The Mental State of the World in 2022

The Global Decline in Younger Generations

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The global decline in younger generations

One of the most prominent trends in the Mental Health Million data over the years is the declining mental wellbeing with each successively younger generation. This is reflected in decreasing MHQ scores and a corresponding increase in percentage Distressed or Struggling with significant mental health challenges in each younger age group.

This trend is apparent in the Internet-enabled populations of every country measured from Africa to Asia, Europe to the Americas. The trend was already clear in data from 2019 prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. Given the Mental Health Million data alone, one interpretation could be that mental wellbeing simply increases with age. However, studies on psychological wellbeing prior to 2010 showed universally that young adults fared best in all countries and regions of the world measured (Stone, Schwartz, Broderick, & Deaton, 2010). This reversal points to a progressive global decline of younger generations since then, one that is corroborated by the growing suicide rates among young adults over the last decade or more (Twenge, Cooper, Joiner, Duffy, & Binau, 2019).

> *One of the most prominent trends in the Mental Health Million data over the years is the declining mental wellbeing with each successively younger generation, a decline that is most severe along the dimension of the Social Self, a measure of how we see ourselves with respect to others and our ability to form and maintain positive relationships with others.*

Here we show in more detail the dimensional and geographic contours of this decline. We show that the decline is most severe along the dimension of the *Social Self*, a measure of how we see ourselves with respect to others and our ability to form and maintain positive relationships with others. A close second is the dimension of *Mood & Outlook*. We also show that English-speaking South and South East Asia as well as Latin America have the greatest collapse in *Social Self* scores across generations despite high scores overall, while Sub Saharan African countries are still relatively more stable across generations.

Globally young adults struggle with mental health far more than older generations

There is not a single region or language group or country where the decline in mental wellbeing across successively younger generations is not apparent. This translates into a dramatic increase in the percentage of each younger generation that are mentally distressed or struggling at a level that would qualify as clinical in nature or requiring of professional help.

Below we show the percentage that are Distressed or Struggling across regions and language groups for two age groups, 55-64 and 18-24. The percentage Distressed or Struggling in the 18-24 age group was three to five times higher than in the 55-64 age group across all regions and language groups. Latin America (both Spanish and Portuguese) as well as English-speaking South Asia had the steepest increase from older to younger generations. For example, while only 10-12% of the 55-64 age group in Spanish-speaking Latin America and English-speaking South Asia were Distressed or Struggling in 2022, 45-50% were Distressed or Struggling among the 18-24 age group.

> *The percentage of the 18-24 age group Distressed or Struggling was three to five times higher than in the 55-64 age group across all regions and language groups.*

The smallest increases in the percent Distressed or Struggling were in the Core Anglosphere and Swahili speaking Sub Saharan Africa, both growing 20%. However, while the Core Anglosphere had the highest percentage Distressed or Struggling in the 55-64 age group at 25% growing to 45% among those 18-24, Swahili speaking Sub Saharan Africa had the lowest percentage Distressed or Struggling in the 55-64 age group at 6%, growing to 24% among those 18-24.

Figure 2.1: Globally young adults are three to four times as likely to struggle with their mental health as their parents' generation

