Adulthood transitions and well-being: Analyzing six waves of panel data in Singapore (2017-2022)

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Mental health of youth in the spotlight

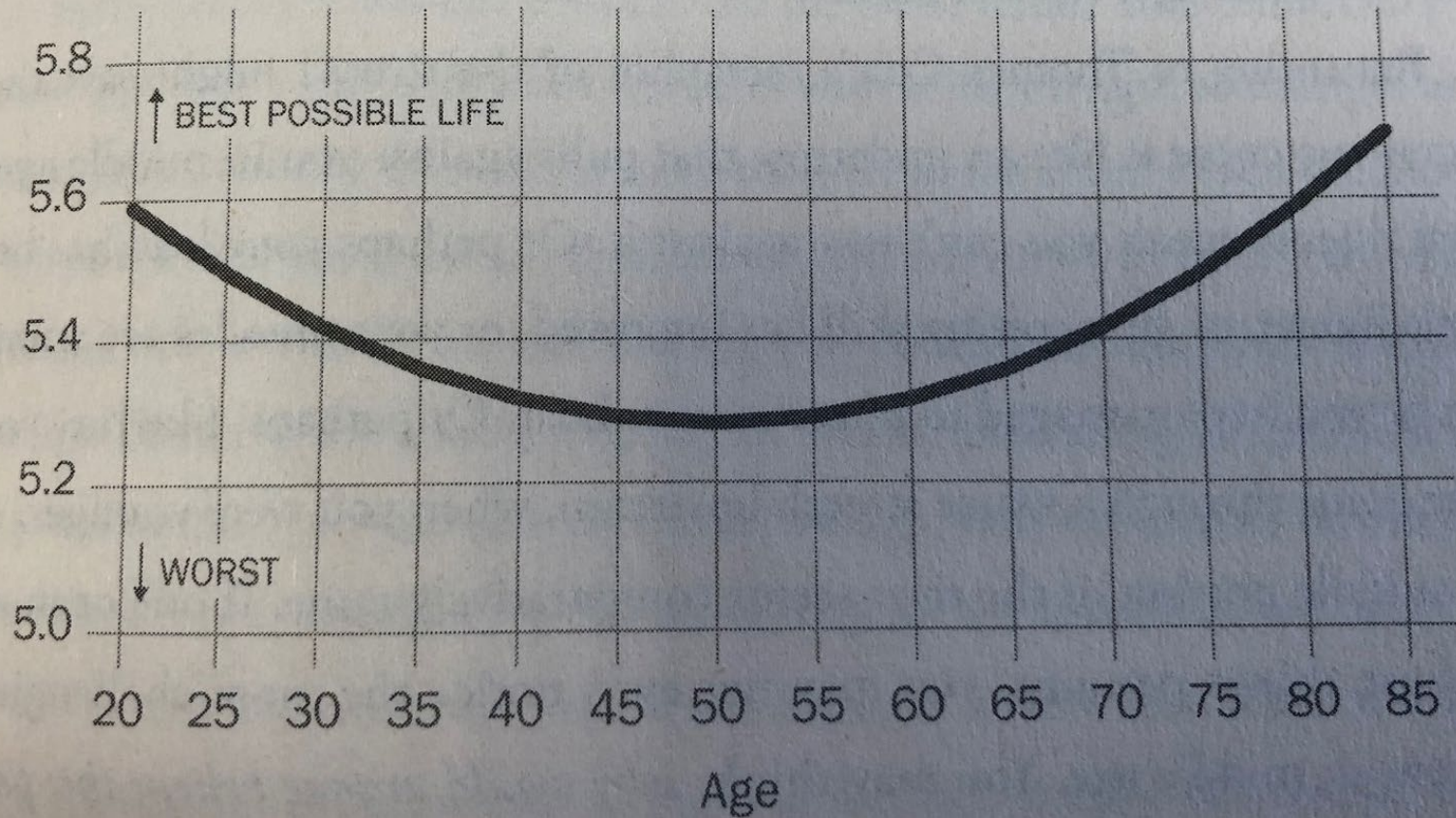**National Population Health Survey 2022 (MOH), 18-74, n = 8,000.**

The survey findings showed that the prevalence of poor mental health **increased** from 13.4 per cent in 2020 to 17 per cent in 2022.

