Despair, Unhappiness and Age



Stirling, Dartmouth, NBER and GLO

www.dartmouth.edu/~blnchflr & twitter @D_Blanchflower

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2. Blanchflower, D.G. (2020a), 'Unhappiness and age', Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization, forthcoming.

3. Blanchflower, D.G. (2020b), 'Is happiness U-shaped? Age and subjective well-being in 145 countries,' <u>Journal of Population</u> <u>Economics</u>, forthcoming.

4. Blanchflower, D.G. (2020c), 'Experienced life cycle satisfaction in Europe: a comment' <u>Review of Behavioral Economics</u>, 7(2), pp. 201-206.

5. Blanchflower, D.G. & Clark, A.E. (2020), 'Children, unhappiness and family finances,' Journal of Population Economics, forthcoming.

6. Blanchflower, D.G. & Graham, C.L. (2020a), 'The mid-life dip in well-being: economists (who find it) versus psychologists (who don't)!' NBER Working Paper #26888, March.

7. Blanchflower, D.G. & Graham, C.L. (2020c), 'The U-shape of Happiness: A Response', submitted to <u>Perspectives in Psychological</u> <u>Science</u>

8. Blanchflower, D.G. & Oswald, A.J. (2020), 'Trends of extreme distress in the USA, 1993-2019,' <u>American Journal of Public Health</u>, forthcoming.

9. Blanchflower, D.G. & Oswald, A.J. (2019a), 'Do modern humans suffer a psychological low in midlife? Two approaches (with and without controls) in seven data sets', in <u>The Economics of Happiness.</u> edited by Mariano Rojas, Springer.

10. Blanchflower, D.G. & Oswald, A.J. (2019b), "Unhappiness and pain in Modern America: a review essay, and further evidence, on Carol Graham's Happiness for All?', Journal of Economic Literature, 57(2), June, pp. 385-402)

There are patterns in the data

I show that there is a U-shape in happiness and a hump shape in unhappiness in 145 countries.

I use all the world's major data files, BRFSS; Gallup World Poll and US Daily Tracker; Eurobarometers; GSS; EQLS; ESS; ISSP; WVS; UK APS. Also Health Survey of England and Health Survey of Scotland

The results from longitudinal data is consistent. Problems of attrition bias and the major panels (BHPS; GSOEP: HILDA) are short and do not follow individuals through the life course.

The findings on happiness are mostly from life satisfaction and happiness but also include trust, satisfaction with the economy, public services and democracy.

The findings on unhappiness include *extreme mental ill-health; depression; worry; sadness; stress; bad nerves; anxiety; loneliness; phobias and panics; being downhearted; being unhappy; poor/short sleep; losing confidence in yourself; not being able to overcome difficulties; being under strain; feeling a failure; feeling left out; feeling tense; thinking of yourself as a worthless person*

Age Minima

The 109 developing countries with their average minima with controls are: Albania 50; Algeria 41; Argentina 45; Armenia 56; Azerbaijan 46; Bahrain 40; Bangladesh 38; Belarus 53; Benin 48; Bolivia 53; Bosnia 52; Botswana 49; Brazil 44; Burkina Faso 39; Burundi 46; Cambodia 46; Cameroon 49; Cape Verde 51; Chile 47; China 43; Colombia 45; Congo (Brazzaville) 58; Costa Rica 41; Cote d'Ivoire 46; Dominican R. 37; Ecuador 48; Egypt 41; El Salvador 54; eSwatini 52; Gabon 54; Gambia 47; Georgia 59; Ghana 51; Guatemala 57; Haiti 44; Honduras 59; Hong Kong 47; India 49; Indonesia 37; Iran 44; Iraq 40; Israel 56; Jamaica 50; Jordan 43; Kazakhstan 50; Kenya 56; Kosovo 45; Kuwait 40; Kyrgyzstan 43; Laos 38; Lebanon 53; Lesotho 57; Liberia 48; Libya 39; Macedonia 50; Madagascar 41; Malawi 50; Malaysia 34; Maldives 36; Mali 45; Mauritius 39; Mexico 45; Moldova 46; Mongolia 34; Montenegro 58; Morocco 36; Mozambique 47; Myanmar 39; Namibia 45; Nepal 40; Niger 46; Nigeria 41; Palestine 46; Panama 47; Paraguay 44; Peru 49; Philippines 42; Puerto Rico 38; Russia 49; São Tomé 50; Saudi Arabia 39; Senegal 49; Serbia 56; Singapore 39; Somaliland 49; South Africa 51; South Korea 49; Sri Lanka 49; Surinam 43; Swaziland 65; Syria 37; Taiwan 41; Tajikistan 43; Tanzania 48; Thailand 48; Togo 51; Trinidad 43; Tunisia 53; Turkey 45; Turkish Cyprus 53; Uganda 48; Ukraine 57; Uruguay 47; Uzbekistan 48; Venezuela 47; Vietnam 43; Yemen 38; Zambia 43 and Zimbabwe 55.

