (we use the same four questions in our survey), a Minister of Loneliness was appointed in 2018. Her strategy is to collect data on loneliness (as we have been doing since 2011), build pathways for lonely people to volunteer and otherwise engage in community work, and promote the use of public spaces for building connected communities. More recently Gallup, which gathers the data on satisfaction with life and the six dimensions used to explain it (GDP per capita, healthy years of life expectancy, having someone to count on in times of trouble, absence of corruption in government and business, perceived freedom to make life decisions, and frequency of donating to charities) that the World Happiness Reports use announced that it is developing a stress index.



## Where do we go from here?

What you resist, persists, so said Carl Jung. What you envision – and work towards with patience and persistence – comes to be. We envision a world where all beings flourish. We believe in the power of grassroots activism. We believe in you.

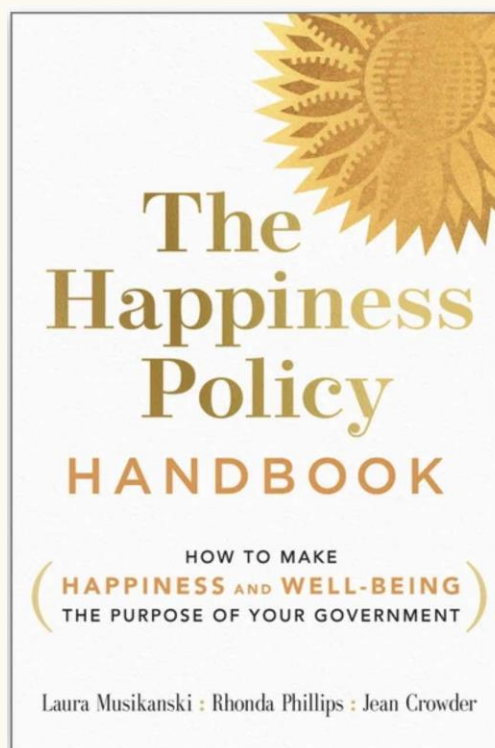
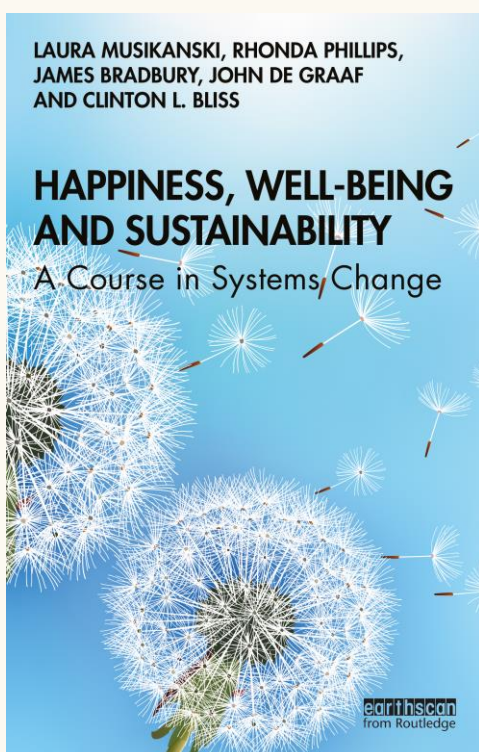
The truth is we are not all that content with the Happiness Index scores. Over time, when we average all the scores into one single number, we have dropped from about 60 out of 100 to 54, and averaged about 58. It is not that bad, but not good. There is some truth to the findings that people who are too happy lack motivation, and that a little bit of discontent can be good for a person and society, but we believe that people deserve to be happy, and would be delighted to see scores closer to 75, farther above the neutral zone. This would mean people generally feel satisfied. A score of 100 where people feel very satisfied is at this stage a long term goal..

How are we going to get there? We wrote two books over these last years to help guide you in contributing to your happiness and changing the circumstances of your life so they best support your happiness and that of others.

The “Happiness Policy Handbook” is the only one of its kind. It gives you the information, tools and resources for raising awareness about the happiness movement among your local policy makers and other decision makers who influence and control the circumstances of life.

“Happiness, Well-being and Sustainability: A Course in Systems Change” is the first coursebook that brings together positive psychology and actions for your personal happiness with the Happiness Movement and change agency.

You can purchase these books online from the publisher or Amazon, and we hope that you will.