In particular, it is <u>younger adults aged 18 to 29</u> that have the highest proportion of poor mental health at 25.3 per cent. The prevalence for other age groups was much lower, ranging from 10.5 per cent for those aged 60 to 74 to 19.4 per cent in those aged 30 to 39 years, results showed.

What are the factors in youth well-being?

- We know from existing research that **AGEING** is a factor: people get more miserable as they age (up to a point).

- U shape curve

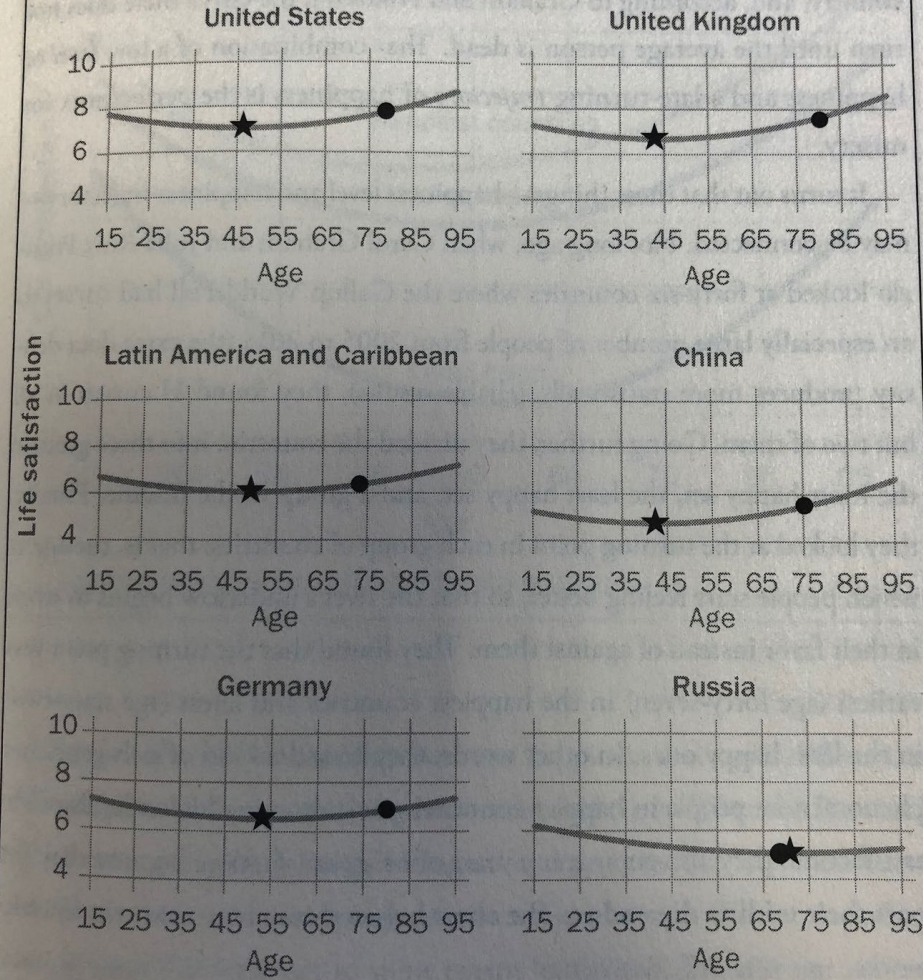- "Life gets better after 50" (the Happiness Curve, Jonathan Rauch 2018)

Average life satisfaction by age
(Adjusted world sample, 2010–2012)

↑ BEST POSSIBLE LIFE

↓ WORST

Age

Life satisfaction and age (adjusted, 2010–2012)

★ Turning point
● Average longevity

United States

United Kingdom

Latin America and Caribbean

China

Germany

Russia

Life satisfaction

Age

- **However, what is it about ageing that drives well-being down?**

  - Need to look deeper at life course factors.

