

The MIDUS Times



Midlife in the United States

Dear MIDUS Participants:

A National Study of Health & Well-Being

Thank you so much for participating in another round of the MIDUS study. I am delighted to report that we have re-interviewed about 75% of the people from the original study. That's close to 5,000 individuals! After nearly a decade this is a terrific follow-up, and it is all due to your generosity of time and good will toward the study. We deeply appreciate everything you have contributed.

The purpose of this newsletter is to give you an early preview of what we have learned from phone interviews and questionnaires (remember those hefty documents!). We organize the information around the theme of "Then and Now." Similar questions about your health and well-being were asked in 1994-95 and in 2004-05, so we can look at how much things have changed over this 9-10 year period. Do we see improvements or decline? And for whom – are there differences between how men and women? What about between younger and older people in the study?

In some areas you will see evidence of improvement for the whole group; while in others, we see signs of more negative change, sometimes for the whole group, and sometimes just for particular age groups, or only one gender. Scientists around the U.S. will continue to study the MIDUS data. From them we will learn even more about why some individuals are changing for the better over time, while others are showing declining health and well-being. We will keep you posted of the findings!

In the meanwhile, if you want to learn more about MIDUS, we encourage you to visit our website: www.midus.wisc.edu. To date, over 175 studies have been published, and we expect to see even more from the newly collected data.

Again, thanks for your support of this important U.S. study.

Sincerely,



Carol D. Ryff, Director
MIDUS National Study of Health and Well-Being

In this Issue

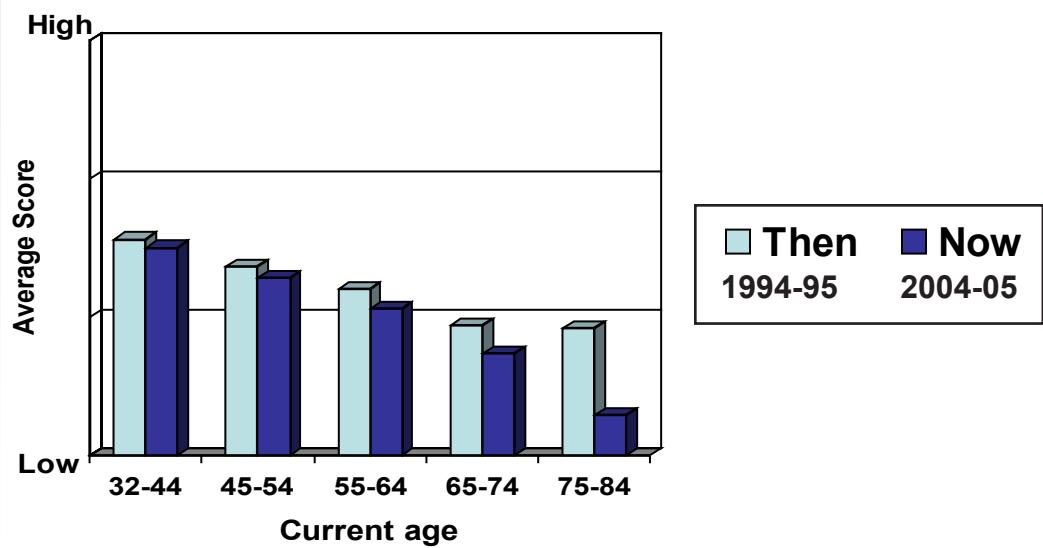
Physical Health.....	2
Emotional Health.....	3
Purpose in Life.....	4
Perceived Control.....	5
Positive Relations with Others.....	6
Contribution to Others' Welfare.....	7
Overall Life Satisfaction.....	8

Physical Health: Then and Now



In general, would you say your PHYSICAL HEALTH is excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor? We asked you this question back in 1994-1995 (Then) and again in the interview you completed in 2004-2005 (Now). The chart below compares your responses, 'Then' (light blue bars) and 'Now' (dark blue bars). A low 'Average score' indicates poor health, while a high score indicates very good or excellent health. Because people tend to rate their health differently as they

