

## Did “living like a Stoic” for a week have as much impact in 2017 as in previous Stoic Weeks? Does Stoicism stick? Stoic Week 2017 Report Part 3 (of 4): The Impact of Stoic Week and SMRT

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Previous reports have summarised the [demographics](#) of Stoic Week and the [relationship \(measured at the start of Stoic Week\) between Stoicism, well-being and character traits](#). This report addresses the effects of doing Stoic Week, and in particular attempts to answer whether the impact of doing Stoic Week was as positive as in [previous years](#). In addition, for the first time, the results of a 3 month follow up study performed on the SMRT course run by Donald Robertson in 2017 will provide the first empirically-founded answer to the question “do the effects of Stoicism last, even 3 months after taking part in a Stoic course?”

### **SMRT 2017 Follow-Up Study**

SMRT (Stoic Mindfulness and Resilience Training) is a four-week intensive training course in core Stoic psychological skills. It requires about twenty minutes of commitment daily for 28 days. SMRT was designed in 2014 by Donald Robertson. Previous analysis of a SMRT course run in 2014 showed [significant improvements in well-being](#)

This year, for the first time, we asked participants to complete the questionnaires three months after the end of the course, as well as at the start and end of SMRT. Of the 907 participants who began the SMRT course, 254 completed the course and 88 completed the 3 month follow-up questionnaires.

The results were as follows :-

Measure	Start	End	% improvement	3 months follow-up	% improvement
SABS	173.0	194.9	12.7	194.6	12.5
Flourish	40.8	47.0	15.0	47.0	15.1
SPANE+	20.1	24.0	18.9	22.4	11.3
SPANE-	-16.1	-12.9	-20.1	-13.3	-17.6
SWL	23.2	27.0	16.3	26.8	15.3

Table 1: SMRT 2017: Impact at end of 28 day course and 3 month follow-up

Participants were found to have significant improvements in all measures at the end of the course. Particularly of note is the 20% reduction in negative emotions (SPANE-). The key question we were looking to answer was “how much would these improvements melt away in the 3 months after SMRT finishes?” It was found that there was very little reduction in benefit even after 3 months. For SABS

(measuring degree of Stoicism) and Flourish (measuring flourishing) there was barely any change. In terms of emotions and satisfaction with life there was a small reduction compared to the end of the course. This result suggests that practising Stoicism for as little as a month has a lasting impact.

## Impact of Stoic Week 2017: Overall Findings

In terms of improvements in well-being over Stoic Week, the results were consistent with those of Stoic Week 2016, 2015 and 2014 confirming a significant positive benefit.

Increases in well-being ranged from 10-16% in the week depending on the scale being used. This replication of previous findings gives us further increased confidence in the reliability of the findings.

Table 2 below shows the overall outcome results.<sup>i</sup>

	<b>Stoic Week 2017</b>	<b>Stoic Week 2016</b>	<b>Stoic Week 2015</b>	<b>Stoic Week 2014</b>
No of participants	2870	1803	2503	1953
Increase in Flourishing	10%	10%	10%	10%
Increase in Satisfaction with Life	16%	15%	15%	16%
Increase in Positive Emotions	11%	10%	10%	11%
Reduction in Negative Emotions	14%	14%	14%	16%
Increase In Stoic Attitudes and Behaviours	9%	11%	13%	12%
Completion Rate	24%	15%	29%	29%

**Table 2: Impact of Stoic Week 2017**

## Impact on Flourishing

Participants reported on average a 10% overall increase in flourishing: The average score for those who completed Stoic Week was 41 at the start of Stoic Week and 45.5 at the end, an increase in over 10%.

Table 3 below shows the impact of Stoicism which on each Flourishing theme.

