

How are you?
**Exploring subjective well-being
and its safeguards based on The Social Study**

The Social Study Kick-off conference 9 December 2025

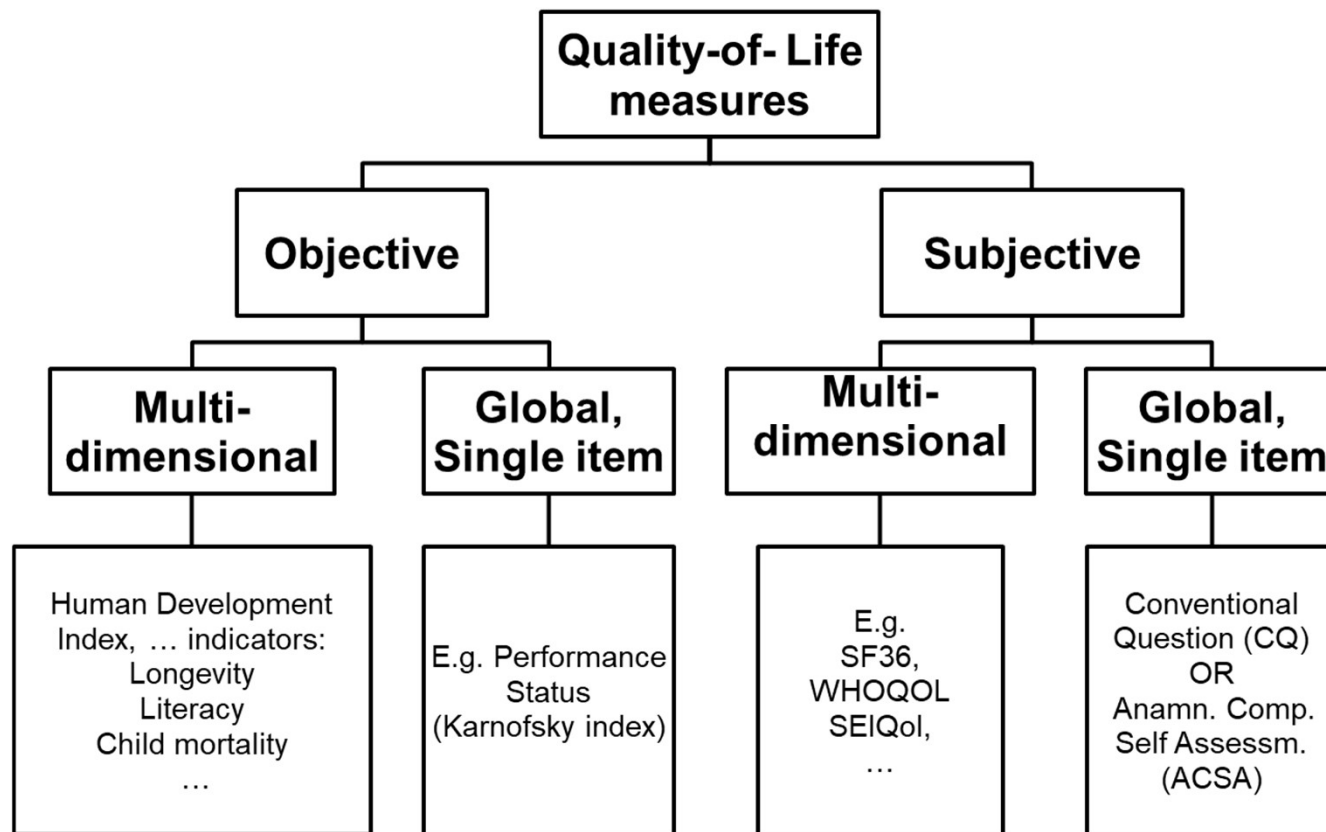
Dries Verlet & Ann Carton 

Overview

1. Introduction: subjective well-being and its measurement
2. ACSA as a self-anchoring scale
3. Some empirical findings, based on The Social Study
 - a. Methodology
 - b. Anchoring by ACSA and its informative value
 - c. “Determinants” of subjective well-being: life satisfaction versus ACSA
4. Conclusion

Introduction

- The study of the subjective well-being as an approach in the study of quality of life



(Theuns & Bernheim, 2019)

How to measure subjective well-being?

