

Happiness of New Zealand

- A Demographic Perspective -

Embargoed Until 7pm 26th March 2008

March 2008

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Highlights

- Women are happier than men
- Older New Zealanders are the happiest age group
- The least happy age group are the middle aged
- The happiest region is Nelson
- The least region happiest is the West Coast/ Buller
- There is a lot of variation in male happiness by region. The happiest males are in Nelson/ Marlborough. The least happy are southern males (Otago/ Southland)
- Those on middle incomes were not as happy as those on higher or lower incomes. Those on higher incomes were only a bit happier than those on low incomes
- By housing status, New Zealanders with freehold homes are the happiest. The least happy are those renting or looking to buy
- Retired people are happier than people who hold jobs
- By marital status the happiest are widowers and widows. Those in relationships are happier than those who are separated, divorced or never been married
- Those without dependent children under 18 are perhaps surprisingly happier than those who do have dependent children under 18 years.

Methodology

Results in this report are based upon a question asked in the UMR Research nation-wide omnibus survey. This is a fortnightly telephone survey of a nationally representative sample of 750 New Zealanders aged 18 and over.

Respondents were asked ***“Using a 0 to 10 scale where 0 means very unhappy and dissatisfied and 10 very happy and satisfied please tell me how happy and satisfied you are with the way your life is going”***.

Fieldwork was conducted on twelve separate occasions, with the first survey conducted from the 1st to 5th August 2007 and the final survey conducted from the 8th to 13th February 2008. The total sample size for twelve surveys is n=9000, which has allowed detailed demographic analysis.

Most of the analysis in this report looks at the respondents who gave a 9 or 10 on the 0 to 10 scale. The sample size for this analysis is n=2965. The margin of error for a 50% figure at the 95% confidence level is +/- 1.8%.