The age minima in the 36 advanced countries with controls are: Australia 41; Austria 49; Belgium 44; Bulgaria 61; Canada 49; Croatia 57; Cyprus 50; Czech Republic 52; Denmark 43; Estonia 54; Finland 47; France 52; Germany 49; Greece 63; Hungary 53; Iceland 47; Ireland 43; Italy 52; Japan 50; Latvia 61; Lithuania 57; Luxembourg 37; Malta 48; Netherlands 45; New Zealand 38; Norway 52; Poland 55; Portugal 54; Romania 53; Slovakia 53; Slovenia 53; Spain 51; Sweden 46; Switzerland 43; UK 45 and USA 45.

How do I find a U-shape?

1) In the 145 countries paper I restrict the sample to those age <70

- 2) I include age and its square and solve for a minimum
- 3) And/or I include a full set of single year of age controls and plot.
- 4) I estimate with limited controls (year and country/region)
- 5) I estimate with full controls (+ gender, labor market and marital status and education
- 6) The results do not seem to be driven by cohort effects
- 7) The US is different with an early life peak before a midlife dip in raw data

8) Life satisfaction dropped sharply in the pandemic but a U-shape still exists in a new GLO paper - de Pedraza, P., Guzi, M. and Tijdens, K. (2020), 'Life dissatisfaction and anxiety in COVID-19 pandemic,' GLO Discussion Paper, No. 544, May.

The U-shape of Happiness: A Response (to Galambos et al, 2020)

David G. Blanchflower

and

Carol L. Graham



Cantril's Life satisfaction ladder, USA 2009-2019 from Gallup US daily tracker

Life satisfaction in UK, 2016-2018



Life satisfaction in Europe, 2009-2019



UK Happiness Percent saying yes from Yougov



From UCL UK study

https://b6bdcb03-332c-4ff9-8b9d-28f9c957493a.filesusr.com/ugd/3d9db5_cf6736fab93e4fb898d42d8668a350a6.pdf



Psychologists disagree

Whitbourne (2018) has gone so far as to argue that the U-shape curve is a 'myth'.

"The curve is not universal – data from economically struggling countries, for example, don't show the happiness rebound. Perhaps the people who participate in such surveys are those whose lives tend to follow the curve, while people who feel miserable at seventy or eighty, whose ennui is offset only by brooding over unrealized expectations, don't even bother to open such questionnaires" Arthur Krystal

"We present evidence that the U shape is not as robust or generalizable as often argued." We believe the conclusion that happiness declines from late adolescence to midlife (the first half of the U-shape) is premature, and possibly wrong "Galambos et al (2020)

"It is possible that the U-shaped (or other) curve exists but that it is so small that it is not practically meaningful. In other words, just because differences across age are statistically significant, that does not mean that these differences have practical significance.... At some point, an effect size becomes so small that it is truly **trivial** and lacks practical significance. For our Cantril ladder scale, respondents reported (and probably thought) in terms of the nearest whole scale point from 1 to 10. Therefore, it seemed that differences below 1.00 should be considered quite small" Jebb et al(2019). **Psychologists disagree - Blanchflower and Graham (#5-7)** Haven't spotted the rise of deaths of despair in US prime age less–educated (Case & Deaton, 2020).