- Evaluation of life: the way we think & feel about life (head & stomach)
 - Cognitive dimension: cf. evaluative well-being
 - Affective dimension: experienced well-being (cf. hedonic dimension)

→ Diversity of measures available, in this presentation, we focus on:

General Life-satisfaction as a common way to measure subjective well-being

ACSA-scale (Anamnestic Comparative Self-Assessment) anchoring based on the best and worst period experienced in life

Anamnestic comparative self-assessment, ACSA

- Founding father: Em. prof. dr. J. Bernheim (physician and medical oncologist), being confronted with a life-threatening disease, his cancer patients spontaneously reviewed their lives, reminiscing and evoking their own best and worst times
 - They defined a personal scale of subjective well-being (SWB), with personal best and worst times as scale anchors
 - Such scale is personal and yet universal
 - Concrete instead of imaginary
 - Probably less affected by relativity bias (self-comparison)
- A serious response to a serious question

Anchoring procedure ACSA

- Administration: 3 steps (2 preparatory, 1 conclusive):
 1. Self-anchoring by identifying Best period in life
 2. Self-anchoring by identifying Worst period in life
 3. ACSA main question: Rating current SWB on self-defined Best-Worst scale

Anchoring procedure ACSA

- Thinking about the best and worst period in life: (as a longer period of life)
 - What were the causes of this situation (check one or more of the 14 topics, cf. infra)?
 - How long did this period last? About months
 - How old were you at that time?years
- First the best period, then worst period

Final assessment ACSA

- In the following scale, where +5 is “as good as the best period in your life”, and -5 is “as bad as the worst period in your life”, please indicate where you find yourself IN THE PRESENT period, that is the last 2 weeks.