The percentage of those Distressed or Struggling with their mental health is dramatically higher among 18-24 year olds relative to 55-64 year olds across all regions and language groups. This differential in mental health is greatest among the Portuguese and Spanish speakers of Latin America and English speakers of South Asia.
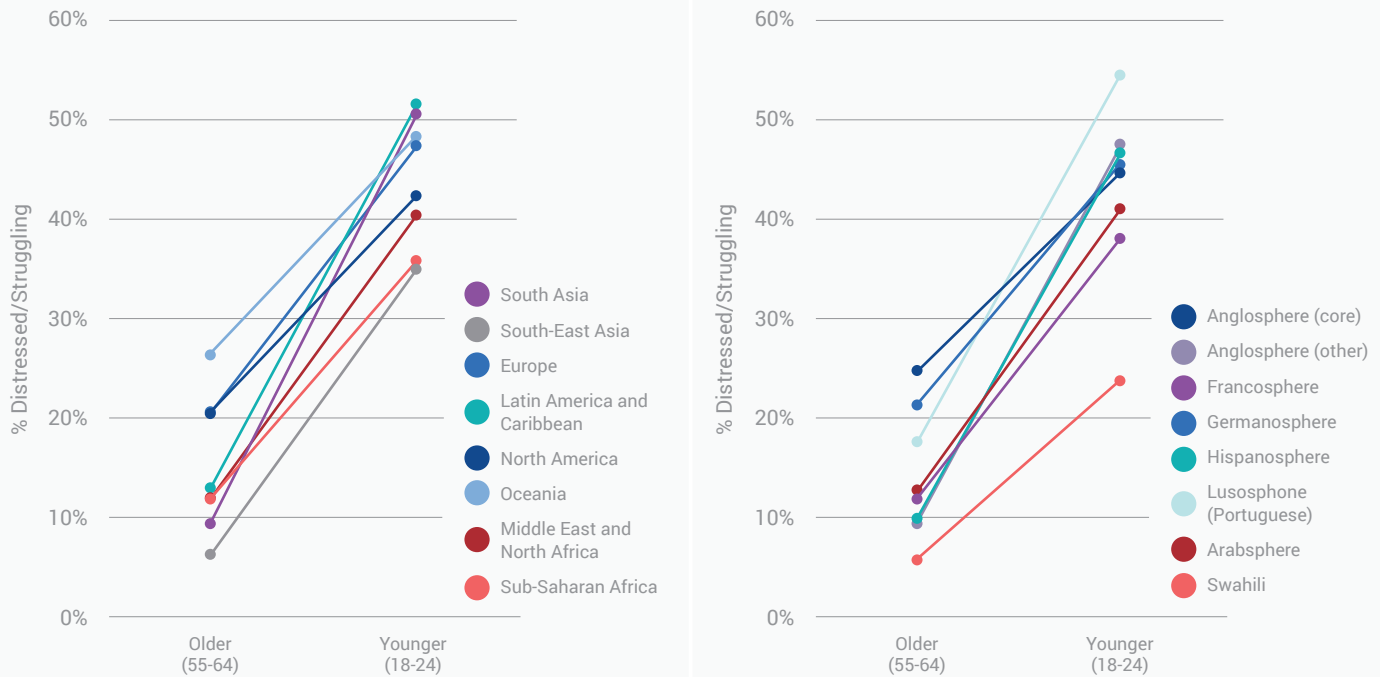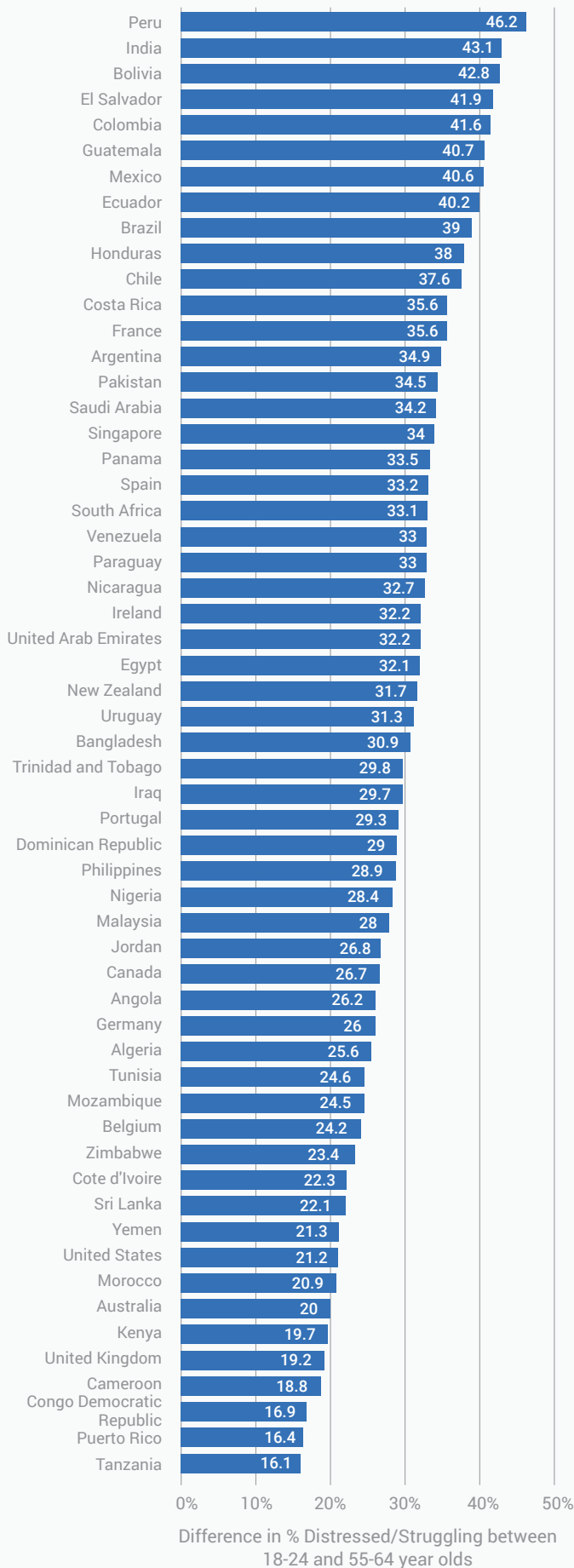
Among countries, nine of the ten with the greatest increase in the percentage Distressed or Struggling from older to younger generations were in Latin America. Peru held the top position with 46% more 18-24 year olds Distressed or Struggling compared to the 55-64 age group. The only country outside of Latin America in the top 10 was India which came in second on the list at 43%.