<b>Flourishing Scale Item</b>	<b>2017 %</b>	<b>2016 %</b>	<b>2015 %</b>	<b>2014 %</b>	<b>2013 %</b>	<b>Theme</b>
1. I lead a purposeful and meaningful life.	15	15	16	14	10	Purpose and meaning
2. My social relationships are supportive and rewarding.	13	13	11	11	10	Relationships

3. I am engaged and interested in my daily activities.	12	8	10	10	10	Engagement in activities
4. I actively contribute to the happiness and well-being of others.	10	10	10	8	8	Benevolent
5. I am competent and capable in the activities that are important to me	8	6	7	8	5	Competent
6. I am a good person and live a good life.	8	8	8	9	8	Ethically Good
7. I am optimistic about my future.	11	10	12	11	18	Optimism
8. People respect me.	7	9	7	7	5	Respected

**Table 3: Impact on Flourishing**

As in previous years, results suggest Stoicism has a particularly large positive impact on **purpose and meaning** (item 1), with **social relationships** (item 2) also showing particularly significant improvement. Table 2 again refutes suggests that Stoicism is a pessimistic philosophy. Stoicism actually lead to a significant increase in optimism.

### Impact on Satisfaction with Life

Participants reported an average 14% increase in satisfaction with life overall as measured by the Satisfaction with Life Scale. Participants who completed Stoic Week's average score was 23 at the start and 26 after Stoic Week for Satisfaction with Life.

Table 4 below shows which aspects of Satisfaction with Life increased the most. As one might anticipate given Stoicism's teachings, the theme of **acceptance** (question 5) showed by the biggest increase – 19%.

Percentage change by each question	2017% increase	2016 % increase	2015 % increase	2014 % increase	2013 % increase	Theme
1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal	16	10	20	15	18	Life is ideal
2.The conditions of my life are excellent	11	13	13	15	11	Externals met
3. So far I have got the important things I want in life.	10	10	13	13	11	Needs met
4. I am satisfied with my life	14	13	14	15	17	Satisfaction
5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing	19	24	20	17	17	Acceptance

**Table 4: Impact on Satisfaction with Life**

## Impact on Emotions

There was a substantial increase in positive emotions and decrease in negative emotions as reported by participants who took part in Stoic Week.

- Participants in Stoic Week's average Positive Emotions score was 20 at the start and 22 after Stoic Week an improvement of 11%.
- Participants in Stoic Week's average Negative Emotions score was -16.5 at the start and -14 after Stoic Week an improvement of 16%
- Participants in Stoic Week's average overall SPANE score was 3.5 at the start and 8.5 after Stoic Week.

There was a greater shift in negative emotions than positive emotions (16% as opposed to 11%) as measured by the SPANE. The positive emotions that showed the biggest changes in 2017 were “contented” and “joyful” (both up 14%). All the negative emotions showed a significant reduction of between 12% and 16%.

Tables 5 and 6 below give all the details about the impact of Stoic Week on positive and negative emotions.

<b>Positive Emotions</b>	<b>2017 change %</b>	<b>2016 change %</b>	<b>2015 % comparison</b>	<b>2014 % comparison</b>	<b>2013 % comparison</b>
Average positive	11	10	10	11	9
Contented	14	15	14	14	12
Joyful	14	12	13	13	12
Happy	11	7	11	9	9
Good	9	8	9	10	7
Pleasant	9	9	9	10	8
Positive	9	10	8	13	8

**Table 5: Impact on Positive Emotions**

<b>Negative Emotions</b>	<b>2017 % Change</b>	<b>2016 % change</b>	<b>2015 % comparison</b>	<b>2014 % comparison</b>	<b>2013 % comparison</b>
Average negative	-16	-14	-14	-16	-11
Unpleasant	-15	-17	-16	-17	-8
Bad	-16	-12	-15	-17	-11
Negative	-15	-16	-14	-17	-12
Angry	-12	-13	-14	-15	-13
Afraid	-14	-13	-12	-14	-10
Sad	-13	-14	-12	-14	-10

**Table 6: Impact on Negative Emotions**

## Impact on Character Traits and Virtues

For the first time, we asked participants to complete the CIVIC questionnaire, which allowed us to measure changes in positive character traits and what the CIVIC terms “character cores” (similar to virtues). This finding should be treated with a certain amount of caution. One would not necessarily expect these features to be very sensitive to change, and only a small number of participants (37) completed the CIVIC both at the start and end of Stoic Week. With these caveats in mind, tables 7 and 8 give changes to character traits and character cores ordered by the percentage improvement during Stoic Week.