  - E.g., **ADULTHOOD TRANSITIONS** (moving from school to work, getting more education, family formation).

- As well as the role of **EVENTS** (e.g., external shocks like Covid-19).

The stresses of adulting and the Covid-19 curveball

- Adulting can be challenging, a time of uncertainty, not understanding the rules, frustration, sometimes devastation. (Christian Smith et al., "Lost in Transition")

- Add to that, events and external shocks such as Covid-19. In fact, global events, economic recession, trade wars etc., were already with us before Covid-19.

- In comes Covid-19 as an additional layer of crisis with staggering consequences for the world including for young people making transitions into adulthood.

- **Making it necessary to ask: How has Covid-19 shaped transitions into adulthood to affect the mental health of different groups of young people?** (Lancet, 24 Jun 2021, Creswell et. al.)

Model

TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL-TO-WORK

+

LIFE SATISFACTION

EDUCATIONAL MOBILITY

+

TRANSITION INTO MARRIAGE

+

AGEING

-

Covid-19

-
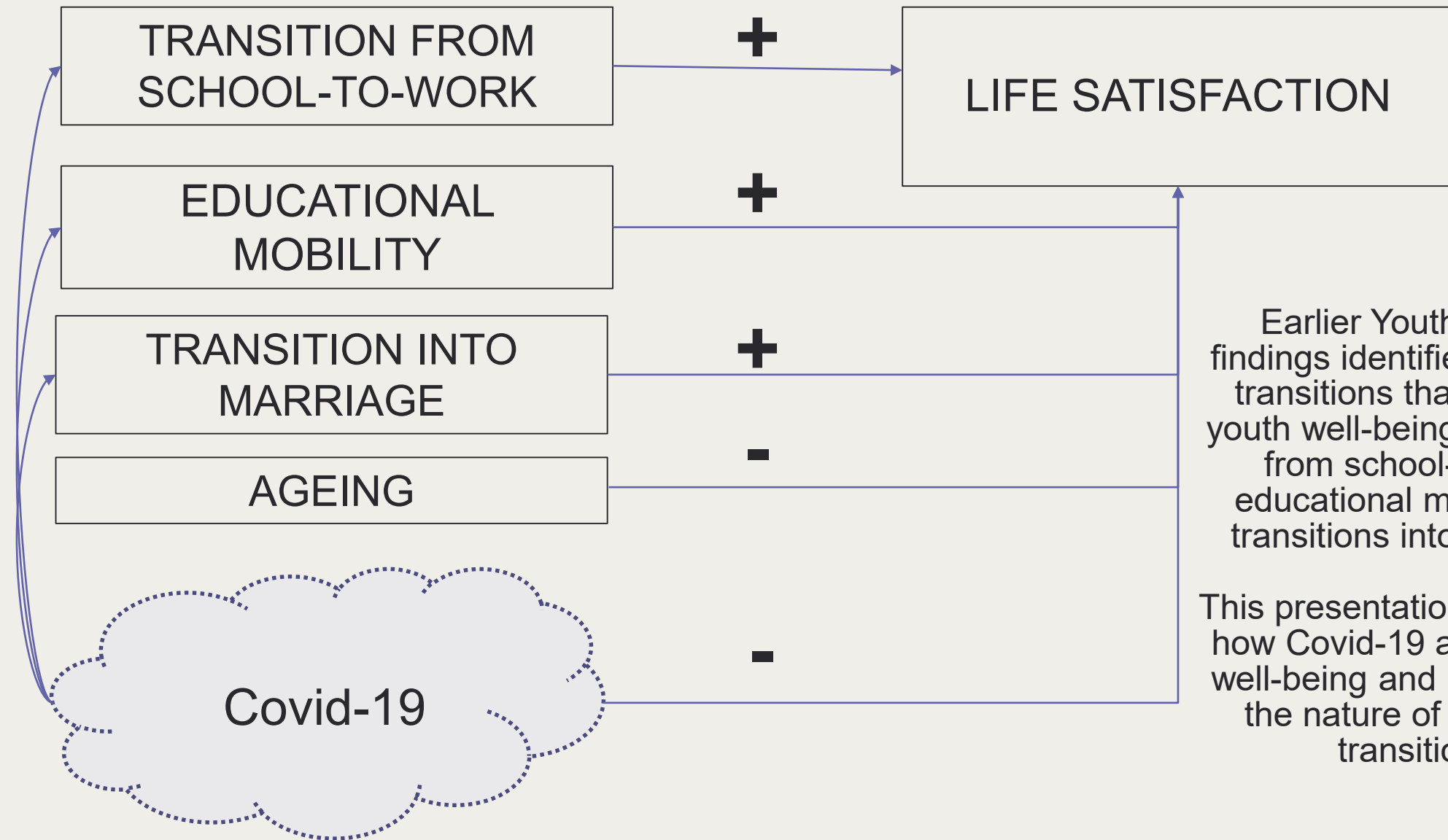
Earlier Youth STEPS findings identified three key transitions that matter to youth well-being: transitions from school-to-work, educational mobility and transitions into marriage.

