

WELL-BEING OVER THE LIFE COURSE: MEASURING SUBJECTIVE EVALUATION WITH LIFE CALENDARS

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Context

*Retrospective reports of emotional experience differ from concurrent evaluation of the same situation. Nevertheless, it's the remembered (and not the "real") experience that predicts future behavior best (Wirtz, Krieger, Scollon & Diener, 2003).
Life calendar methods reduce some of the memory biases inherent to retrospective (factual) accounts (Belli, 2001).*

- **Only few studies assess subjective well-being with life calendar instruments**
- **Empirical validation of the measurement is lacking**

Two aspects of the assessment of retrospective accounts of emotional experiences

Dynamics of retrospective memory

Emotional experiences are short-lived. Once the feeling has faded, people reconstruct the situation based on semantic information (Robinson & Clore, 2002)

➔ Retrospective accounts of emotional experience:

- Reconstruction based on (remembered) objective circumstances (Schwarz, Kahneman & Xu, 2009, Manzoni et al. 2010)
- Variability over time (Clausen, 1998)
- Evaluation of life satisfaction is influenced by individual differences and cultural norms (Pavot & Diener, 2008)
- Reconstruction of the past in the light of the present rather than simple recalling (Scott & Alwin, 1998)

Methods of measurement

The choice of the measurement method has an important impact on the results.

To date, subjective evaluation has been assessed with two methods:

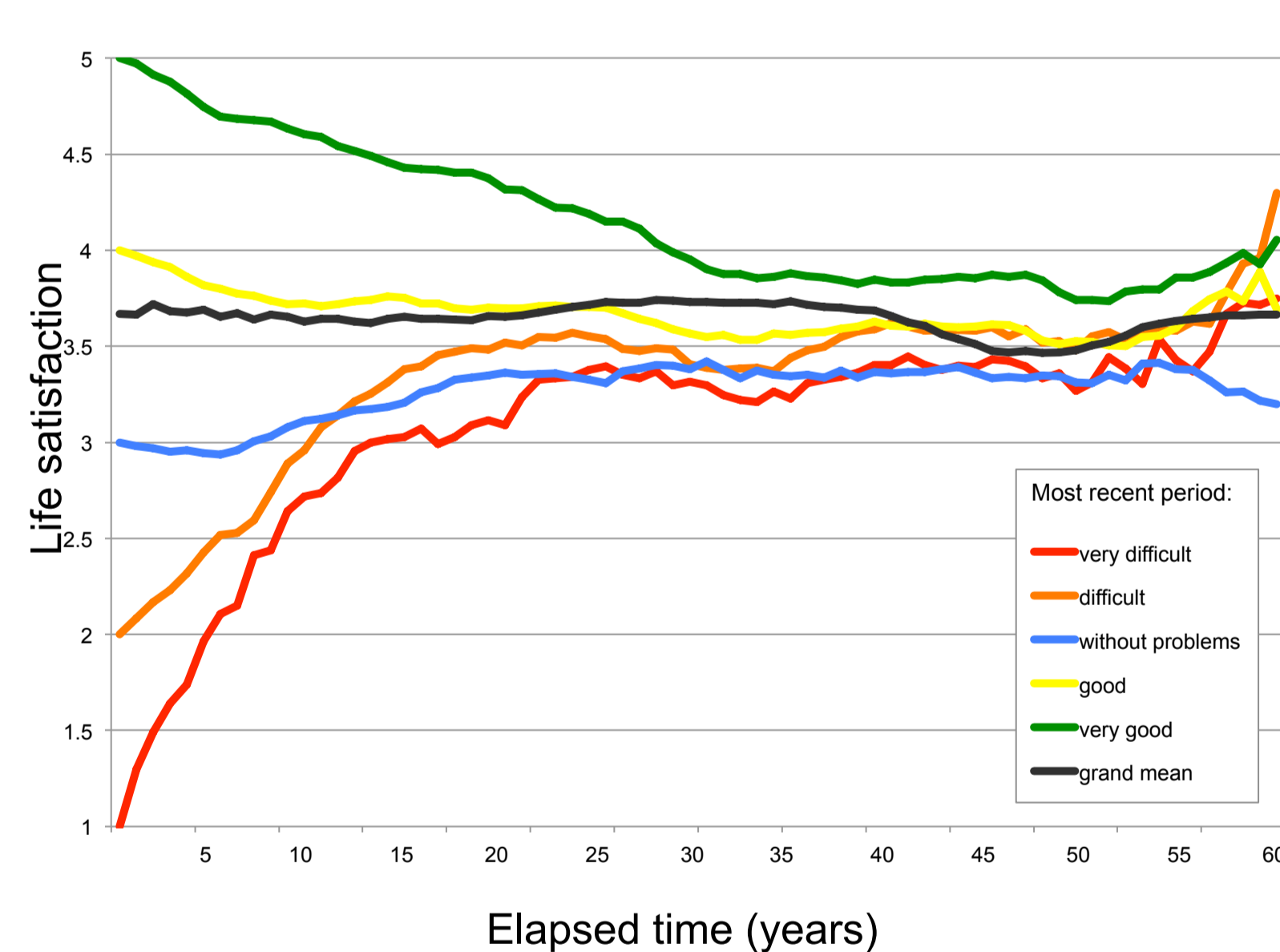
- Division of the life in periods and evaluation of each period on a likert scale with 3 or 5 labelled categories ("Biographies et Entourages"; VLV; PSMIII pilot study)
- Life satisfaction charts (Clausen, 1995; Perren, Keller, Passardi & Scholz, 2010)

➔ The implications of each measurement method in combination with life calendars remain to be explored.

