

Stoic Week 2015 Report Part 2: Impact on well-being Tim LeBon

This report forms the second part of the report on Stoic Week 2015, which took place in first week of November. The previously published part 1 reported on the [demographics](#), part 3 will provide an analysis of the association between well-being and Stoic Attitudes and Behaviours (SABS scale analysis) and part 4 will provide an analysis of qualitative feedback.

Over two and a half thousand participants took three established well-being questionnaires as well as the Stoic Attitudes and Behaviours scale.ⁱ Well-being was measured before and after Stoic Week, allowing us to assess the impact of doing Stoic Week on self-reports on well-being

Overall Findings

Results were very similar to those of Stoic Week 2014, with increases in well-being ranging from 10-15% in a week depending on the scale being used. This gives us increased confidence in the reliability of the findings. The changes between 2014 and 2015 are not statistically significant. Table 1 below show the overall findings.

	Stoic Week 2015	Stoic Week 2014
No of participants	2503	1953
Completion Rate	29%	29%
Increase in Flourishing	10%	10%
Increase in Satisfaction with Life	15%	16%
Increase in Positive Emotions	10%	11%
Reduction in Negative Emotions	14%	16%
Increase In Stoic Attitudes and Behaviours	13%	12%

Table 1: Overall Findings

Impact on Flourishing

Participants reported on average a 10% overall increase in Flourishingⁱⁱ

Table 2 below shows the impact of Stoic which on each element of Flourishing.

Flourishing Scale Item	2015 % increase	2014	2013	Theme
Q1. I lead a purposeful and meaningful life.	16	14	10	Purpose and meaning
Q7. I am optimistic about my future.	12	11	18	Optimism
Q2. My social relationships are supportive and rewarding.	11	11	10	Relationships
Q3. I am engaged and interested in my daily activities.	10	10	10	Engagement in activities

Q4. I actively contribute to the happiness and well-being of others.	10	8	8	Benevolent
Q6. I am a good person and live a good life.	8	9	8	Ethically Good
Q8. People respect me.	7	7	5	Respected
Q5. I am competent and capable in the activities that are important to me	7	8	5	Competent

Table 2: Impact on Flourishing

As in previous years, results suggest Stoicism has a particularly large positive impact on purpose and meaning, optimism and social relationships.

Impact on Satisfaction with Life

Participants reported a 15% increase in satisfaction with life overall as measured by the Satisfaction with Life Scale.ⁱⁱⁱ

Table 3 below shows which aspects of Satisfaction with Life increased most; there was not a very large variation, the themes of life being ideal and acceptance showed the biggest increase.

Percentage change by each question	2015 % increase	2014	2013	Theme
Q1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal	20	15	18	Life is ideal
Q5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing	20	17	17	Acceptance
Q4. I am satisfied with my life	14	15	17	Satisfaction
Q2. The conditions of my life are excellent	13	15	11	Externals met
Q3. So far I have got the important things I want in life.	13	13	11	Needs met

Table 3: 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. There was a greater shift in negative emotions (14% as opposed to 10%) as measured by the SPANE.^{iv} The positive emotions that showed the biggest changes were “contented” (14%) followed by “joyful” (13%) whilst there was little variation amongst negative emotions – “unpleasant,” “bad” and “negative” and “angry” showing a 14-16% reduction. Tables 4 and 5 below shows the changes in positive and negative emotions.

Positive	2015	%	2014	%	2013
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Emotions	change	comparison	comparison
Overall positive	10	11	9
Contented	14	14	12
Joyful	13	13	12
Happy	11	9	9
Good	9	10	7
Pleasant	9	10	8
Positive	8	13	8

Table 4: Impact on Positive Emotions

Negative Emotions	% 2015 Change	% 2014 Change	% 2013 Change
Overall negative	-14	-16	-11
Unpleasant	-16	-17	-8
Bad	-15	-17	-11
Negative	-14	-17	-12
Angry	-14	-15	-13
Afraid	-12	-14	-10
Sad	-12	-14	-10

Table 5: Impact on Negative Emotions

Impact on Stoic Attitudes and Behaviours (SABS)

Comparisons in SABS scores before and after Stoic Week allows us to assess whether participants changed with respect to Stoic Attitudes and Behaviours as a result of taking part in Stoic Week. It also enables us to see in which ways they became more “Stoic”.