> *Latin America (both Spanish and Portuguese) as well as English-speaking South Asia had the steepest increase in the percentage Distressed or Struggling from older to younger generations.*

In the bottom ten were a mix of countries largely from Sub Saharan Africa and the Core Anglosphere. Tanzania was the lowest at 16% followed by Puerto Rico, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Cameroon.

Peru, India, Bolivia top the list with over 42% more young adults 18-24 Distressed or Struggling with their mental health compared to those aged 55-64. Tanzania, Puerto Rico and the Democratic Republic of Congo are the lowest with only ~16% more young people struggling relative to their parents' generation.

Country	Value
Peru	46.2
India	43.1
Bolivia	42.8
El Salvador	41.9
Colombia	41.6
Guatemala	40.7
Mexico	40.6
Ecuador	40.2
Brazil	39
Honduras	38
Chile	37.6
Costa Rica	35.6
France	35.6
Argentina	34.9
Pakistan	34.5
Saudi Arabia	34.2
Singapore	34
Panama	33.5
Spain	33.2
South Africa	33.1
Venezuela	33
Paraguay	33
Nicaragua	32.7
Ireland	32.2
United Arab Emirates	32.2
Egypt	32.1
New Zealand	31.7
Uruguay	31.3
Bangladesh	30.9
Trinidad and Tobago	29.8
Iraq	29.7
Portugal	29.3
Dominican Republic	29
Philippines	28.9
Nigeria	28.4
Malaysia	28
Jordan	26.8
Canada	26.7
Angola	26.2
Germany	26
Algeria	25.6
Tunisia	24.6
Mozambique	24.5
Belgium	24.2
Zimbabwe	23.4
Cote d'Ivoire	22.3
Sri Lanka	22.1
Yemen	21.3
United States	21.2
Morocco	20.9
Australia	20
Kenya	19.7
United Kingdom	19.2
Cameroon	18.8
Congo Democratic Republic	16.9
Puerto Rico	16.4
Tanzania	16.1

0%   10%   20%   30%   40%   50%

Difference in % Distressed/Struggling between 18-24 and 55-64 year olds

Dimensional scores across generations

Dimensional scores represent metrics relating to specific aspects of mental function. We compute scores for six dimensions of mental function. These include *Social Self, Mood & Outlook, Adaptability & Resilience, Drive & Motivation, Cognition* and *Mind-Body Connection*. Each dimensional score aggregates across a subset of the elements in the MHQ. Furthermore, some elements in the MHQ may contribute to more than one dimension.