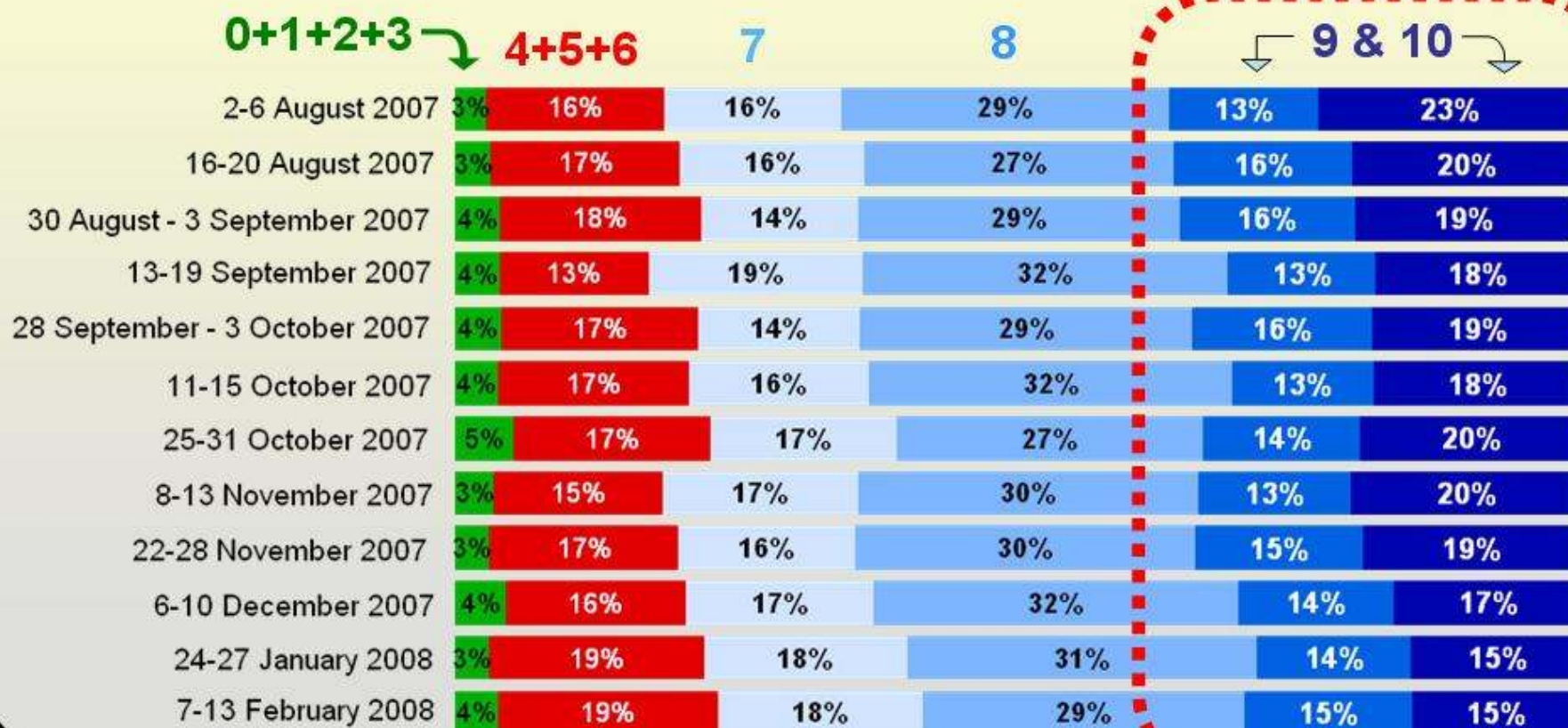
The Trend



Trend since August

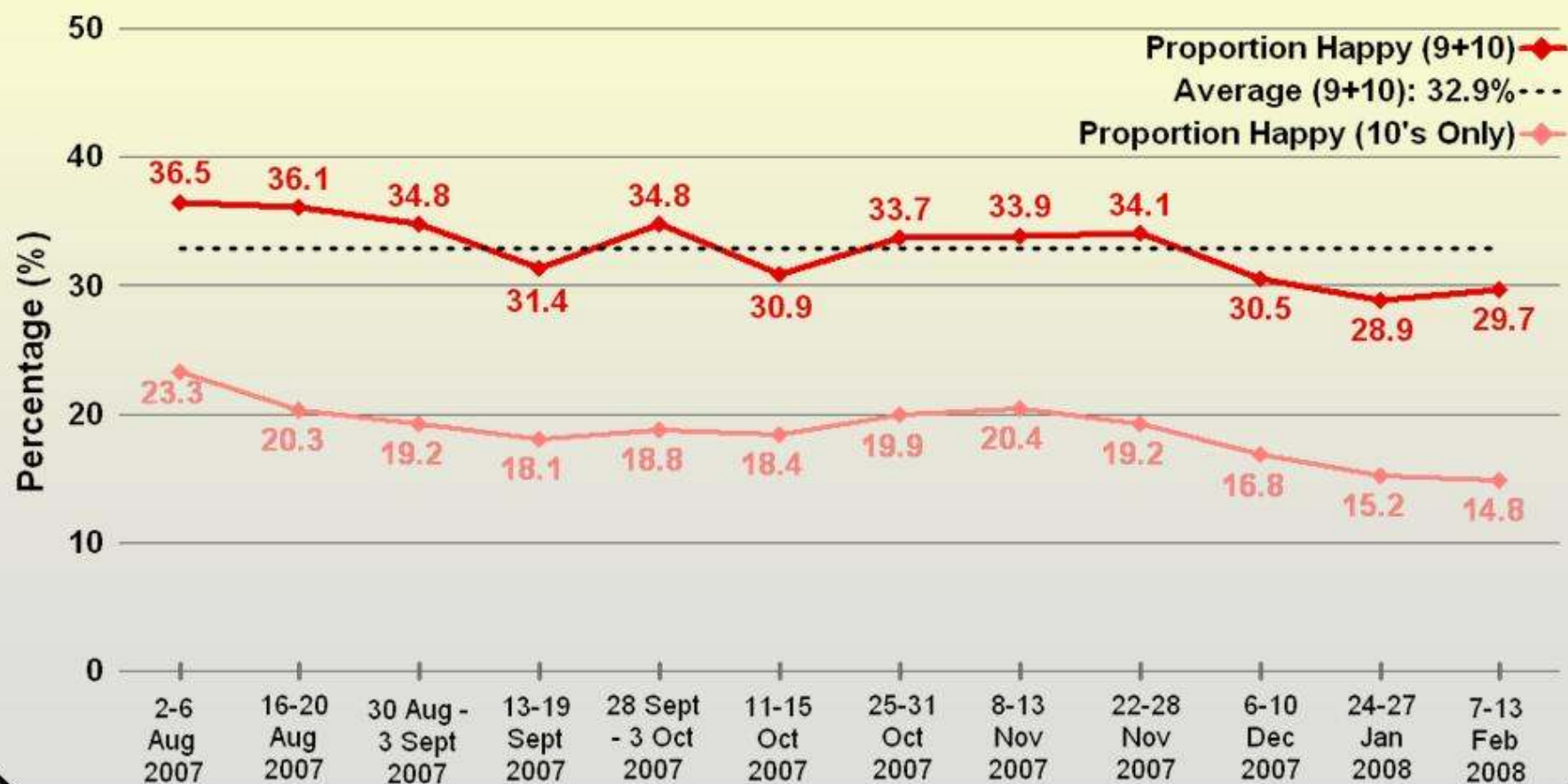
New Zealanders are generally pretty happy and satisfied with the way their life is going. Since tracking began in August 2007, around a third of the population has rated their happiness using a 9 or 10, on the 0 to 10 scale. The median, and the most common rating is 8 out of 10, while the mean was around 7.5. The analysis in this report focuses on the aggregated percentages for 9 and 10.

Since August, the happiness at the 9+10 level has been up and down. Happiness dipped during the month of September and October, then increased around November. From December however, happiness has been sliding steadily. This trend is more apparent when focusing on the 10's only.