Table 6 below gives the changes in average scores for each item between the beginning and end of Stoic Week for 2015 and, for comparison, in previous years. Overall there was a 13% increase in assenting to Stoic attitudes and behaviours. ^v

Changes in SABS (%)	2015	2014	2013
All items	13	12	12
Attitudes overall	12	10	10
Behaviours overall	14	15	16
<i>Positively worded Stoic attitudes and behaviour</i>	<i>2015</i>	<i>2014</i>	<i>2013</i>
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.	27	26	31
26. Recognising that only virtue matters enables me to face life's transience and my approaching death.	21	-	-

18. I am good at controlling my urges and impulses when that's better for me in the long run	16	-	-
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.	16	14	12
16. Viewing other people as fellow-members of the brotherhood of humankind helps me to avoid feeling anger and resentment	16	-	-
14. The cosmos is a single, wise, living thing.	15	11	14
19. I try to contemplate what the ideal wise and good person would do when faced with various misfortunes in life.	14	13	15
15. I try to anticipate future misfortunes and rehearse rising above them.	14	17	17
23. I make an effort to pay continual attention to the nature of my judgments and actions.	13	10	11
11. I think about my life as an ongoing project in ethical development	12	-	-
27. I do the right thing even when I feel afraid.	11	-	-
21. I treat everybody fairly even those I don't like or don't know very well	10	-	-
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.	10	14	10
13. 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.	10	6	5
2. It doesn't really matter what other people think about me as long as I do the right thing.	9	7	9
10. Virtue (or human excellence) consists in perfecting our rational nature, through cultivating wisdom.	7	8	9
16. I often contemplate the smallness and transience of human life in relation to the totality of space and time.	7	8	6
28. I feel sensitive to the suffering of others and take active steps to reduce suffering	6	-	-
8. The only things truly under our control in life are our judgements and voluntary actions.	6	6	7
5. Peace of mind comes from abandoning fears and desires about things outside our control.	5	4	7
<i>Reverse-scored Non-Stoic attitudes and behaviour (negative percentage means more Stoic)</i>	<i>2015</i>	<i>2014</i>	<i>2013</i>
22. I spend quite a lot of time dwelling on what's gone wrong in the past or worrying about the future.	-27	-23	-21
6. If bad things happen to you, you are bound to feel upset.	-18	-21	-18
3. It can sometimes be a good thing to get angry when people are really rude, selfish or inconsiderate.	-18	-16	-19
17. If I was honest I'd have to admit that I often do what is enjoyable and comfortable rather than what I believe to be the right thing.	-16	-12	-7
29. Happiness depends on things going well for me and my family and friends	-14	-	-
30. We have to accept that some things that matter a lot for our happiness are outside	-12	-	-
4. It's more important to feel good than to do good.	-6	-7	-4
9. You should go wherever your emotions leads you	-5	-	-
7. There's no such thing as "good" and "bad"; it's a matter of personal or cultural	+5	-	-
20. If you treat other people properly they are bound to like and respect you	+6	-	-
ADDITIONAL QUESTION (not part of SABS scoring)	2015	2014	2013
31. When making a significant decision I ask myself "What really matters here?" and then look for the option that satisfies the things that are most important.	11	-	-

Table 5: Impact on Stoic Attitudes and Behaviours

. Key findings are:-

- The three biggest changes were

- Reducing rumination (item 22). This is very important as rumination is strongly associated with mental health problems such as depression
- Cognitive Distancing (item 24)
- Virtue helping to cope with transience and death(item 26) This was one of the new items added this year and associated with the writings of Marcus Aurelius
- Note although 28 of the items changed in the expected direction (i.e. people became more Stoic) the reverse was true for two items
 - Relativism (item 7)
 - The idea that treating people well will mean they are bound to like and respect you (item 20)

The correlation of all the SABS items and well-being will be given in the next part of this report.

Appendices

Appendix A The Satisfaction with Life scale

The SWLS is a short 5-item instrument designed to measure global cognitive judgments of satisfaction with one's life. This scale is widely used as part of the measure of Subjective Well-being (also known as happiness).