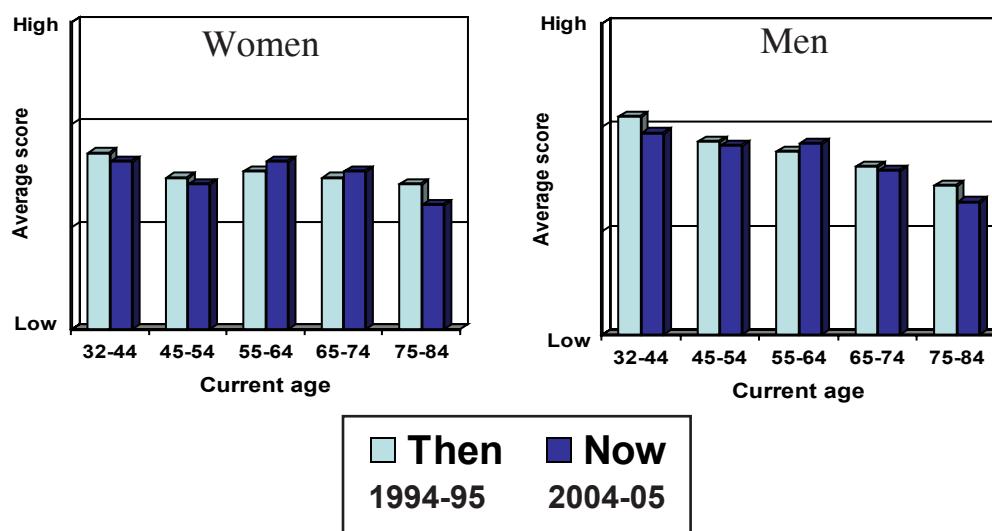
age, the chart shows the scores by age groups. Younger adults, aged 32-44 (Then & Now), are more likely to rate their health as 'Good' to 'Very Good'. Older adults, aged 75-84, however, are more likely to rate their health as 'Fair' or 'Poor'. Changes from 'Then' to 'Now' are most significant for the 3 oldest age groups. These patterns are not too surprising, given that all of us probably expect to have more physical health challenges as we grow older.



Emotional Health: Then and Now



What about emotional health? Has it gotten better or worse over time? Here, we illustrate our findings separately by men and women because men tend to rate their emotional health higher than women. In addition, we also see differences in ratings by age. As with physical health, older people tend to rate their emotional health lower in comparison to younger respondents. This was true both for the first MIDUS assessments as well as for the more recent findings. In contrast to physical health, none of the age groups showed significant change from 'Then' until 'Now' in emotional health.



How old do you feel?

When we asked what age MIDUS respondents feel most of the time, we discovered something interesting. The youngest adults reported feeling about 6 years younger than they actually were, whereas the oldest group in the study reported feeling, on average, about 15 years younger than they actually were.