This presentation focuses on how Covid-19 affects youth well-being and how it alters the nature of these key transitions.
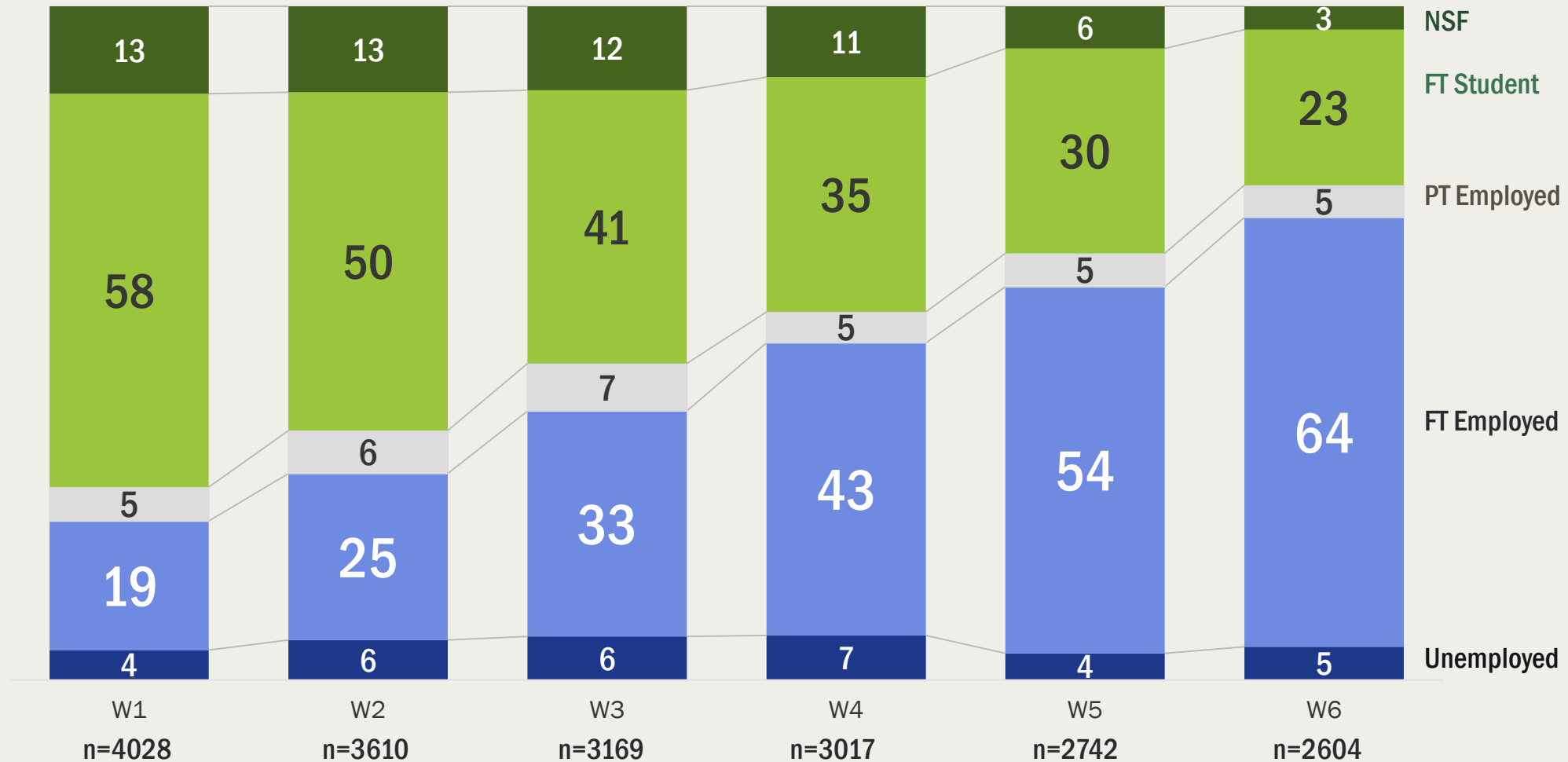
Follow respondents across 6 years (ages)