Question	Theme
Q1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal	Life is ideal
Q2. The conditions of my life are excellent	Externals met
Q3. So far I have got the important things I want in life.	Needs met
Q4. I am satisfied with my life	Satisfaction
Q5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing	Acceptance

Using a 1-7 scale, users score between 35 (extremely satisfied) and 5 (extremely dissatisfied)

The SWL scale was developed by Ed Diener, Robert A. Emmons, Randy J. Larsen and Sharon Griffin as noted in the 1985 article in the *Journal of Personality Assessment*. See <http://internal.psychology.illinois.edu/~ediener/SWLS.html>

Participants in Stoic Week's average SWL score was 22.3 at the start and 26 after Stoic Week.^{vi}

Appendix B The Flourishing Scale

The Flourishing Scale is a brief 8-item summary measure of the respondent's self-perceived success in important areas such as relationships, self-esteem, purpose, and optimism. The

scale provides a single psychological well-being score. This scale was developed by Ed Diener and associates to measure a broader conception of well-being than purely subjective life satisfaction and presence of positive and absence of negative emotions.

Flourishing Scale Item	Theme
1. I lead a purposeful and meaningful life.	Purpose and meaning
2. My social relationships are supportive and rewarding.	Relationships
3. I am engaged and interested in my daily activities.	Flow & interested
4. I actively contribute to the happiness and well-being of others.	Benevolent
5. I am competent and capable in the activities that are important to me.	Competent
6. I am a good person and live a good life.	Ethically Good
7. I am optimistic about my future.	Optimism
8. People respect me.	Respected

Reference: Diener, E., Wirtz, D., Tov, W., Kim-Prieto, C., Choi, D., Oishi, S., & Biswas-Diener, R. (2009). New measures of well-being: Flourishing and positive and negative feelings. *Social Indicators Research*, 39, 247-266.
<http://internal.psychology.illinois.edu/~ediener/FS.html>

Participants in Stoic Week's average Flourishing score was 41 at the start and 45.4 after Stoic Week. (Note this is

Appendix C The Scale of Positive and Negative Emotions (SPANE)

The SPANE is a 12-item questionnaire includes six items to assess positive feelings and six items to assess negative feelings. For both the positive and negative items, three of the items are general (e.g., positive, negative) and three per subscale are more specific (e.g., joyful, sad). Along with the Life Satisfaction scale, presence of positive and absence of negative emotions forms the other part of Subjective Well-being. Users are asked to select a number between 1 (very rarely or never) and 5 (very often or always) to indicate how often they have experienced the emotion in the last 4 weeks.

Positive Emotions

Contented
Joyful
Positive
Good
Pleasant
Happy

Negative Emotions

Unpleasant
Bad
Negative
Angry
Afraid
Sad

Three scores are derived: SPANE-P – some of positive emotions SPANE-P – sum of negative emotions – SPANE –B Balance of positive and negative.

- Participants in Stoic Week's average overall SPANE score was 3.7 at the start and 8.2 after Stoic Week.
- Participants in Stoic Week's average SPANE-P score was 20.1 at the start and 22.2 after Stoic Week.
- Participants in Stoic Week's average SPANE-N score was -16.3 at the start and -14 after Stoic Week.

Reference: Diener, E., Wirtz, D., Tov, W., Kim-Prieto, C., Choi, D., Oishi, S., & Biswas-Diener, R. (2009). New measures of well-being: Flourishing and positive and negative feelings. *Social Indicators Research*, 39, 247-266.

<http://internal.psychology.illinois.edu/~ediener/SPANE.html>

Appendix D The Stoic Attitudes and Behaviours Scale (version 2.0)

Below are a number of statements which describe certain attitudes or behaviours. Although this scale is called the “Stoic attitudes and behaviours scale” note that some of the attitudes and behaviours listed are Stoic, others are not. Please circle the answer closest to how you feel, on the scale 7 (Strongly Agree) to 1 (Strongly Disagree). Please answer the questions as honestly as you can. Please answer all questions.

SABS ITEM	Theme
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	SABS1_A_AttitudeIsSufficient
2. It doesn't really matter what other people think about me as long as I do the right thing	SABS2_A_DoingRightNotPeoplePleas
3. It can sometimes be a good thing to get angry when people are really rude, selfish or inconsiderate	SABS3*_A_AngerCanBeGood
4. It's more important to feel good than to do good.	SABS4*_A_Hedonism
5. Peace of mind comes from abandoning fears and desires about things outside our control.	SABS_A_FocusOnWhatYouCanContr
6. If bad things happen to you, you are bound to feel upset	SABS6*_A_UpsetInevitable
7. There's no such thing as “good” and “bad”; it's a matter of personal or cultural opinion	SABS7*_A_Relativism
8. The only things truly under our control in life are our judgements and voluntary actions	SABS8_A_WhatWeCanControl
9. You should go wherever your emotions leads you	SABS9*_A_Romanticism
10. Virtue (or human excellence) consists in perfecting our rational nature, through cultivating wisdom	SABS10_A_VirtueRationalityWisdom
11. I think about my life as an ongoing project in ethical development	SABS11_A_M_EthicalProject
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	SABS12_A_VirtueSufficientForFlourish