## Data

### How many people took the Happiness Index

Year	Approximate survey takers
2020	11000
2019	12400
2018	5600
2016	5600
2015	4100
2014	9200
2013	11300
2012	8900
2011	2600

### Satisfaction with life

	Best Possible Life (Cantril Ladder)	Satisfaction with life	Life is worthwhile	Happiness	Anxiety
2020	57.8	54.8	56.8	54.7	49.8
2019	58.3	55.8	58.0	55.3	51.0
2018	61.3	60.0	62.0	59.1	53.2
2017	54.4	50.2	48.4	47.9	48.2
2016	66.3	66.1	57.6	65.0	54.7
2015	65.3	67.2	68.2	66.3	54.1
2014	68.7	72.4	68.8	69.0	50.3
2013	67.4	67.4	63.7	65.8	49.6
2012	68.9	68.9		69.7	
2011	69.3	69.4		70.5	

### Psychological wellbeing

	Sense of Purpose and Meaning	Sense of Engagement & Interest	Sense of Optimism	Sense of Accomplishment	Feeling positive about oneself
2020	59.0	56.4	63.1	52.0	51.6
2019	60.0	58.7	63.4	53.3	52.9
2018	63.0	62.2	67.2	56.2	56.3
2016	70.1	68.4	74.0	62.3	63.6
2015	71.3	70.6	76.1	64.1	65.5
2014	73.9	72.5	76.4	66.5	68.3
2013	69.9	68.8	73.4	62.4	65.5
2012	72.2	71.7	74.7	65.3	68.2
2011	72.1	71.2	72.7	65.6	68.7

## Health

	Perceived Health Status	Perceived Energy Level	Satisfaction with Ability to Perform Daily Living Activities	Satisfaction with Quality of Exercise
2020	51.4	52.7	60.9	47.8
2019	51.5	53.2	62.2	48.0
2018	54.4	55.0	64.7	49.9
2016	58.6	60.2	69.7	54.3
2015	60.7	61.5	67.5	59.0
2014	62.4	61.5	55.7	73.0
2013	62.3	58.0	53.5	72.7
2012	60.5	58.3	53.8	74.6
2011	61.6	58.0	52.5	75.4

## Time Balance

	Spending Time Doing Things One Enjoys	Sense that Life is Too Rushed	Sense that One Has Plenty of Spare Time
2020	48.6	43.8	49.4
2019	48.3	43.4	47.6
2018	50.2	44.1	46.5
2016	53.3	44.4	44.9
2015	53.7	49.4	44.9
2014	55.3	28.3	44.9
2013	53.3	27.3	44.0
2012	25.9	27.3	42.2
2011	51.7	26.7	39.4

## Lifelong Learning and Culture

	Satisfaction with Access to Sports and Recreational Activities	Satisfaction with Access to Artistic and Cultural Activities	Satisfaction with Access to Informal Education	Sense of Discrimination In One's Neighborhood
2020	57.9	53.4	57.8	74.5
2019	59.8	55.9	57.9	75.5
2018	63.5	59.7	61.2	77.5
2016	66.9	61.8	63.9	
2015	67.1	62.0	63.7	
2014	66.5	62.7	61.6	
2013	68.2	65.6	63.3	
2012	71.6	67.6	66.1	
2011	71.3	69.7	67.2	

## Community

	Sense of Belonging to One's Local Community	Trust in Neighbors	Trust in Businesses in One's Community	Perception that Money in A Lost Wallet Would be Returned	Satisfaction with Personal Safety	Volunteerism Participation	Frequency of Giving Donations
2020	46.8	36.5	45.8	37.5	67.2	36.9	39.9
2019	47.3	36.7	46.0	36.7	67.1	38.3	39.0
2018	49.3	38.3	48.1	37.0	68.5	41.8	43.4
2016	55.4	42.3	51.9	40.3	69.3	50.9	45.1
2015	52.8	42.2	52.0	39.9	68.5	52.0	44.5
2014		47.0	53.3	43.2	68.0	50.1	48.0
2013		48.4	55.4	43.4	70.1	50.9	52.3
2012		51.7	57.7	44.5	71.6	53.8	52.4
2011		56.8	60.5	47.9	74.4	59.6	57.7