W1	W2	W3	W4	W5	W6
17	18	19	20	21	22
18	19	20	21	22	23
19	20	21	22	23	24
20	21	22	23	24	25
21	22	23	24	25	26
22	23	24	25	26	27
23	24	25	26	27	28
24	25	26	27	28	29

School-to-work has been the most significant occupational transition since 2017. Majority were employed by 2022, with over 6 in 10 (64%) in full-time positions:

	NSF	FT Student	PT Employed	FT Employed	Unemployed
W1 n=4028	13	58	5	19	4
W2 n=3610	13	50	6	25	6
W3 n=3169	12	41	7	33	6
W4 n=3017	11	35	5	43	7
W5 n=2742	6	30	5	54	4
W6 n=2604	3	23	5	64	5

Work

Homemakers are excluded in this chart:
W1 n= 13, W2 n=8, W3 n=9, W4 n=10, W5 n=11, W6 n=16
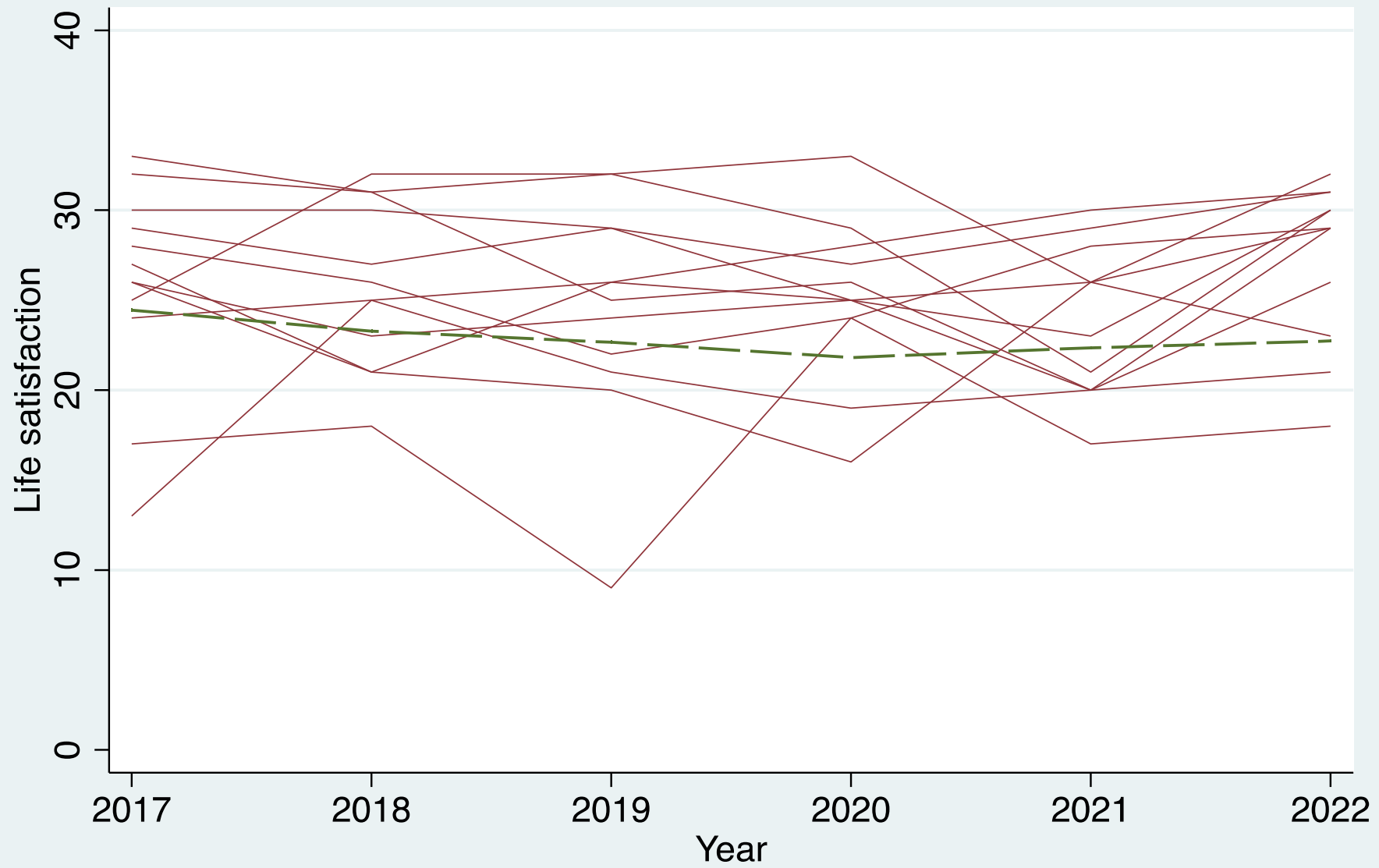
DV: Life satisfaction scale

