others, led purposeful and meaningful lives, and were engaged and interested in their activities. Just over 43 per cent of 40-somethings were flourishing – the same rate as those aged 80-plus. But from the age of 50 on, there was a very different picture, as life satisfaction and happiness ratings rose and depression scores dropped. Levels of "flourishing" gradually increased through to the 70s, before declining again in old age as ill health and disability impacted on wellbeing.

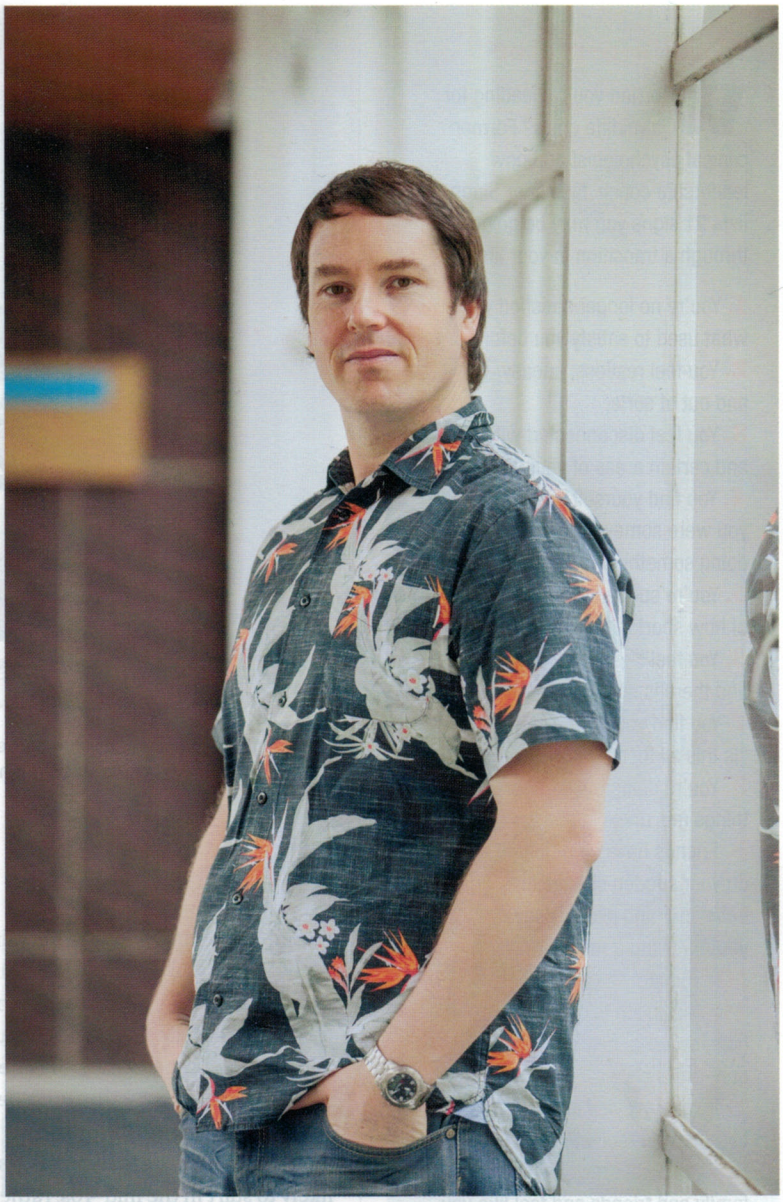
Investigator Dr Aaron Jarden says the work found a very strong relationship between money and wellbeing, but it was not strongly related to the amount earned. "Someone earning $200,000 a year who was spending more than that could have their wellbeing majorly impacted, while someone earning $50,000 and living within that had high wellbeing."

He says there's plenty of debate and disagreement internationally about why midlife seems to be associated with a decline in happiness. "There are some things people agree on more – that it's the time of life when people are more stressed, they have more responsibilities, both at work and for children. A lot of what impacts on the hedonic, or pleasurable, aspects of life takes a hit around that time."

Conversely, though, it's also a time that corresponds with an increase in the so-called eudaimonic, or meaning and purpose, aspects of life.

"Having children, for example – you take a really big hit in your pleasure but a really big gain in sense of meaning and purpose. Your recipe for wellbeing around that time changes a bit as well, so everyone you ask will give a completely different answer to what's driving this – it's a range of things from expectations to stress."

Positive relationships, the ability to regulate emotions, and natural resilience can be buffers to the dip. "The U-shape is over a nation, but there's a lot of variability when you look at individuals."



Dr Aaron Jarden says AUT's research found that how much a person lives within their means has a greater impact on their wellbeing than how much they earn.

"Having children – you take a really big hit in your pleasure but a really big gain in sense of meaning and purpose."

DR AARON JARDEN

know they can't please everyone all the time and tend to become less neurotic and more extroverted.

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