## Social Support

	Satisfaction with Personal Relationships	Sense that People in One's Life Care	Sense Of Feeling Loved	Sense of Feeling Lonely
2020	57.2	71.4	60.8	42.9
2019	57.0	71.7	61.6	44.7
2018	61.3		65.6	49.1
2016	67.6	80.0	71.1	44.2
2015	69.2	80.3	71.0	
2014	68.3	80.3	72.9	
2013	65.0	80.1	71.1	
2012	67.4	81.8	73.1	
2011	70.4	82.7	74.4	

## Environment

	Perception that One's Physical Environment is Healthy	Satisfaction with Efforts to Preserve the Natural Environment in One's Neighborhood	Satisfaction with One's Opportunities To Enjoy Nature	Satisfaction with Air Quality
2020	62.3	55.7	65.9	64.8
2019	61.7	55.5	65.6	64.6
2018	63.5	55.1	68.4	65.8
2016	66.3	57.2	70.5	68.1
2015	66.2	56.1	70.4	67.8
2014	66.9	57.1	70.7	65.5
2013	67.5	57.5	70.3	66.6
2012	69.0	61.8	73.3	69.9
2011	70.0	62.3	74.3	73.6

## Government

	Sense of Corruption In One's City or Town	Sense that Public Officials In One is City or Town Pay attention to What People Think.	Confidence in National Government	Confidence in Local Government
2020	50.4	50.5	34.3	43.4
2019	51.7	50.7	34.8	44.3
2018	53.4	52.1	33.3	43.9
2016	45.6	54.4	39.3	47.8
2015	50.1	51.8	56.2	36.8
2014		52.8	46.1	35.4
2013		54.0	47.4	34.7
2012		55.6	49.8	37.1
2011		55.6	51.1	31.7

## Economy/Standard of Living

	Feeling of Stress About Personal Finances	Frequency One Finds Oneself Getting By Paycheck to Paycheck	Frequency One Ate Less Because There Was Not Enough Money For Food	Sense That One Has Enough Money to Buy What One Wants
2020	53.4	59.7	80.0	58.3
2019	50.4	55.5	77.3	56.3
2018	51.1	55.5	76.9	56.4
2016	53.4	58.2	78.6	58.6
2015	45.6	52.1	78.0	57.8
2014	53.6	56.4	82.6	56.4
2013	52.6	55.8	84.3	57.4
2012	51.3	54.3	83.5	56.0
2011	51.1	54.0	84.0	54.5

## Work

	Satisfaction with Work Life	Satisfaction with Work-Life Balance	Frequency One Feels Work Life Interesting	Sense One is Paid Appropriately	Conditions Allow One to Be As Productive As One Could Be	Sense of Autonomy
2020	53.8	51.0	50.6	54.1	56.0	62.7
2019	54.8	50.9	52.5	52.9	56.4	63.7
2018	56.3	53.2	54.5	53.8	57.2	64.5
2016	61.3	56.8	58.1	54.8	60.4	65.2
2015	61.3	56.3	60.4	55.7	57.5	64.9
2014	61.8	56.8	61.5	53.0	58.9	66.2
2013	59.9	54.7	61.3	52.1	55.8	68.3
2012	61.1	56.1	63.0	52.6	57.3	68.5
2011	62.7	57.1	63.6	52.4	57.8	68.9

The Happiness Alliance is a nonprofit organization serving communities around the world.

Our mission is to contribute to the transformation of economies and societies so that the happiness of people, the well-being of communities and the sustainability of ecosystems is the primary aim of governance, enterprise and people.

Our projects are:

Planet Happiness: Bringing the Happiness Movement to the Tourism Sector by focusing the attention of all tourism stakeholders on the well-being agenda and using tourism as a vehicle for development that demonstrably strengthens destination sustainability and the quality of life of host communities.

The Happiness Learning Collaborative: a joint project of Purdue University and the Happiness Alliance that is a transdisciplinary cross-sector project that empowers educators, community organizers, and residents to realize community well-being.

Happiness Intelligence!: Raising awareness, providing actionable guidance, and designing new modes of engagement that galvanize researchers, policymakers, and industry practitioners to ensure that artificial intelligence systems safeguard and contribute to the happiness of people, the well-being of communities & the sustainability of planetary ecosystems

The Happiness Roundtable: convening grassroots leadership in the Happiness Movement for connection, collaboration and celebration.

*Join us at [happycounts.org](http://happycounts.org)*



For attribution, please cite:

Musikanski, L. & Bradbury, J. (2021). The Happiness Report Card 2021 Part Two. *Happiness Alliance* [happycounts.org](http://happycounts.org)