7 item Likert scale, over 5 items.

1) In most ways, my life is close to my ideal.

2) The conditions of my life are excellent.

3) I am satisfied with my life.

4) So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life.

5) If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

Mean across waves: 24.4 (W1), 23.3 (W2), 22.7 (W3), 21.8 (W4), 22.4 (W5), 22.7 (W6)

Focal IVs (moving between statuses)

(1) "Transition from school to work" measured by changes in employment statuses, 1=unemployed, 2=full time employed, 3=part-time employed, 4=student, 5=national service, 6=homemaker.

(2) "Educational mobility" measured by changes in highest level of formal education attained, 1=low (up to O level), 2=middle (A level to diploma), 3=high (degree and others).

(3) "Transition into marriage" measured by changes in marital status, (1=single, 2=married)

Covid-19: measured in two ways

(1) **As "Covid years" (2020, 2021, 2022 as Covid years vs. 2017, 2018, 2019 as non-Covid years).** The problem with using the "years" approach however is that it is quite strict – e.g., everyone in 2020 will "feel" Covid the same way.

(2) **As "Covid as subjective experience".** The question being asked is: "To what extent has Covid-19 influenced your life in Singapore?" (1=Highly positive impact, 2=Some positive impact, 3=No impact at all, 4=Some negative impact, 5=Highly negative impact). This circumvents the problem of scrunching Covid down to a common within-year experience, but rather tracks changes in Covid-related sentiments, within individuals, over time.

Even in the worst years, a good number reported being unaffected or positively affected by Covid-19

Table: Covid19 as a subjective experience by individuals, distribution across years

Covid effect*	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
Highly positive impact (++)	0	0	0	74	104	119	297
Some positive impact (+)	0	0	0	512	506	683	1701
No impact at all (NIL)	2064	2064	2064	250	220	351	7013
Some negative impact (-)	0	0	0	983	941	683	2607
Highly negative impact (--)	0	0	0	142	164	641	370
Total	2064	2064	2064	1961	1935	1900	11988

Measured at three waves (2020, 2021, 2022):
"To what extent has COVID-19 influenced your life in Singapore?"

Analytical strategy

Use **fixed effect (FE) regressions** to model impact of X on Y.