Trend since August

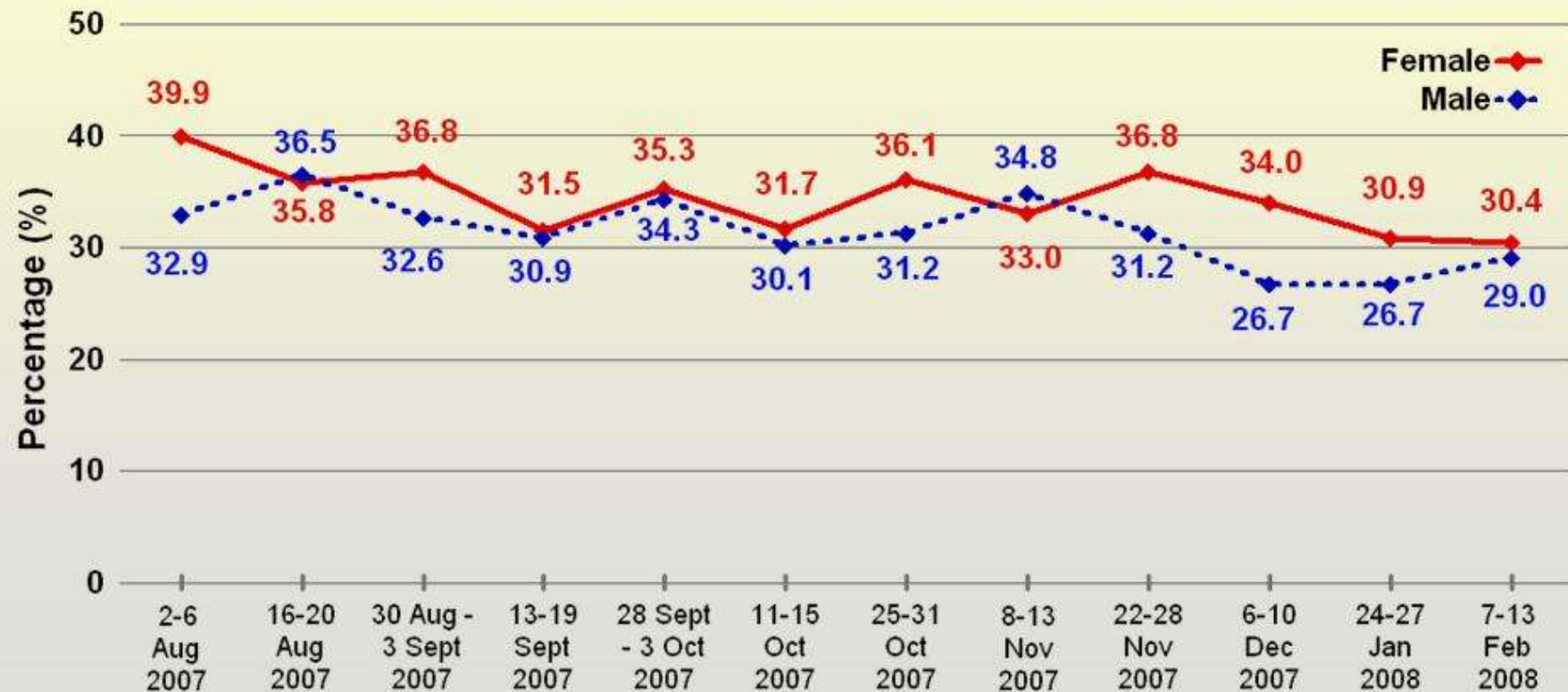
This chart shows the trends for the 9+10 and the 10 ratings. The nation was happiest when tracking first began in August 2007 and was least happiest when tracking finished in February. During this time, happiness has fluctuated around the mean of 32.9%, however the overall trend has been negative.



Trend since August

- Gender Differences -

Women are generally more happy and satisfied about their life than their male counterparts. In ten of the twelve surveys, women's happiness ratings were higher than men's. With the exception of the two surveys in mid-August and early-November, happiness between the sexes has generally followed the same trend, and the happiness gap has generally been pretty close.



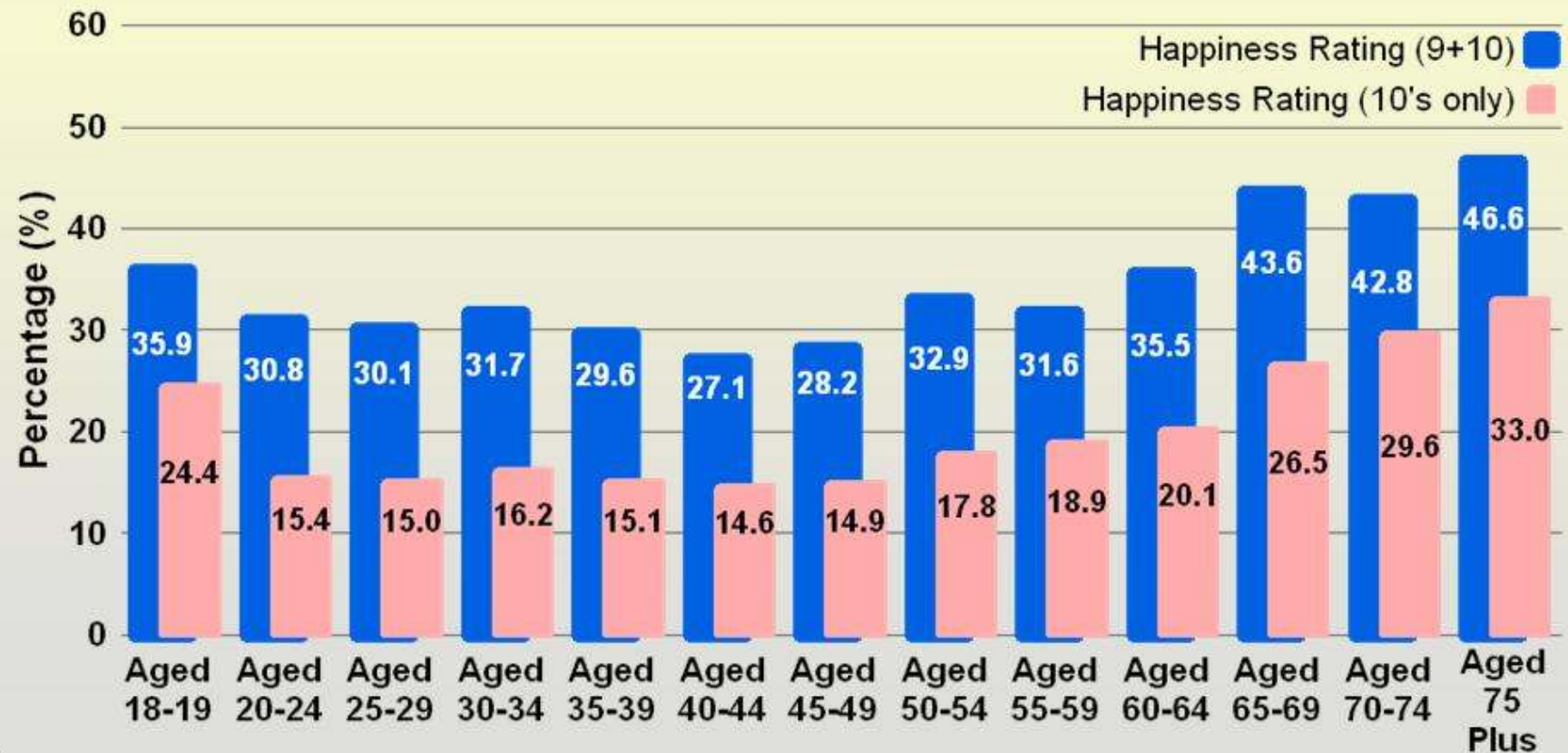
Note: The average proportion of people saying they are "Very happy and satisfied" (9+10) across all surveys is 32.9%