<b>CIVIC Trait</b>	<b>BEFORE</b>	<b>AFTER</b>	<b>% improvement</b>	
Zest	2.43	2.73	12.0	11.98
Hope	2.64	2.91	10.3	10.26
Meaning/Purpose	2.07	2.23	7.5	7.49
Persistence	2.89	3.05	5.7	5.72
Leadership	2.50	2.64	5.6	5.57
Self-Control	3.03	3.20	5.6	5.56
Emotional Awareness	2.72	2.86	5.1	5.07
Humor	2.73	2.86	4.6	4.58
Social Perceptiveness	2.53	2.64	4.2	4.16
Perspective-Taking	3.17	3.30	4.2	4.16
Humility	3.29	3.42	3.9	3.90
Gratitude	3.08	3.20	3.8	3.78
Perspective	2.94	3.03	3.2	3.25
Creativity	2.87	2.95	3.0	2.98
Authenticity	3.32	3.41	2.9	2.91
Kindness	2.79	2.87	2.8	2.83
Teamwork	3.15	3.24	2.7	2.74
Bravery	2.96	3.04	2.7	2.67
Spirituality	2.44	2.51	2.6	2.63
Forethought	3.08	3.16	2.6	2.56
Forgiveness	3.19	3.26	2.4	2.39
Love	3.26	3.33	2.2	2.22
Love of Learning	3.59	3.66	2.1	2.13
Trustworthiness	3.32	3.38	1.8	1.85

Curiosity	3.63	3.69	1.8	1.81
Fairness	3.40	3.44	1.1	1.12
Carefulness	3.23	3.26	0.8	0.81
Openness to Evidence	3.37	3.40	0.8	0.78
Appreciation Of Beauty	3.17	3.19	0.5	0.50

**Table 7: Impact of Stoic Week on CIVIC Character Traits**

Zest and hope improved significantly during Stoic Week, as did meaning and purpose, to a lesser extent. The finding regarding zest is particularly intriguing given that zest was also found to be the trait most associated with Stoicism at the start of Stoic Week.

Character core	Before	After	Improvement (%)
FORTITUDE	2.7	2.9	9.1
TRANSCENDENCE	2.3	2.4	4.9
INTERPERSONAL CONSIDERATION	2.8	2.9	4.0
TEMPERANCE	3.0	3.1	3.4
APPRECIATION	3.2	3.3	3.0
SINCERITY	3.2	3.3	2.8
EMPATHY	3.2	3.3	2.2
INTELLECTUAL ENGAGEMENT	3.3	3.4	1.8

**Table 8: Impact of Stoic Week on CIVIC Character Cores**

Fortitude (which is closely related to the virtue of courage) improved by over 9%, with transcendence and interpersonal consideration also displaying quite large improvements.

## Impact on Stoic Attitudes and Behaviours (SABS)

Comparisons in SABS scores before and after Stoic Week allow us to assess whether participants changed with respect to being Stoic taking part in Stoic Week. It also enables us to see in which ways they became more Stoic. Overall there was an 9% increase in assenting to Stoic attitudes and behaviour (SABS) scores from an average of 168 to 182.5.

Table 9 below gives the changes in average scores for those items that change most between the beginning and end of Stoic Week for 2017.

Item number	SABS item <i>Those items in italics have been reversed scored, so a high score still indicates a more Stoic attitude or behaviour.</i>	% Change	Average Score at start of Stoic week (completers only)	Average score at end of Stoic Week
2	It doesn't really matter what other people think about me as long as I do the right thing	30	3.5	4.5
22	<i>I spend quite a lot of time dwelling on what's gone wrong the past or worrying about the future</i>	29	4	5.2
24	When an upsetting thought enters my mind the first thing I do is remind myself it's just an impression in my mind and not the thing it claims to represent	21	3.9	4.7

6	<i>If bad things happen to you, you are bound to feel upset</i>	19	4.6	5.5
26	Recognising that only virtue matters enables me to face life's transience and my approaching death	18	3.8	4.4
29	<i>Happiness depends on things going well for me and my family</i>	16	4.8	5.6
25	Viewing other people as fellow-members of the brotherhood of humankind helps me to avoid feeling anger and resentment	16	3.7	4.3
35	<i>My good name and what other people think about me matters a lot.</i>	15	4.4	5.1
18	I am good at controlling my urges and impulses when that's better for me in the long run [this item is excluded from SABS total as items 32 and 33 better measure a specifically <i>Stoic</i> concept of self-control]	15	4.9	5.7