- Mostly based on sample size of <500 (#5)
- Wrongly show that studies such as Inglehardt (1990) show no U-shape when they do. When the Eurobarometer data they use are re-estimated there are clear U-shapes (#5)
- One study claimed there was an M-shape but this was due to omitting young, happy students (#3)
- Wrongly report (Jebb et al) that their study shows no U-shape when the data clearly does (#7)
- Wrongly claim the size of the effects are trivial even though they are comparable to losing a spouse or a job (#6). They are about half of the scale of the drop in happiness in the lockdown.
- Suggest that it is appropriate to study the life course from 18-80 by studying people in the age range of 18-35 or ages 60+(#7)

Wrongly compare studies with no controls to those with controls (#5-#7)

Blanchflower and Oswald American Misery and Despair USA 1003-2019 (#8) We examine responses to a question in the BRFSS on 8.1 million respondents. We say that someone is in 'despair if they say 30 of last thirty days were bad mental health days.

Q1. "Now thinking about your mental health, which includes stress, depression, and problems with emotions, for how many days during the past 30 days was your mental health not good?"

The first finding is shown in Table 1. It is that the aggregate level of the paper's extreme-distress proxy -- effectively *'every day of my life is a bad day'* -- has trended upwards since the early 1990s. In 1993, the proportion of Americans with a reported level of distress this severe was 3.6%. In 2019, that proportion had increased to 6.4% of U.S. adults.

The USA appears to have a problem of middle-aged extreme distress that stems disproportionately from within the white low-education section of the U.S. population.

It finds: (i) at the personal level, the strongest statistical predictor of extreme distress is 'I am unable to work'; (ii) at the state level, a decline in the share of manufacturing jobs is a predictor of increased extreme distress. These findings seem to mesh with other evidence on the psychological damage created by economic insecurity.

Table 1. U.S. Rates of Extreme Distress by Gender, Race, Age, and Education (%)					ition (%)	
	All	Male	Female	High School.	<i>Age 35-54</i> .	Age 35-54
				Grad & Below	White	Non-white
1993	3.6%	3.2	4.1	4.5	3.9	4.9
1995	4.3	3.4	5.1	5.0	4.6	6.1
1997	4.3	3.6	5.0	5.5	4.7	5.5
1999	4.4	3.8	4.9	5.5	4.8	5.9
2001	4.9	4.0	5.6	6.3	5.3	6.0
2003	4.9	4.1	5.7	6.4	5.2	5.8
2005	4.7	3.8	5.5	6.1	5.3	5.6
2007	4.9	4.2	5.5	6.5	5.2	5.6
2008	5.0	4.1	5.8	6.6	5.6	6.1
2009	5.1	4.3	5.9	6.9	5.5	6.6
2010	5.1	4.4	5.8	6.9	5.4	6.0
2011	5.7	5.0	6.3	7.4	6.5	6.7
2012	5.8	5.1	6.5	7.7	6.4	6.9
2013	5.6	4.8	6.4	7.4	6.1	6.4
2014	5.6	4.8	6.4	7.3	6.3	6.3
2015	5.5	4.8	6.1	7.1	6.5	6.1
2016	5.7	4.8	6.5	7.5	6.5	6.0
2017	5.9	5.1	6.7	7.7	6.9	5.5
2018	6.2	4.5	7.3	8.1	6.8	5.7
2019	6.4	5.3	7.0	8.6	6.8	5.5

Table 1 U.S. Dates of Extreme Distance by Condex Dass Ass. and Education (0/)





Extreme distress, ages 35-54 by college or non-college, 1993-2019

Table 2. Extreme-Distress Regression Equations, USA 1993-2019 (Full Sample, Pooled Data)