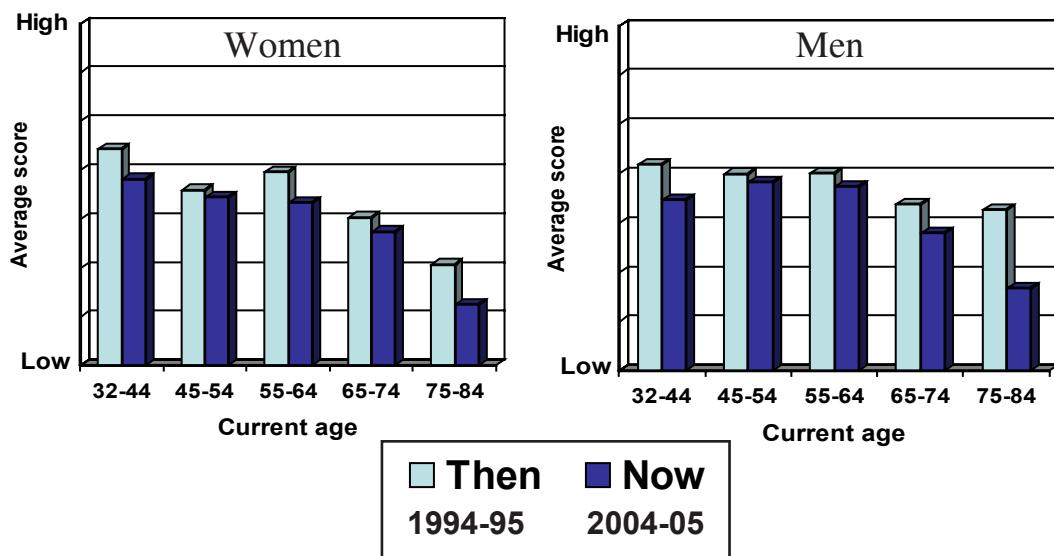
Is this positive aging, or wishful thinking?

Purpose in Life: Then and Now



MIDUS has many ways of determining how people feel about themselves and their lives. One set of questions has to do with whether or not people feel their life has purpose and meaning – that is, whether they have goals to live for and daily activities that seem important and worthwhile. The main story here, illustrated below, is that older persons reported significantly

lower levels of life purpose than did younger adults. Comparison of the ‘Then’ and ‘Now’ patterns makes clear that this was true back in 1994-95 and it remains true in the present. Each age group also showed significant decline in purpose in life from ‘Then’ until ‘Now’, and women also reported significantly lower purpose in life than did men.



FUN FACTS

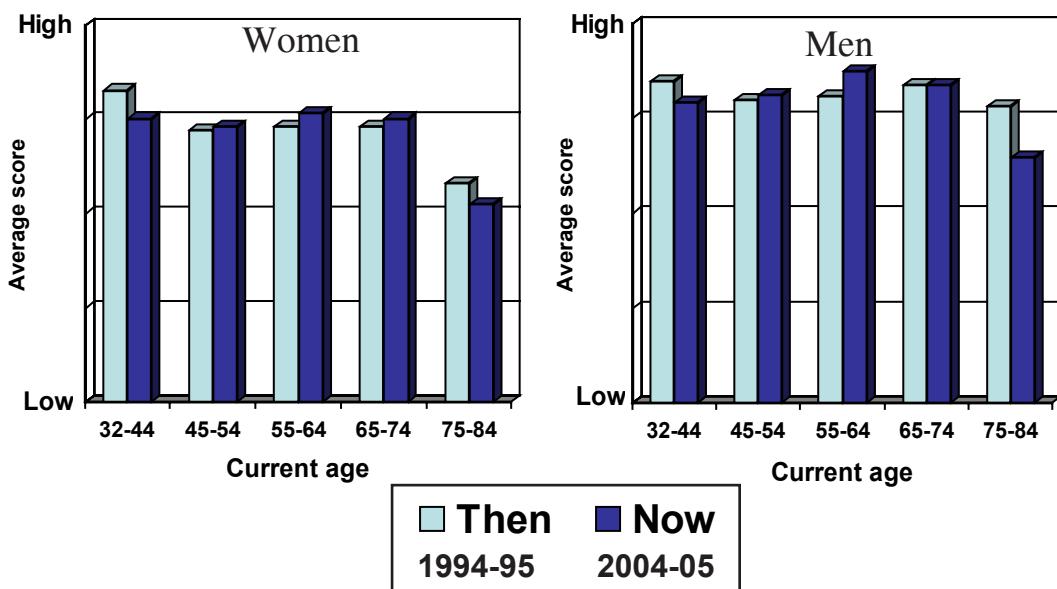
Our youngest MIDUS participants are currently 32 years old. The year of their birth coincided with the first recorded use of the word “Internet”.