31	When making a significant decision I ask myself "What really matters here?" and then look for the option that a good and wise person would choose.	14	5	5.7
12	To flourish as a human being all you need is rationality and a good character; things like money, status, health and good luck are not essential	14	4.8	5.4
15	I try to anticipate future misfortunes and rehearse rising above them	14	3.4	3.9
17	<i>If I was honest I'd have to admit that I often do what is enjoyable and comfortable rather than doing what I believe to be the right thing</i>	14	4.8	5.4
19	I try to contemplate what the ideal wise and good person would do when faced with various misfortunes in life.	13	4.2	4.8
3	<i>It can sometimes be a good thing to get angry when people are really rude, selfish or inconsiderate</i>	13	5.2	5.8
23	I make an effort to pay continual attention to the nature of my judgments and actions.	12	4.8	5.4

27	I do the right thing even when I feel afraid.	11	2.9	3.2
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**Table 8: Impact of Stoic Week on Stoic Attitudes and Behaviours (items with most change)**

The SABS items that showed the biggest increases are strongly related to improved mental health.

- Doing the right think regardless of what others think((item 2)
  - This will not only help people be virtuous, it could also be expected to reduce social anxiety.
- Cognitive Distancing & Stoic Mindfulness (item 24).
  - This is important because it allows people to take a step back, not automatically assenting to unhelpful judgements.
- Reducing rumination (item 22)
  - Dwelling on negative thoughts for a long time is strongly associated with depression.

All SABS items moved in the expected direction with the exception item 34, an item added in SABS v3.0 which measures a utilitarian concept of practical wisdom. Perhaps the reason for this item not changing in the expected direction is that the utilitarian concept of practical wisdom incorporates some ideals to which Stoics would assent - such as reflection and benevolence.

The 9% change in Stoic Attitudes and Behaviours overall is significant in that it supports the view that it is changes in level of Stoicism that is mediating the change in well-being rather than other variables, such as the placebo effect.

## Completion Rate

The completion rate in 2017 was 24%<sup>ii</sup>, more than only 15% in 2016. This may have been due to improvements in the materials or more attempts to encourage participants to complete the questionnaires at the end of Stoic week, or possibly other factors.

## Appendices

### Impact on Stoic Attitudes and Behaviours (SABS)

Item number	SABS item wording <i>Those items in italics have been reversed scored, so a high score still indicates a more Stoic attitude or behaviour.</i>	2017 % Change	2017 Average Score at start of Stoic week (completers only)	2017 Average score at end of Stoic Week	2016 % Change	2016 Average Score at start of Stoic week (completers only)	2016 Average score at end of Stoic Week
1	As long as you have the right attitude, you can lead a good life even in the worst of conditions, such as being tortured or being held prisoner	8	5.3	5.7	8	5.3	5.7
2	It doesn't really matter what other people think about me as long as I do the right thing	9	5.7	6.2	10	5.7	6.3
3	<i>It can sometimes be a good thing to get angry when people are really rude, selfish or inconsiderate</i>	13	4.2	4.8	15	4.2	4.8
4	<i>It's more important to feel good than to do good.</i>	5	5.5	5.8	7	5.4	5.8
5	Peace of mind comes from abandoning fears and desires about things outside our control.	4	6.1	6.4	7	6.0	6.5
6	<i>If bad things happen to you, you are bound to feel upset</i>	21	3.9	4.7	16	4.0	4.6