	All	Whites	Non-whites
State-level variable			
State Manufacturing %*100	044 (079,008)	066 (103,029)	.031 (026, .088)
Personal-level variables			× · · · /
Unable to work	.176 (.174, .178)	.189 (.186, .190)	.147 (.144, .150)
Out of work >1 year	.085 (.083, .087)	.093 (.090, .096)	.065 (.062, .068)
Out of work <1 year	.057 (.056, .059)	.064 (.061, .066)	.043 (.041, .046)
Education grades 1-8	.006 (.001, .012)	.018 (.011, .025)	007 (015, .000)
Education grades 9-11	.001 (005, .006)	.007 (.000, .015)	009 (017,001
High school graduate/GED	015 (021,010)	012 (020,005)	020 (028,012
1-3 years college	017 (022,011)	015 (023,008)	016 (024,008
>=4yrs college	029 (034,023)	027 (034,020)	028 (036,020
Constant	.0078	.0082	0097
Ν	7,432,061	5,901,896	1,455,077

95% confidence intervals in parentheses

The U-shape of Happiness in Scotland

David N.F. Bell

Division of Economics, Management School, University of Stirling, IZA and CPC

and

David G. Blanchflower

Table 1. Life satisfaction Scotland, 2008-2018 (mean=7.686) – Scottish Health Survey	
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			2	
Age 25-34	0573 (1.73)	3236 (8.96)	3357 (8.81)	3351 (8.34)
Age 35-44	2334 (7.34)	5052 (13.74)	5463 (14.10)	5187 (12.68)
Age 45-54	3830 (12.31)	5495 (14.73)	6065 (15.36)	5720 (13.70)
Age 55-64	2295 (7.35)	3171 (8.08)	3981 (9.55)	3432 (7.78)
Age 65-74	.1653 (5.18)	1360 (2.91)	1970 (3.93)	1222 (2.32)
Age 75+	0219 (0.65)	1541 (2.97)	1832 (3.26)	0409 (0.69)
<1 portion fruit & veg		.1333 (3.26)	.1386 (3.15)	.1129 (2.43)
1 but < 2 fruit & veg		.1996 (6.89)	.1807 (5.84)	.1619 (4.96)
2 but <3 fruit & veg		.2750 (9.48)	.2537 (8.19)	.2301 (7.04)
3 but <4 fruit & veg		.3548 (11.97)	.3098 (9.78)	.2749 (8.23)
4 but <5 fruit & veg		.3996 (12.78)	.3489 (10.45)	.3025 (8.62)
5 but <6 fruit & veg		.4514 (13.31)	.3853 (10.63)	.3404 (8.92)
6 but <7 fruit & veg		.4726 (12.37)	.4209 (10.34)	.3678 (8.59)
7 but <8 fruit & veg		.4745 (10.47)	.4102 (8.53)	.3581 (7.13)
8+ fruit & veg		.4547 (11.04)	.3960 (9.11)	.3489 (7.62)
Male		0013 (0.10)	0194 (1.26)	0240 (1.49)
Log equivalized income			.2557 (22.69)	.2531 (21.06)
BMI				0086 (5.78)
Year dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Education dummies	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Marital status	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Labor force status	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ν	60,772	60,565	51,314	44,373

Table 2. Well-being in Scotland, 2016-2019

	Life satisfaction	Happiness	Worthwhile	Anxious
Age 25-34	4273 (10.24)	2907 (5.63)	2074 (5.12)	.1149 (1.62)
Age 35-44	7552 (18.06)	5272 (10.20)	3928 (9.67)	.2935 (4.13)
Age 45-54	9033 (21.71)	5872 (11.41)	5190 (12.84)	.3204 (4.53)
Age 55-64	5611 (13.33)	2728 (5.24)	2409 (5.89)	.0158 (0.22)
Age 65-74	.0742 (1.61)	.3309 (5.80)	.2858 (6.38)	6673 (8.51)
Age 75+	.1204 (0.92)	.3376 (2.09)	.3050 (2.41)	4119 (1.86)
Male	1265 (7.59)	0873 (4.23)	2997 (18.50)	3627 (12.80)
Year dummies	YesYes	YesYes		
Education dummies	YesYes	YesYes		
Marital status	YesYes	YesYes		
Labor force status	YesYes	YesYes		
Constant	8.2346	7.7694	8.2608	2.9631
Adjusted R ²	.1051	.0530	.0795	.0345
Ň	42,971	42,96642,934	42,956	
Mean dep variable	7.751	7.576	7.929	2.807

Source: UK Annual Population Survey, January 2016-December 2019. Notes: excluded category ages 16-24.