Preliminary results from secondary data analysis and pre-tests

Satisfaction over the life course, grouped by evaluation of the most recent period

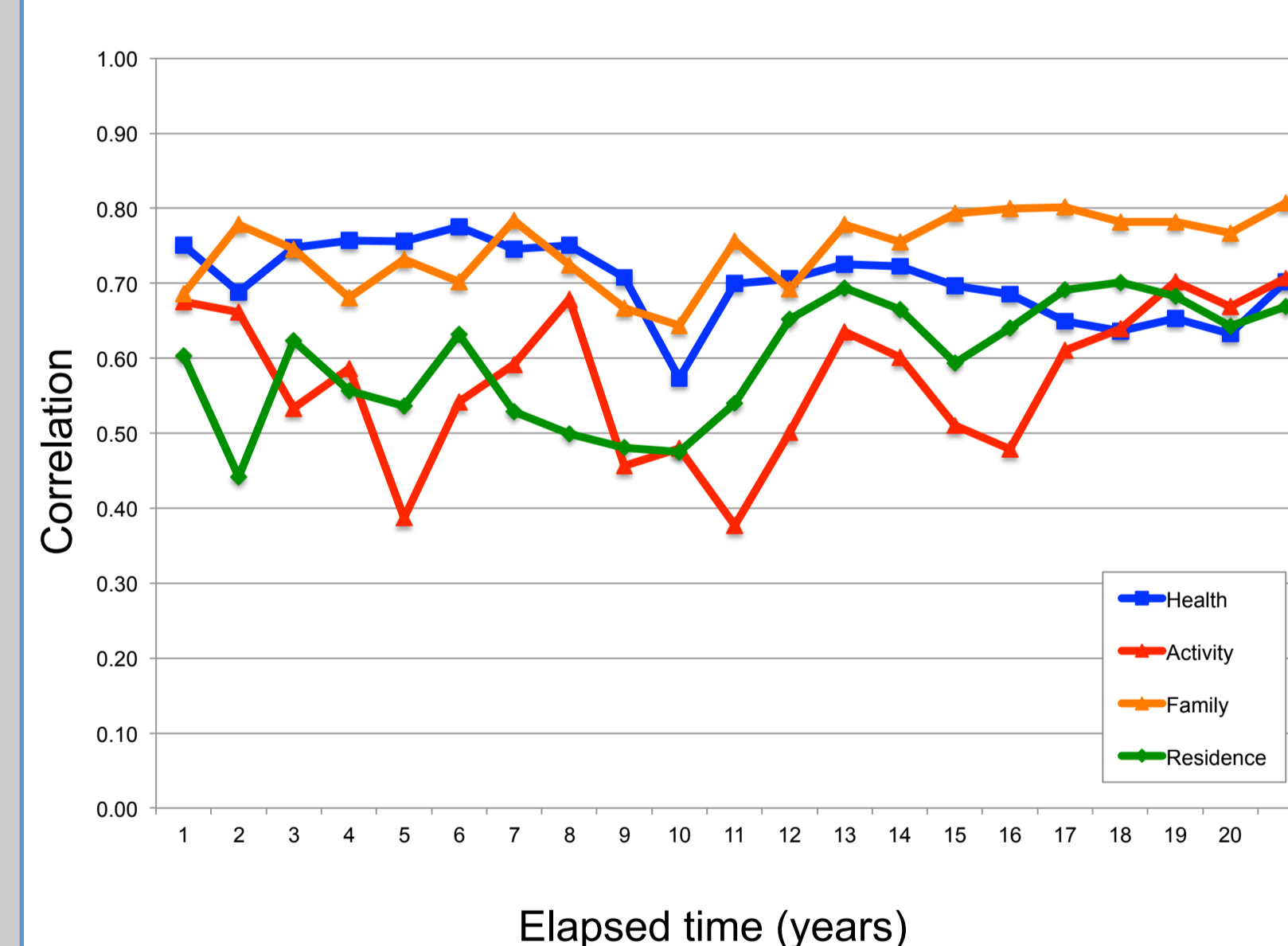
(Data: biographies et entourages, INED, 2001)



- Stability of the mean satisfaction over the life course
- Convergence of all groups around the mean after about 30 years → same pattern when grouped by first period
- More positive than negative periods

Correlations of satisfaction assessed by 5-point, labelled likert scales and life satisfaction graph, by life domain

(Data: pre-tests with students at University of Lausanne, 2011)



- Medium to large correlations between both methods
- Different degrees of concordance in different life domains
- In general, slightly more positive evaluations with likert scales

Next steps

Research Questions

- What are we really measuring when assessing subjective evaluation with life calendars?
- Which are the implications of the different measurement methods?
- Do life calendars decrease, or actually even increase memory biases of retrospective accounts of life satisfaction by enhancing the influence of factual information?

Data and methods

- Secondary data
Biographies et entourages (France, 2001; N=2830; 50-70 years)
PSMIII pilot study (Switzerland, 2012/2013, N≈500, general population)
- Experimental study: Comparison of measurement methods for subjective life calendar data

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