Happiness by Age



Age Group

New Zealanders seem to be most happy in their early and older years, whilst middle aged people are the least happiest. These findings support those found by researchers from the University of Warwick in Britain and Dartmouth College in the USA, where happiness tends to follow a U-shaped curve throughout one's lifetime. Despite the differences in happiness however, none of the figures between the ages of 18 and 64 were found to be significantly different. Only, the last three age groups were found to be significantly higher at the 95% confidence level. Happiness at the maximum ten level has been included to further emphasise the U-shaped trend.



Note: The average proportion of people saying they are "Very happy and satisfied" (9+10) across all surveys is 32.9%

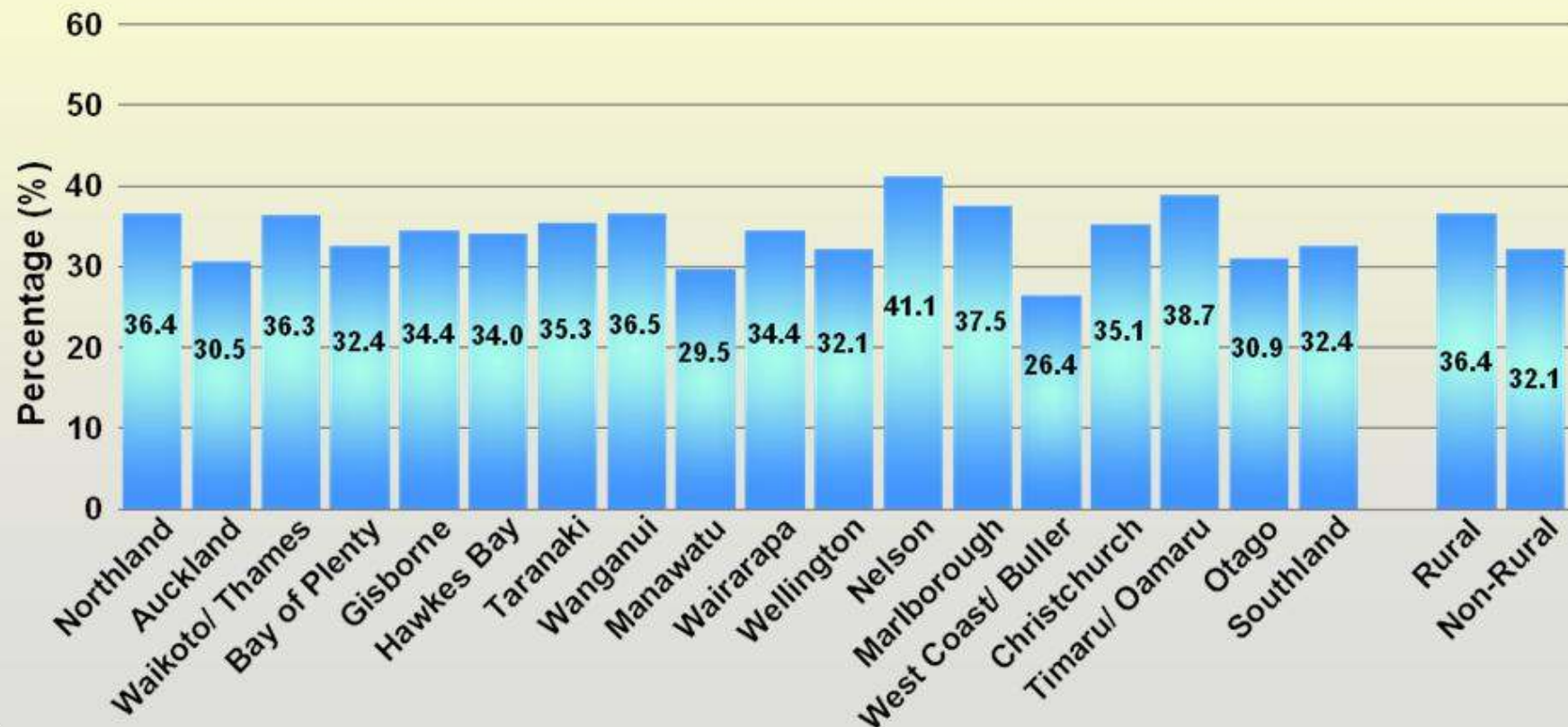
Happiness by Region



Region

Some areas are happier than others. Nelson is the happiest region, with 41% of people residing in this area rating their happiness using a 9 or 10. Timaru, Oamaru, Marlborough and Wanganui were also areas with high proportions of happy people. The least happiest people reside in the West Coast and the Manawatu, with less than 30% using a 9 or 10 to rate their happiness. Auckland was the least happiest of the big cities, and due to the large sample size, was the only place found to be significantly different from other regions, namely Nelson, Christchurch and Waikato.