Panel data allows us to track within-person changes over time in the IVs and DV.

FE models assign zero change for all time-invariant variables thus controlling for such effects (e.g., gender, race, cohort, and housing background).

To measure the effects of Covid across groups AND the effects of transitions across Covid years (and/or Covid experiences), I use the interaction term: Transition x Covid.

MAIN EFFECTS

Table: Effect of transitions on life satisfaction (Covid as Covid years)

Predictors	b	Significance
Education (mid)	-.50	**
Education (high)	-.008	NS
Education (low)=0		
Married	2.22	***
Single=0		
Unemployed	-.89	***
Full-time employed	.04	NS
Part-time employed	-.56	*
National Service	-.13	NS
Homemaker	1.21	NS
Student=0		
Covid years	-.55	***
Ageing (time since start of survey)	-.27	***
Constant	24.08	***

*P<.05, **P<.01, ***P<.001

- Moving from lower to higher amounts of education (i.e., educational mobility) increases life satisfaction.

- Moving from single to married increases life satisfaction.

- Moving from student to unemployment and part-time employment reduces life satisfaction.

- Moving into the Covid years is associated with lower life satisfaction.

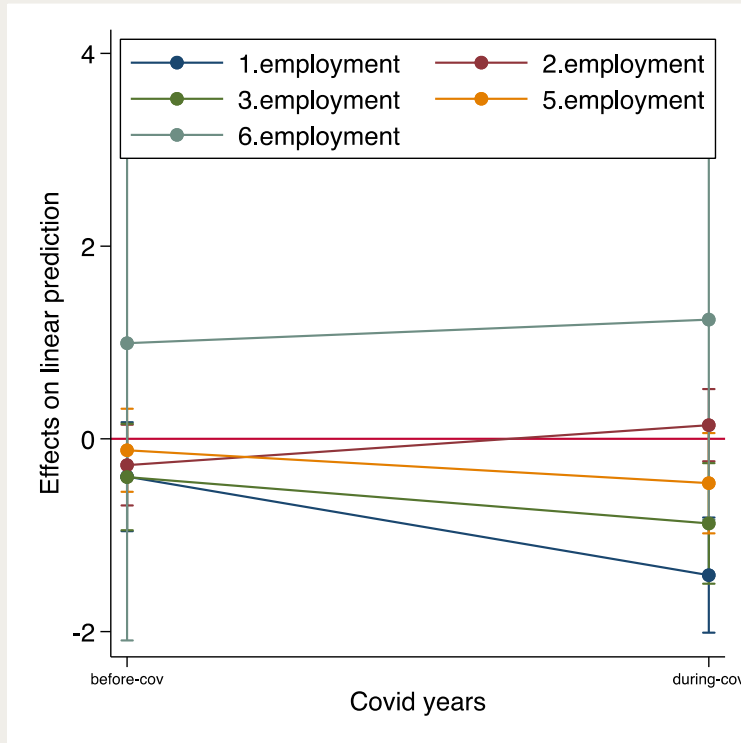- Moving to the next year (i.e., ageing) reduces life satisfaction.

Table: Effect of transitions on life satisfaction (only interactions shown, Covid as Covid years)

| Predictors	b	Significance
Education (mid) x Covid years	.68	NS
Education (high) x Covid years	1.33	**
Married x Covid years	.70	NS
Unemployed x Covid years	-1.02	*
Full-time employed x Covid years	.42	NS
Part-time employed x Covid years	-.48	NS
National Service x Covid years	-.34	NS
Homemaker x Covid years	.25	NS