13. 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.	SABS13_A_HumanityConnected
14. The cosmos is a single, wise, living thing	SABS14_A_CosmosLivingAndWise
15. I try to anticipate future misfortunes and rehearse rising above them	SABS15_B_NegativeVisualisation
16. I often contemplate the smallness and transience of human life in relation to the totality of space and time.	SABS16_B_ViewFromAbove
*17. 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	SABS17*_B_ShortTermHedonism
18. I am good at controlling my urges and impulses when that's better for me in the long run	SABS18_B_V_SelfControl
19. I try to contemplate what the ideal wise and good person would do when faced with various misfortunes in life	SABS19_B_IdealStoicAdvisor
20. If you treat other people properly they are bound to like and respect you	SABS20*_A_OthersTreatYouWell
21. I treat everybody fairly even those I don't like or don't know very well	SABS21_B_V_Fairness
*22. I spend quite a lot of time dwelling on what's gone wrong the past or worrying about the future	SABS22*_B_RuminationWorry
23. I make an effort to pay continual attention to the nature of my judgments and actions.	SABS23_B_StoicMindfulness
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	SABS24_B_UpsettingThoughtJustImp
25. Viewing other people as fellow-members of the brotherhood of humankind helps me to avoid feeling anger and resentment	SABS25_A_M_Brother_Less_Anger
26. Recognising that only virtue matters enables me to face life's transience and my approaching death	SABS26_A_M_Virtue_Coping_Death
27. I do the right thing even when I feel afraid.	SABS27_B_V_Courage
28. I feel sensitive to the suffering of others and take active steps to reduce suffering	SABS28_B_V_Compassion
29. Happiness depends on things going well for me and my family and friends	SABS29*_A_HappinessContigent
30. We have to accept that some things that matter a lot for our happiness are outside our control	SABS30*_A_HappinessOutsideControl
31. <i>When making a significant decision I ask myself "What really matters here?" and then look for the option that satisfies the things that are most important.</i>	SABS31_B_V_PracticalWisdom_null

Note: Items marked * are reversed_scored. The item marked in *italics* is not scored as part of SABS

In the themes column, each item is coded as follows:- SABS<item number><asterisk if reverse-scored>_< B=Behaviour, A=Attitude>_<M=item related to Marcus Aurelius, V=items related to virtue>_<theme name>

SCORING

The SABS v2.0 scale is currently being developed by the Exeter University Stoic Week team so your scores should be treated as merely indicative. There are two subscales -

Stoic Attitudes and Stoic behaviours.

Add up your scores for questions 1,2,5,8,10,11, 12,13,14,25 and 26 = A

Subtract your scores for questions 3, 4, 6,7,9, 29 and 30 from 8

Your score for Stoic Attitude is A+ B. Your score will range from 12 (least Stoic) to 84 (most Stoic).

Add up your scores for questions 15,16,18, 19,21,23,24,27 and 28 = C

Subtract your scores for questions 17, 20 and 22 from 8

Your score is for Stoic Behaviours is C+D. Your score will range from 7 (least Stoic) to 49 (most Stoic)

To obtain your overall score, add up your two Stoic attitude and behaviours totals, which will range from 30 (least Stoic) to 210 (most Stoic) .

Participants in Stoic Week's average SABS score was 139 at the start and 156.3 after Stoic Week.

A score of 116 or lower places someone in the bottom 10% of respondents.

A score between 116 and 131 places someone in bottom 11-33% of respondents.

A score between 132 and 143 places someone in the 34% to 60% range of respondents.

A score between 144 and 162 places someone in the 61% to 90% range of respondents.

A score of 163 or above places someone in the top 10% of respondents.

ⁱ Details of these four questionnaires are given in Appendices A-D.

ⁱⁱ See Appendix A for a description of the Flourishing Scale.

ⁱⁱⁱ See Appendix B.

^{iv} See Appendix C.

^v See Appendix D for details of the SABS 2.0. Note that we used a revised version of the SABS scale, so for new items comparisons are not possible.

^{vi} The average changes given in the appendices are calculated using all participants (including those who dropped out) whereas the averages given earlier exclude those who dropped out.