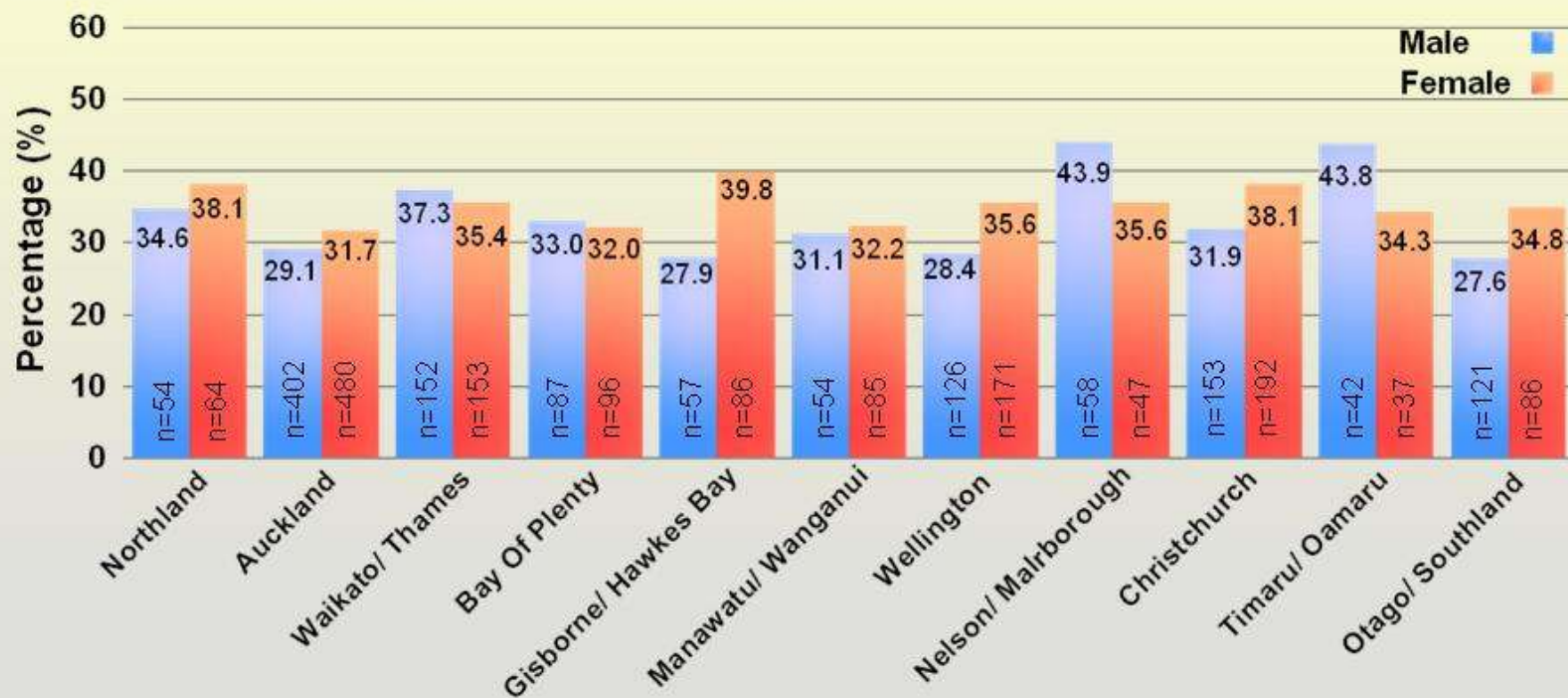
People in rural areas, that is, those who reside in an area of less than 1000 people, are significantly happier than those in non-rural areas.



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Region by Gender

When looking at the gender differences across regions, we can see a lot of variation amongst males compared to females. Some regions have been combined to maintain a robust sample size, however some figures need to be treated with caution. Happiness amongst males varies between 43.9% and 27.6% (a difference of 16.4%) compared to 39.8% and 31.7% for women (a difference of 8.1%). In most regions, females are happier than males. The happiest males are found in Nelson and Marlborough, while the happiest females are found in Gisborne and Hawkes Bay. Men in Nelson, Marlborough, Timaru and Oamaru are significantly more happy than men in Auckland, Otago, Southland and Wellington. Waikato men are also happier than their Auckland neighbours. No significant regional differences were found amongst females.