As bad
as the
WORST
period
in my
life

-5



-4



-3



-2



-1



0



1



2



3



4



5

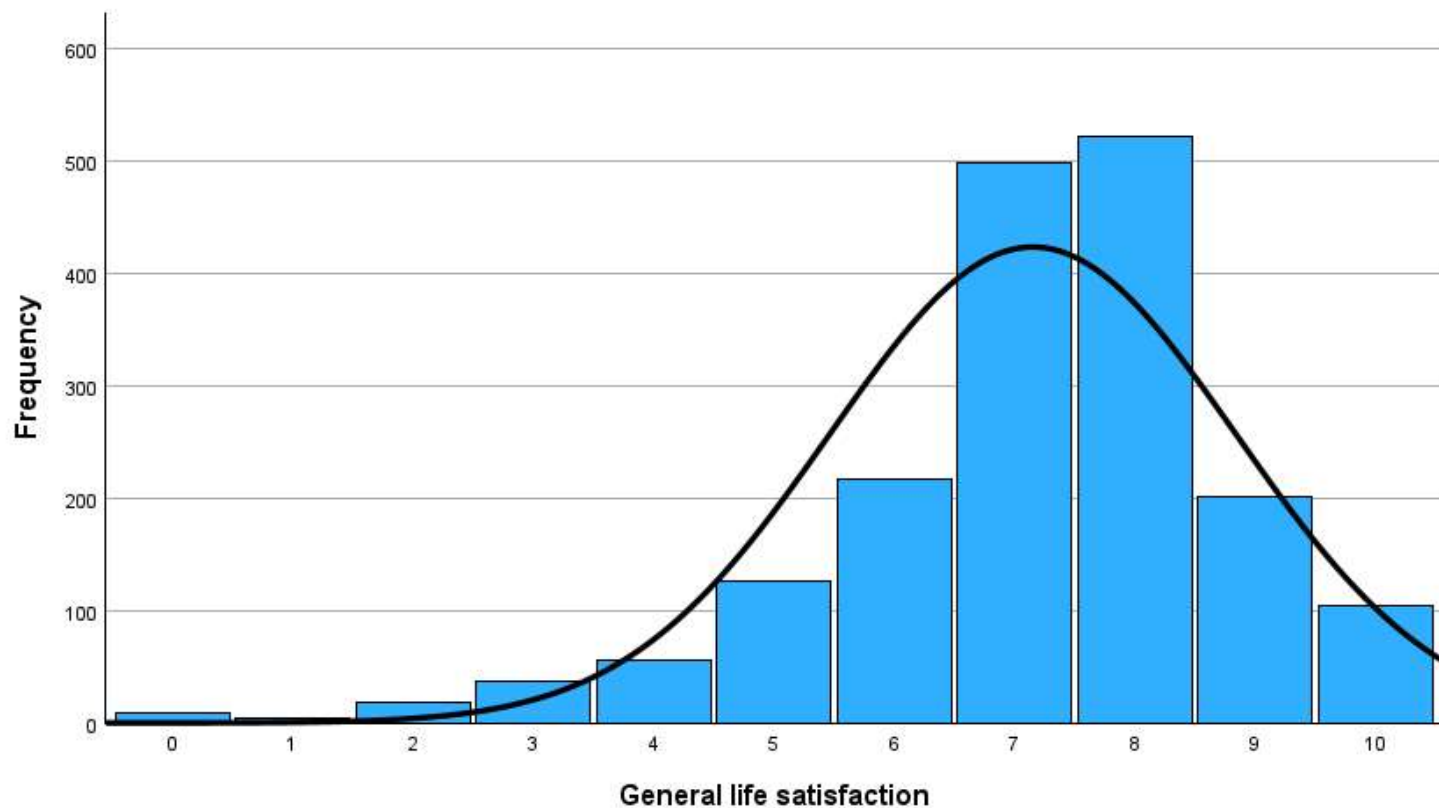


As good
as the
BEST
period
in my
life

Methodology: The Social Study

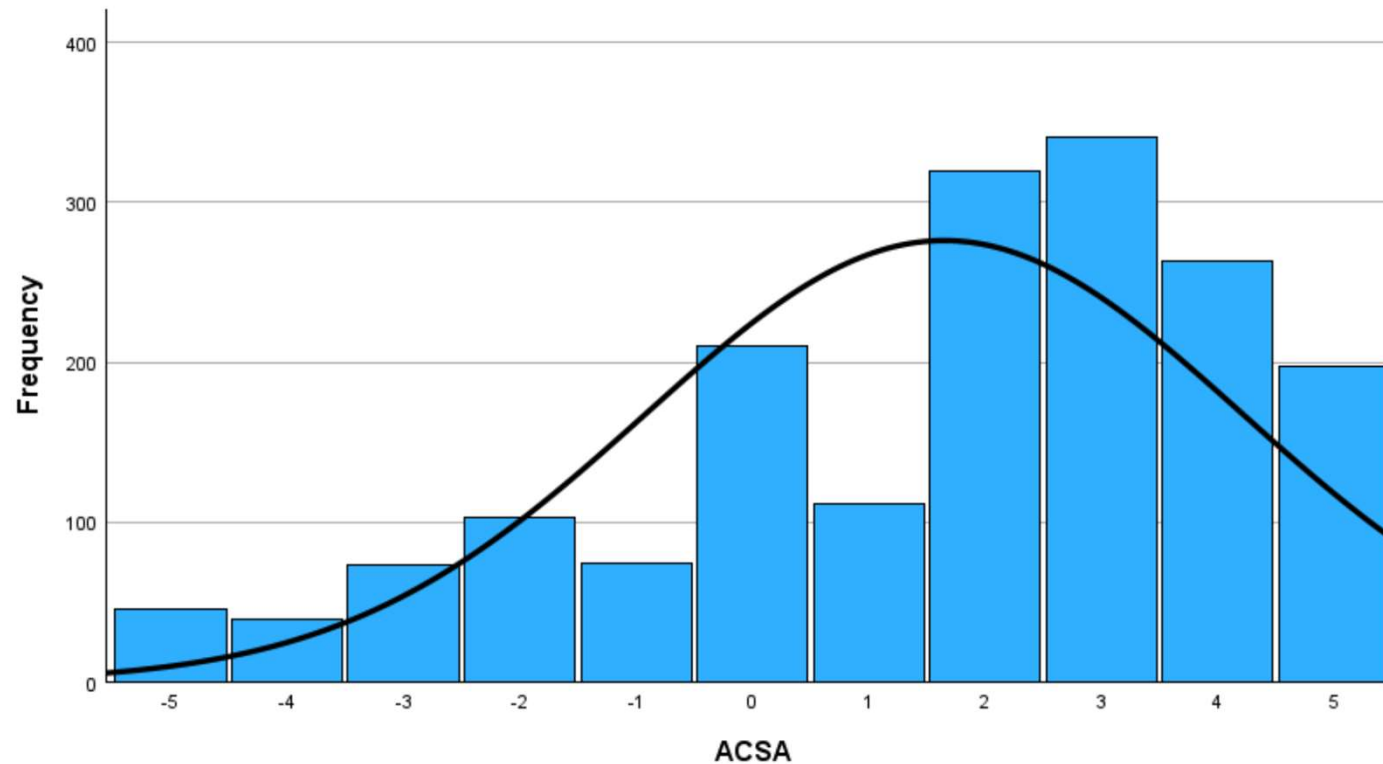
- First questionnaire commissioned by the Flemish government, coordinated by Statistics Flanders
- Wave of December 2024, main topics:
 - Subjective well-being and its determinants
 - Disabilities
 - Perception of Brussels
- N = 1.798 respondents in Flanders
- Weighted data
- Next week: presentation of more detailed results, Monday 15th December:
[SV-seminarie: The Social Study – samenwerking en mogelijkheden](#)
- For now: focus on the subjective well-being and its “determinants”