Our oldest participants are currently 84 years of age. They were born in the year that insulin was first used to treat diabetes.

Perceived Control: Then and Now

What about people's sense of control over their life? How has it changed over time? On average, more recent ratings were lower than what we saw ten years ago. This downward shift in sense of control was most strongly evident in the oldest and youngest adults. Among

those in the middle ages, past to present ratings on sense of control actually improved slightly. For both past and present, the oldest rated themselves substantially lower than younger age groups on sense of control. Finally men rated themselves higher than women overall.

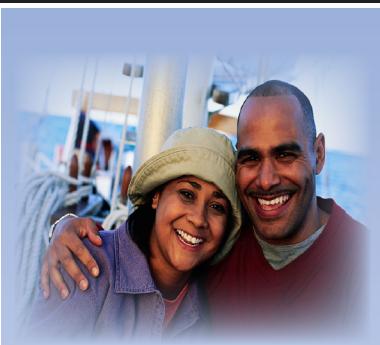


How much sleep are people getting?

During the week, MIDUS participants report sleeping about 7 hours each night. On weekends, MIDUS participants report getting an average of 7.5 hours of sleep per night.

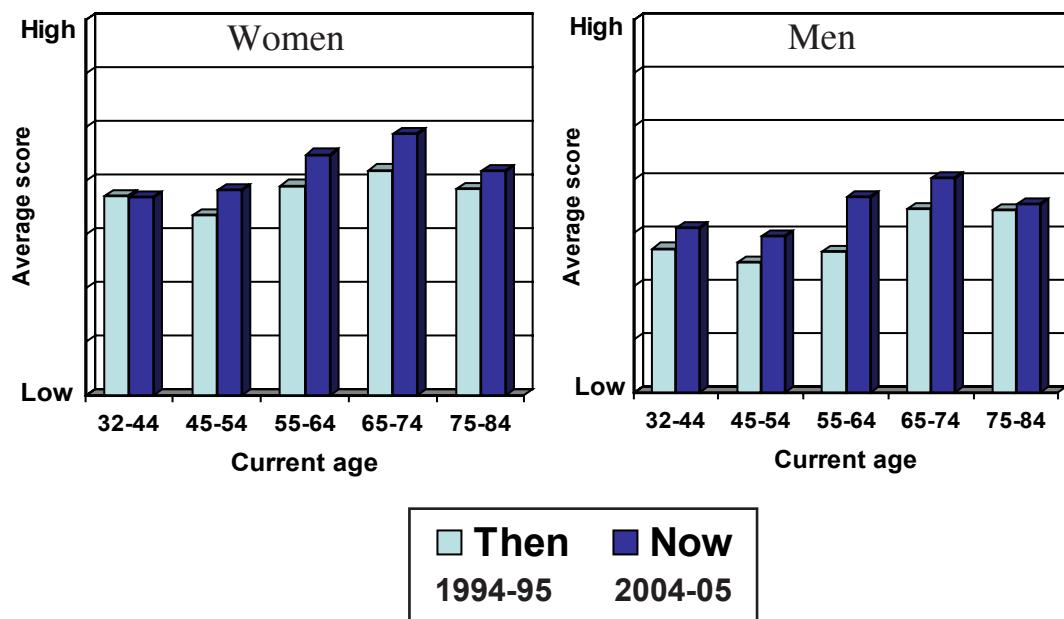
Although men and women reported similar amounts of sleep, younger adults tended to sleep less than older adults on weeknights. On weekends younger adults tended to catch up on sleep by almost an hour on average.

Positive Relations with Others: Then and Now



Some things are getting better. When we examined how participants feel about the quality of their relationships with others, our findings tell a notably positive story from the past to the present. As you can see from the figure below, current ratings were significantly higher than

past ratings across all ages. That is, there was an overall shift in the direction of reporting better relationships with others. Women also rated themselves significantly higher than men, while older individuals rated their connections to others more positively than did younger adults.