*P<.05, **P<.01, ***P<.001

BEING JOBLESS IN A TIME OF COVID is especially challenging: Transitions from student into unemployment are more damaging on mental health during Covid than before Covid.
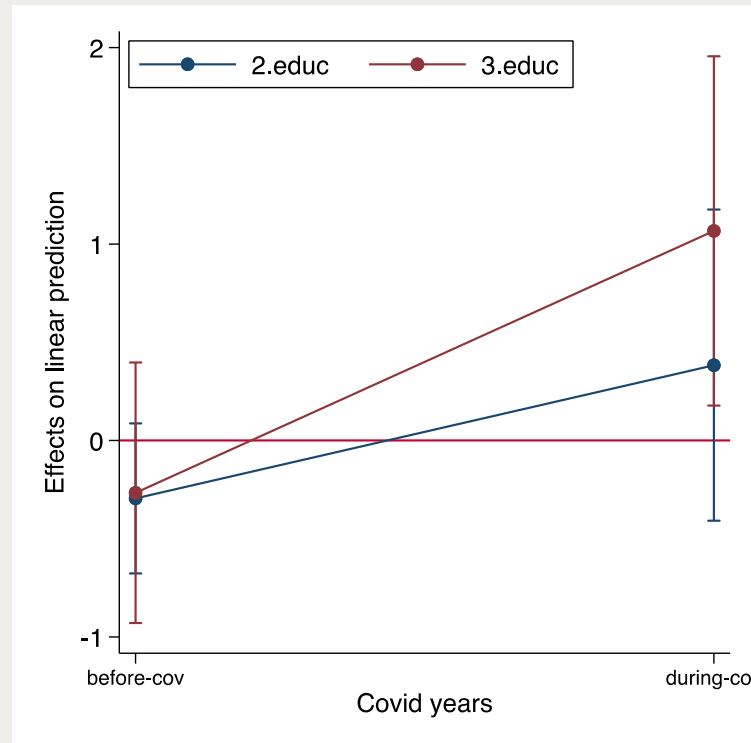
The mental health premiums to educational mobility (accruing to the well-educated) are greater during Covid than before Covid.
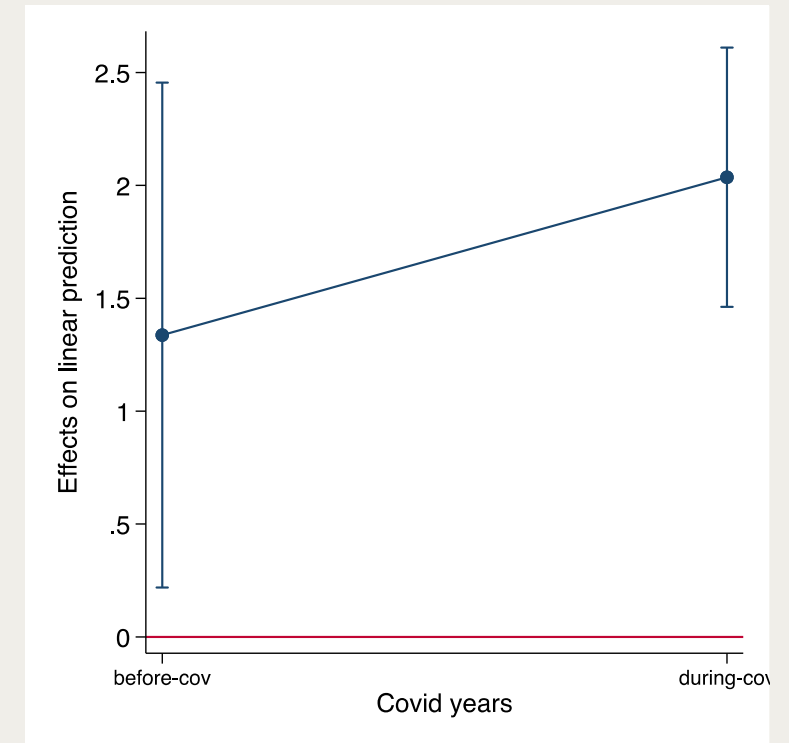
Transition into marriage from singlehood sees no significant increase in life satisfaction during Covid as compared to before Covid. Marriage significantly increases LS with or without Covid.

Summary

1) Transition from student to full-time employment is the desired state.

2) Being unemployed reduces life satisfaction.

3) Covid-19 amplifies mental health inequalities between occupation and education groups.

4) Marriage uplifts life satisfaction in all years (Covid or no Covid).

5) Ageing decreases life satisfaction.