7	<b><i>What is called “morally right” and “morally wrong” is in reality just a matter of personal or cultural</i></b>	6	4.1	4.4	5	4.2	4.4
8	<b>The only things truly under our control in life are our judgements and voluntary actions</b>	5	6.0	6.3	9	5.9	6.4
9	<b><i>You should go wherever your emotions leads you</i></b>	4	5.8	6.0	2	5.7	5.8
10	<b>Virtue (or human excellence) consists in perfecting our rational nature, through cultivating wisdom</b>	7	5.8	6.1	9	5.7	6.2
11	<b>I think about my life as an ongoing project in ethical development</b>	8	5.7	6.1	13	5.5	6.2
12	<b>To flourish as a human being all you need is rationality and a good character; things like money, status, health and good luck are not essential</b>	14	5.0	5.7	15	4.9	5.7
13	<b>I consider myself to be a part of the human race, in the same way that a limb is a part of the human body. It is my duty to contribute to its welfare.</b>	5	5.7	6.0	8	5.5	5.9
14	<b>The cosmos is a single, wise, living thing</b>	7	4.1	4.4	11	3.9	4.3
15	<b>I try to anticipate future misfortunes and rehearse rising above them</b>	14	4.8	5.4	16	4.9	5.6
16	<b>I often contemplate the smallness and transience of human life in relation to the totality of space and time.</b>	9	5.1	5.6	6	5.4	5.7
17	<b><i>If I was honest I'd have to admit that I often do what is enjoyable and comfortable rather than doing what I believe to be the right thing</i></b>	14	3.4	3.9	15	3.4	4.0
18	<b>I am good at controlling my urges and impulses when that's better for me in the long run [this item is excluded from SABS total as items 32 and 33 better measure a specifically <i>Stoic</i> concept of self-</b>	15	4.4	5.1	14	4.3	4.9

	control]						
19	I try to contemplate what the ideal wise and good person would do when faced with various misfortunes in life.	14	4.8	5.4	17	4.7	5.5
20	<i>It is possible to control how other people behave towards you</i>	7	5.4	5.7	13	4.9	5.5
21	I treat everybody fairly even those I don't like or don't know very well	8	5.2	5.7	10	5.1	5.6
22	<i>I spend quite a lot of time dwelling on what's gone wrong the past or worrying about the future</i>	30	3.5	4.5	24	3.6	4.4
23	I make an effort to pay continual attention to the nature of my judgments and actions.	13	5.2	5.8	13	5.2	5.8
24	When an upsetting thought enters my mind the first thing I do is remind myself it's just an impression in my mind and not the thing it claims to represent	29	4.0	5.2	28	4.2	5.3
25	Viewing other people as fellow-members of the brotherhood of humankind helps me to avoid feeling anger and resentment	16	4.8	5.6	17	4.8	5.6
26	Recognising that only virtue matters enables me to face life's transience and my approaching death	19	4.6	5.5	20	4.5	5.4
27	I do the right thing even when I feel afraid.	12	4.8	5.4	13	4.7	5.3
28	I care about the suffering of others and take active steps to reduce this	6	5.3	5.6	8	5.2	5.6
29	<i>Happiness depends on things going well for me and my family</i>	18	3.8	4.4	11	3.8	4.2
30	<i>We have to accept that some things that matter a lot for our happiness are outside our control</i>	11	2.9	3.2	17	2.9	3.4
31	When making a significant decision I ask myself "What really matters here?" and then look for the	15	4.9	5.7	12	5.0	5.6

	<b>option that a good and wise person would choose.</b>						
32	<b>I sometimes have thoughts or urges it would be unwise to act on, but I usually realise this and do not act on them</b>	7	5.3	5.6	6	5.2	5.5
33	<b>My beliefs about what is best determine my wishes and motives</b>	6	5.2	5.6	9	5.1	5.6
34	<b><i>When making an important decision I try to predict the consequences of my actions and aim to balance the long-term happiness of myself and others</i></b>	-12	2.5	2.2	-12	2.6	2.3
35	<b><i>My good name and what other people think about me matters a lot.</i></b>	16	3.7	4.3	20	3.5	4.2
36	<b><i>I am upset when I hear of the suffering of others</i></b>	0	2.6	2.6	6	2.5	2.6
37	<b><i>There's no overall plan to the universe.</i></b>	10	3.2	3.5	12	3.2	3.6

**Table 9: Impact of taking part in Stoic Week 2017 on Stoic attitudes and behaviours (all SABS items)**

<sup>i</sup> These are calculated using only those people who completed Stoic Week. If the averages for the beginning of Stoic Week were to include those who dropped out, the improvement would be slightly greater, since those who dropped out tend to start with slightly lower scores on well-being.

<sup>ii</sup> The completion rate figure includes a number of completers whose data was excluded from the analysis for various reasons, such as incomplete data.