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Note: Care should be taken when interpreting smaller sub-samples

Happiness by Income & Housing Status



Personal Income

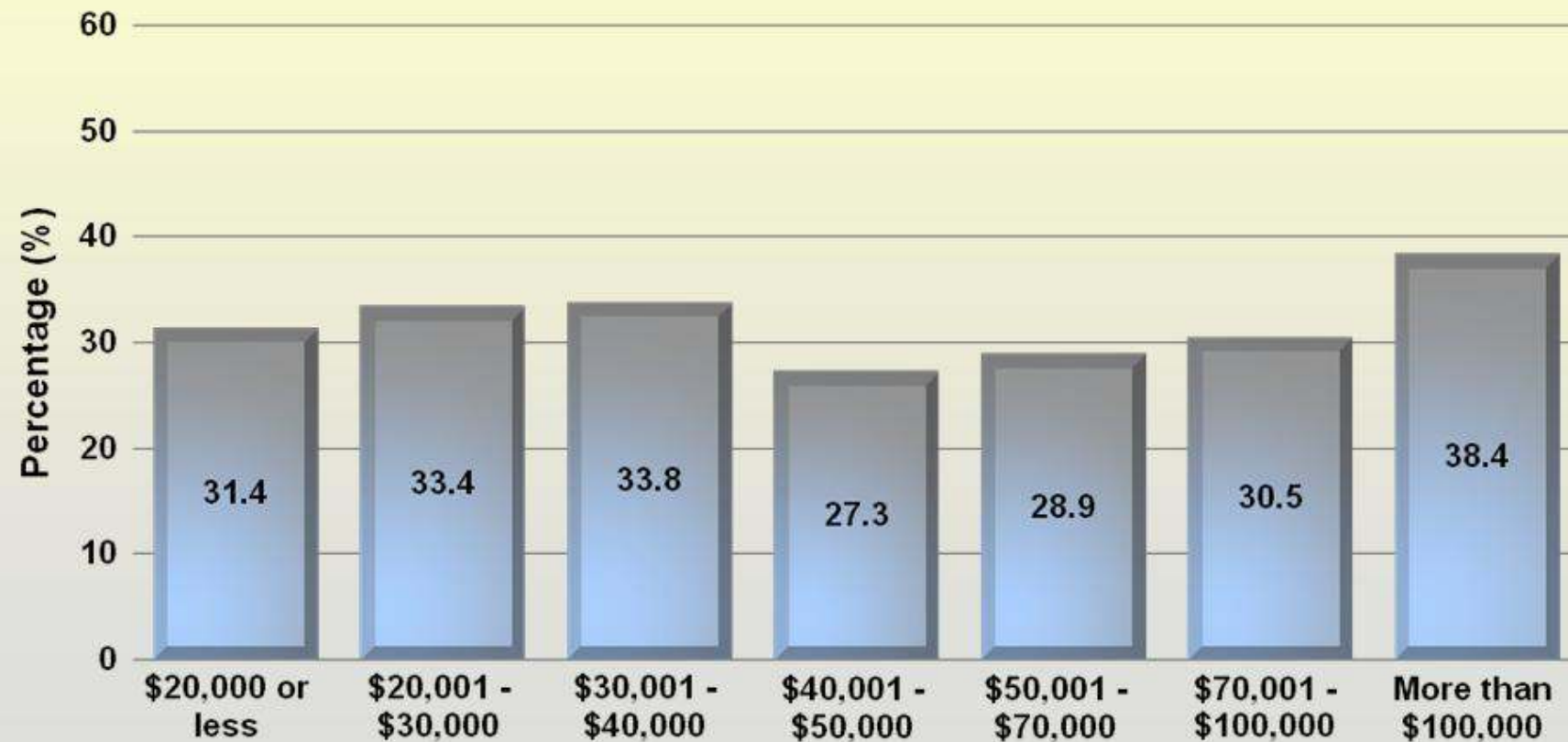
There is a well known adage in society that says money cannot buy happiness. However figures from a U.S. study in 2005 showed that happiness levels tended to increase as personal income increased, and our findings show a similar pattern. People in the highest income group (those earning more than \$70,000) are the happiest, and this is significantly higher than the happiness of those earning between \$30,000 and \$70,000. Interestingly, low income earners (between \$15,000 and \$30,000) are also reasonably happy.



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Household Income

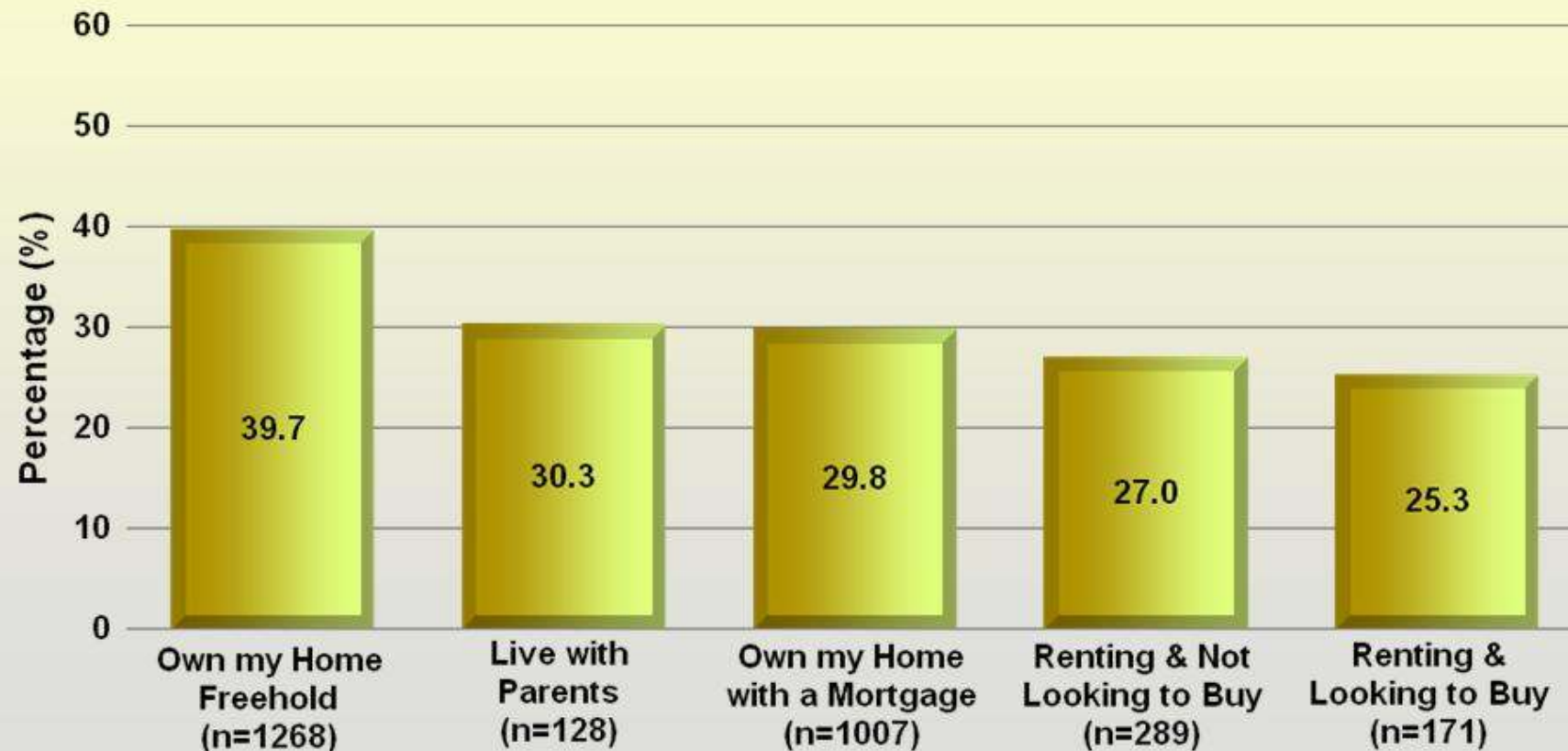
Happiness by household income follows a similar pattern to that of personal income. Those in the top income bracket (a combined household income of more than \$100,000) are the most happy, while those in the brackets immediately below are the least happiest. Once again, the level of happiness for low income households (between \$20,000 and \$40,000) are above the average.