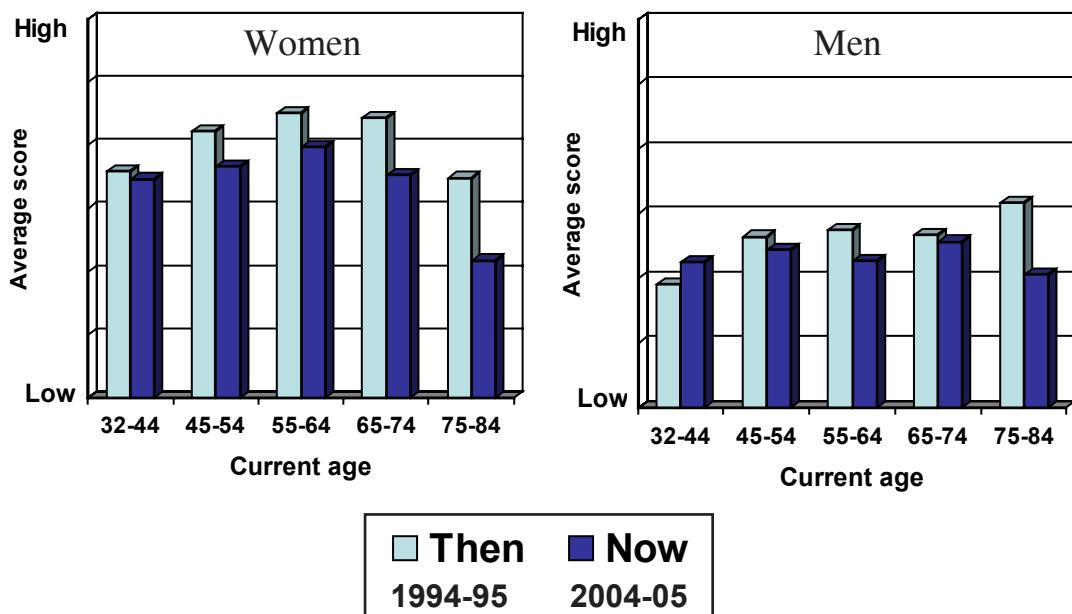
Who has served in the military?

About 29% of MIDUS participants indicated they had served in the armed forces during their lifetime, and around 9% had experienced combat. Most of this service was reported by the older men in the study.

Contribution to Others' Welfare: Then and Now

We also asked how much people in the study saw themselves making contributions to the welfare and well-being of others. What we found is illustrated below. Overall, women see themselves as contributing to

others more than men, particularly in the middle years of adulthood. For all age groups except young adults, there was a significant decline in their ratings on this area of life from 1994-95 to the present.



MIDUS is a Longitudinal Research Study

A major objective of MIDUS is to understand how people change as they age. The most direct way to do this is to follow the same people over time, as opposed to comparing people of different ages at the same time (i.e. a cross-sectional study).

In MIDUS, we are able to look at how each of you have changed over the past 9 to 10 years, in all of the areas we have measured, such as health, attitudes and beliefs, work and family life. Comparing the same people over time also gives us a window on broad trends that may be affecting everyone.



A National Study of Health & Well-Being

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THANKS FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!

Phone or Address Change?
Keep in Touch!

We value your input!
Contact us at
Ph: 608-262-2056 Fax: 608-263-6211

Overall Life Satisfaction: Then and Now

Older people in MIDUS rate both their physical and emotional health more negatively (see pages 2-3) than younger people. However, we see a different story when we examine overall satisfaction with life. Here, it is the older people who provide more positive ratings than the younger adults!

This was true both in our first interviews and in the more recent findings. Two other results stand out. Men had significantly higher ratings overall than women, and there was significant improvement from 1994-95 to 2004-05. Life is becoming more satisfying, especially among MIDUS participants who are older.