Levels of general life satisfaction based on 0 – 10 point scale



Mean: 7,15
Std. Dev.: 1,69
N: 1792

Score on ACSA, -5 – +5 point scale



Mean: 1,65
Std. Dev.: 2,57
N: 1776

Correlation with general life-satisfaction: 0,486

Some findings for ACSA: when thinking on it, what causes the best and worst situation?

	Mentioned	
	Best	Worst
Relationships	69%	39%
Family	73%	33%
Friends	70%	13%
Studies	16%	16%
Work	42%	28%
Health	53%	33%
Security or safety	22%	11%
Money	33%	22%
Legal issues	1%	8%
Achievements	25%	8%
Personal event	39%	35%
Historical event	2%	2%
Natural event	12%	1%
Other	4%	5%

Some findings for ACSA: How long do these periods last and on what age?

	Best	Worst
No answer	7,7%	4,2%
< 12 months	41,1%	43,3%
12 months or more	51,2%	52,5%

- How old were you at that time?
 - Best period: 31 year (st. dev.: 15)
 - Worst period: 34 year (st. dev.: 16)
- First the best period, then worst period?

Some findings for ACSA: First the best period, then worst period?

- Sequentiality

Best first	52,2%
Same	6,4%
Worst first	34,8%
System	6,6%

- Those who have experienced the worst period first and then the best, score significantly higher on the final ACSA scale (2.35 versus 1.11).
- 5,0% of the variance in the score on the ACSA scale can be “predicted” by taking into account whether the worst period is coming before the best period!

Searching for possible “determinants” of subjective well-being

- Inspiring theoretical models:
 - Self-Determination Theory (cf. Deci & Ryan, 2000)
 - Homeostasis theory (e.g. Heady, 1989; Cummins, 2004, 2010, 2018, ...)
 - Flourishing (e.g. Keyes, 2002; Huppert & So, 2013; Diener e.a., 2019; Seligman, 2012...)
- As reflected and used in different models/research frameworks of different organisations, e.g. OECD, Eurostat, UNECE, ONS, European Social Survey, EQUALITY Research–Collective, ...
- Diversity of relevant variables included in our first commissioned questionnaire, next to the abundantly use of variables from the core questionnaire

Pred. value of (groups of) variables in explaining the variance of the general life satisfaction and ACSA (adj. R^2)

	General life satisfaction	ACSA
Socio-demographic variables	10,8%	4,2%
Disability/impairment	6,0%	2,7%
Social contact (freq.)	4,9%	2,2%
Interpersonal trust	12,7%	4,8%
Social position (Subj SES)	11,0%	2,3%
Self-determination (6 items)	18,6%	8,6%

Pred. value of (groups of) variables in explaining the variance of the general life satisfaction and ACSA (adj. R^2)

	General life satisfaction	ACSA
Self-esteem	22,3%	10,6%
Anomy	7,7%	3,3%
Personality (big 5, 10 items)	10,5%	6,9%
Resilience	21,5%	15,2%
Feel appreciated	38,1%	17,5%
Life going somewhere	27,4%	14,7%
Opportunities	20,9%	4,0%
Optimism	35,9%	20,5%

Conclusions

- General life-satisfaction versus ACSA as a self-anchoring scale
 - ACSA as a more “real” measurement instrument
 - Information on the best and worst period as such important “explanatory” value for the final measurement, as the order of the experienced best and worst period
 - “Explanatory” value of the variables in our models are similar, although lower for ACSA
- Flourishing as an inspiring model, cf. role of resilience, self-esteem, feeling appreciated next to connectedness and subjective socio-economic position
- Importance of mediators/buffers for explaining subjective well-being, although we can question if they are determinants rather than proxies for subjective well-being
- Caution about causality
- Follow-up questionnaire in the panel can help us to clarify the interrelationship of subjective well-being measures and its correlates

Seminarie: The Social Study – samenwerking en mogelijkheden



Monday 15 December 2025



10:00 – 12:30



Klein Auditorium - Belpaire



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