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Housing Status

In general, people who are living in their own home are happier than people who are flatting or living in a rental property. People who own their home freehold, that is, without a mortgage, are the happiest, with nearly 40% saying they are happy and satisfied. People who live with their parents are the next happiest, slightly above those who own their home with a mortgage. People in rental properties are the least happiest, with people looking to buy a house being less happy than those who aren't looking.



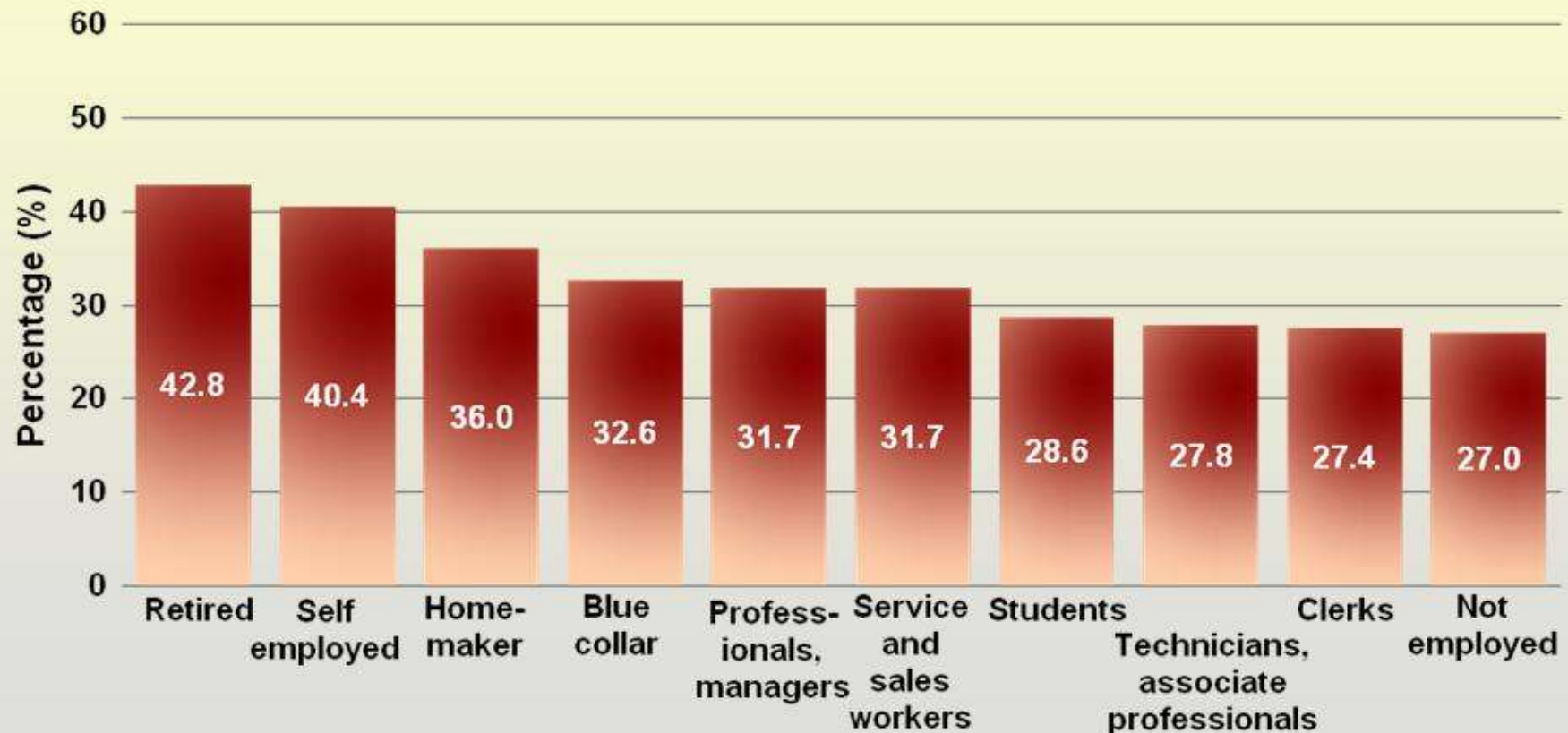
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Happiness by Occupation