Mood and Outlook

Your ability to manage and regulate your emotions effectively and to have a constructive or optimistic outlook for the future.

Social Self

How you interact with, relate to and see yourself with respect to others.

Drive and Motivation

Your ability to work towards achieving your desired goals and to initiate, persevere and complete activities in your daily life.

▶

Cognition

Your ability to perform basic cognitive functions, make sense of complex sets of events and situations and display a longer-term perspective in your thoughts and behavior.

Adaptability & Resilience

Your ability to shift your behaviour and outlook in response to changing circumstances and cope with the challenges and setbacks that you encounter.

Mind-Body Connection

The regulation of the balance between your mind and body.

Across the global Internet-enabled population, average scores were highest for *Adaptability & Resilience* at 85 followed by *Drive & Motivation* at 81 and lowest for *Social Self* at 66 and *Mood & Outlook* at 63 (Figure 2.3).

Furthermore, the drop in MHQ points was highest for *Social Self* at 66. Correspondingly the increase in the percentage of young adults 18-24 struggling relative to those age 55-64 was also highest for this dimension at 33%. This was followed by *Mood & Outlook* as a close second.

> *Of all dimensions the drop in MHQ points was highest for Social Self at 66 MHQ points.*

Figure 2.3: **Mental wellbeing across dimensions**

Globally the dimension of *Adaptability & Resilience* scored high while *Mood & Outlook* and *Social Self* scored the poorest. Among the dimensional scores *Social Self* has the biggest drop from older to younger generations. All differences shown are between the age groups of 55-64 and 18-24.
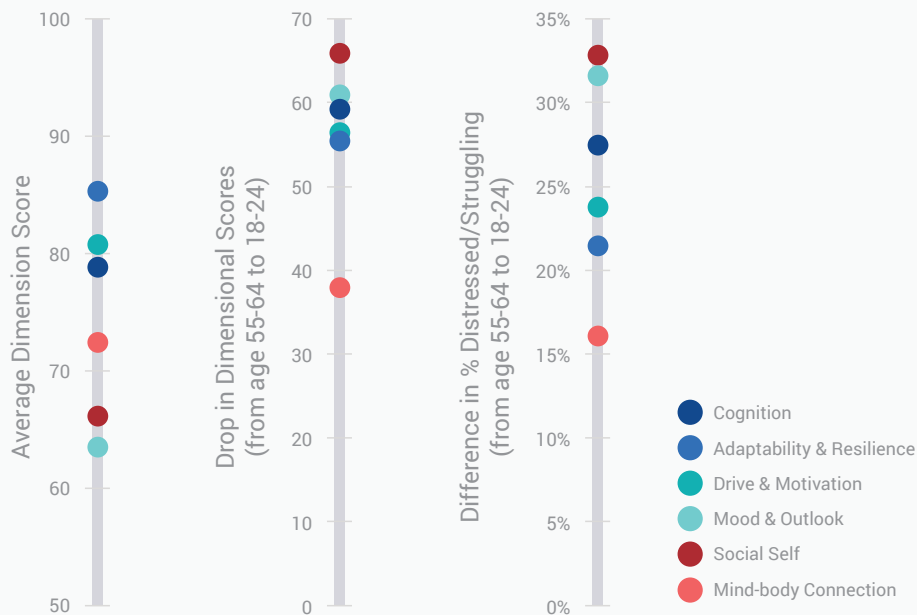
The decline in the Social Self: a geographic view

The geographic trends in the decline in *Social Self* across age groups are similar to those for overall mental wellbeing. Latin America and English-speaking South and South-East Asia form a distinct group with high decline of 77 to 84 *Social Self* points relative to other regions which ranged from 43 to 57. Here again Swahili-speaking Sub Saharan Africa shows the smallest decline. Thus, the overall decline in mental wellbeing is driven substantially by a deterioration of the *Social Self.*

Interestingly while the *Social Self* is highest in Asian and African countries that have been traditionally collectivist cultures, it is the English-speaking of these that are seeing the greatest deterioration.