Table 3. GHQ36 Scotland, 2008-2018 (mean=7.686) Scottish Health Survey

.0938 (0.99)	.4215 (4.01)	.5434 (4.87)	.5078 (4.32)
.4426 (4.88)	.6778 (6.33)	.8373 (7.38)	.7473 (6.24)
.8020 (9.03)	.7958 (7.33)	.9765 (8.45)	.8631 (7.07)
.2981 (3.34)	.0633 (0.55)	.2841 (2.33)	.1654 (1.28)
6849 (7.49)	2961 (2.17)	1882 (1.28)	2981 (1.93)
4580 (4.61)	3074 (2.01)	2045 (1.24)	3715 (2.13)
	4566 (3.79)	4676 (3.62)	4208 (3.09)
	3333 (3.91)	2877 (3.16)	1985 (2.07)
	5985 (7.00)	5775 (6.33)	5240 (5.46)
	7638 (8.77)	7135 (7.65)	6393 (6.53)
	8327 (9.07)	7528 (7.68)	7023 (6.82)
	9605 (9.64)	8757 (8.23)	7886 (7.05)
	-1.0062 (9.01)	9323 (7.82)	8587 (6.85)
	-1.0343 (7.84)	9066 (6.46)	9035 (6.15)
	9830 (8.18)	8987 (7.05)	7537 (5.61)
	9509 (22.47)	9262 (20.51)	9256 (19.57
		3888 (11.71)	3332 (9.45)
			.0202 (4.68)
YesYes	YesYes		
No	YesYes	Yes	
No	YesYes	Yes	
No	YesYes	Yes	
55,250	55,17447,766	42,190	
	.0938 (0.99) .4426 (4.88) .8020 (9.03) .2981 (3.34) 6849 (7.49) 4580 (4.61) YesYes No No No No S55,250	$\begin{array}{rrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr$	$\begin{array}{cccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccccc$



Chart 1. Life satisfaction in Scotland, 2008-2018, Scottish Health Survey

Limited controls (LHS)All controls (RHS)

Chart 2. Life satisfaction, Scotland, 2016-2019, APS





Chart 3. GHQ36 Unhappiness - Scotland, 2008-2018, Scottish Health Survey

• Limited controls (LHS) • All controls (RHS)

Chart 4. Anxiety in Scotland, 2016-2019, APS.



• Limited controls • All controls

Sleep Duration is U-shaped in Age in the United States

(Reject and) resubmitted to Journal of Sleep Research

David G. Blanchflower

April 30th, 2020

Chart 1. Average hours of sleep, USA, 2013-2019







Chart 9. Incidence of short sleep and the probability of being depressed.

Age

Galambos, Krahn, Johnson and Lachman claim: "the conclusion that happiness declines from late adolescence to midlife (the first half of the U shape) is premature, and possibly wrong."

Carol Graham and I argue that couldn't possibly be further from the truth. The empirical literature they summarize they claim is inconsistent with a U shape, but we show it is consistent with one, once their errors and omissions are corrected.

We present evidence of midlife zeniths in well-being for the UK, the US and Europe based on four million individual observations.

We also find evidence that the U-shape applies not just to life satisfaction but more broadly to questions on the household's financial situation the situation of the economy, the provision of public services, expectations of the economy, satisfaction with democracy and trust in the media; political parties; the police; the army and even the United Nations.

These all have minima that average around age 48.

The finding of a U-shape is one of the most robust patterns in social science.

I'VE BEEN "SOCIAL DISTANCING" ALL MY LIFE...