Occupational Group

Retired people, self employed and homemakers are the happiest people in New Zealand when looking across the occupational demographic. Retirees top the list with 42.8%, which comes at no surprise since we have already established that people in the older age brackets are the most happy and satisfied. People who are not employed but looking for work are the least happiest. Blue collar workers are slightly happier than white collar workers (professionals or managers) however it's not significant at the 95% level.



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Happiness by Other Demographics

- Marital status
- Have dependent children



Marital Status

A survey done by Time Magazine in 2005 showed that married people are generally happier than single people, and our findings have produced similar results. People who are married, or in a de-facto relationship are significantly happier than people who are separated, divorced or have never been legally married. An interesting figure to emerge from the data was amongst widowed people, who turned out to be the happiest marital group, with 37.6% saying they are happy and satisfied with their life.

The only gender difference that is significantly different at the 95% confidence level is for those who have never been legally married. Males in this sub-sample are much less happy compared to their female counterparts.

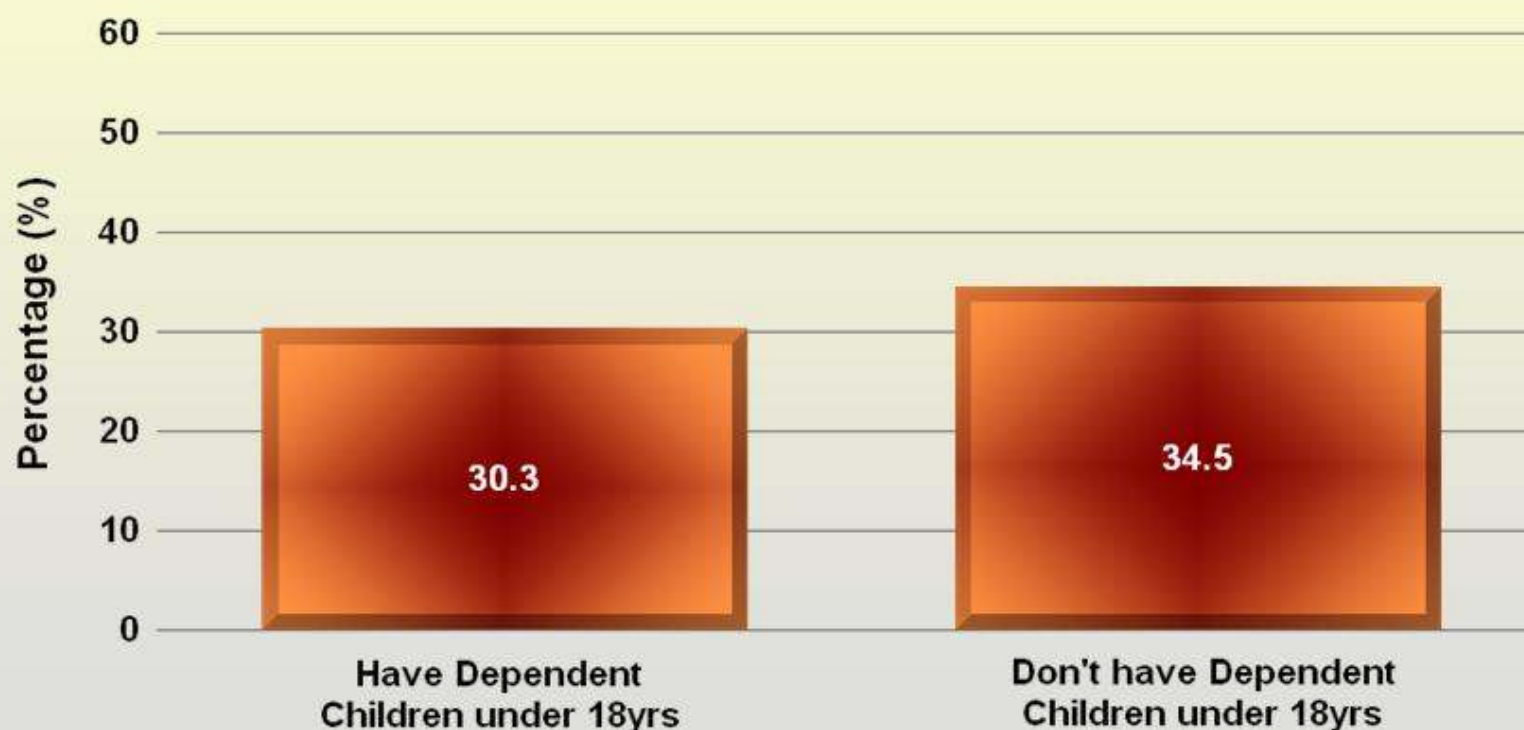


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Have Dependent Children

When looking at the composition of people's households, we found that people who have at least one dependent child living with them are significantly less happy than people who don't live with any dependent children. This is an interesting finding considering findings by Time Magazine in 2005 that stated people's happiest times are generally when they are around their children.



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