Figure 2.4: **The generational decline of *Social Self* by Regions and Language Groups**

The *Social Self* has declined most substantially from older to younger generations in English-speaking South and South East Asia, Spanish and Portuguese Latin America and least among Swahili speakers of Sub-Saharan Africa.
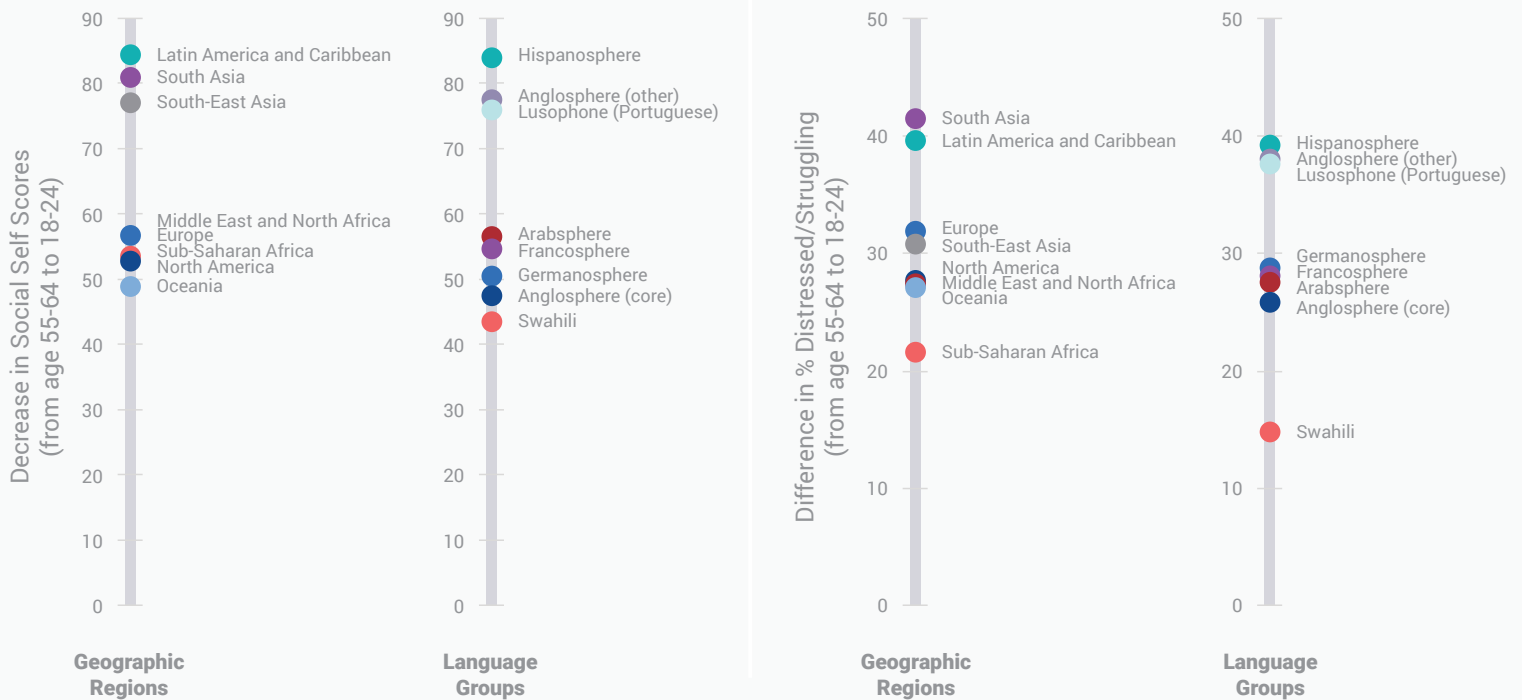
In the next sections we explore trends relating to family relationships and friendships to understand the nuances of the *Social Self* and its deterioration.