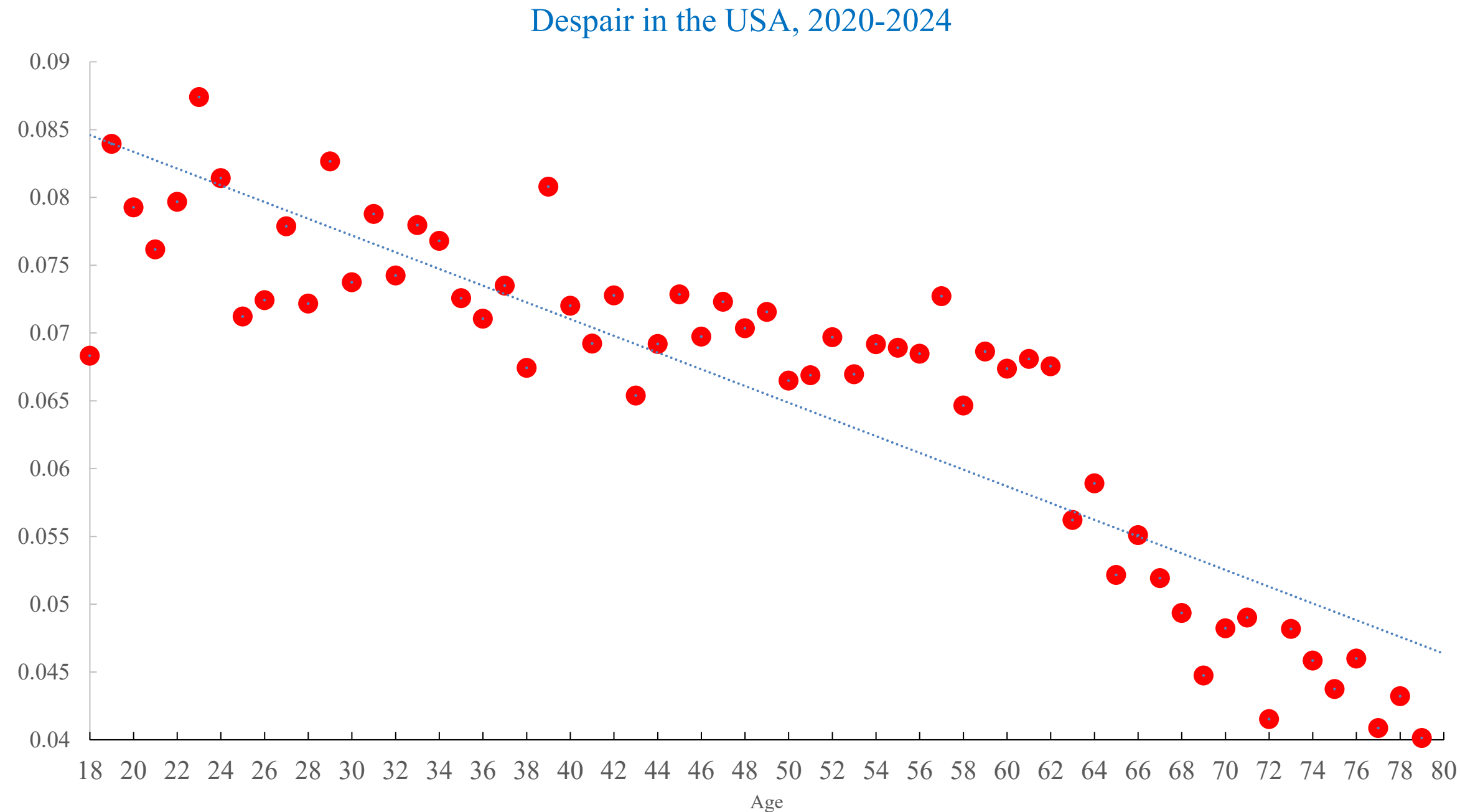


The Global Decline in the Mental Health of the Young



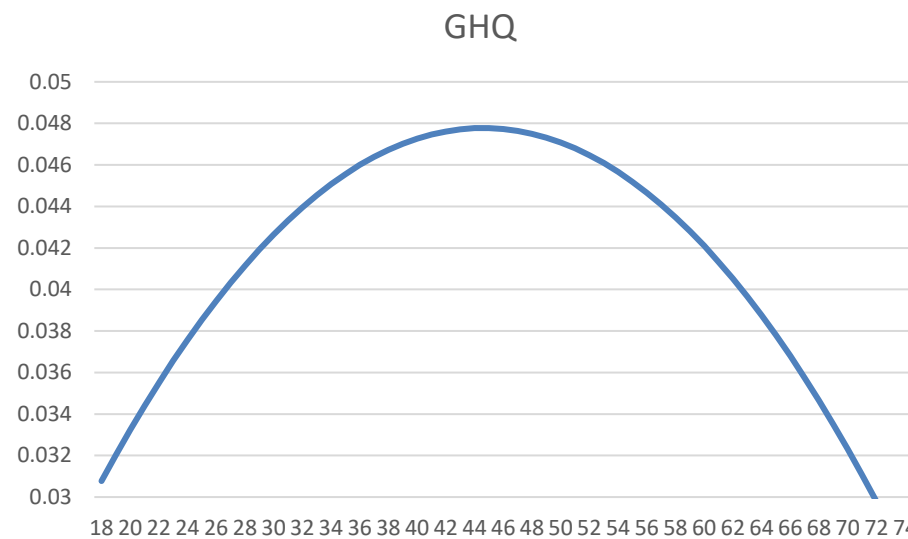
Professor David Blanchflower

Dartmouth, Glasgow and NBER

<https://sites.dartmouth.edu/blanchflower/>

Well-being – for non-technical summaries see [1-2]

- In 2004 I wrote my most highly cited paper with 5,000 Google cites which examined happiness using data from the General Social Survey (GSS) and life satisfaction data for the UK from the Eurobarometer Survey
- We found “*well-being is U-shaped in age*” from equations with an age and age² term.
- We explored the U-shape further in a second paper in 72 developed and developing nations using the GSS, 1972-2006, Eurobarometer data for Europe, 1976-2002 and the World Values Survey, 1981-2004, Latinobarometers and Asiabarometers, 1997-2005.
- We also found ill-being is hump-shaped in age from a Eurobarometer file and the UK Labour Force Survey 2004-2007 using GHQ scores that maximizes around age



- I later found a U-shape in 145 countries and many more surveys and years
- Blanchflower and Oswald (2004), 'Well-being over time in Britain and the USA', *Journal of Public Economics*. Blanchflower and Oswald (2008), 'Is well-being U-shaped over the life cycle?', *Social Science & Medicine*, Blanchflower (2020) 'Unhappiness and age', *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*, and Blanchflower (2021), 'Is happiness U-shaped everywhere? Age and subjective well-being in 145 countries', *Journal of Population Economics*, 2021

60 Blanchflower Well-being papers

- In the years since 2008 I explored the U-shape in a series of 20 articles with multiple co-authors – Bell [30, 45], Bryson [4, 53], Clark [32], Graham [14, 26, 28], Lepinteur [60], Oswald [33, 38, 41, 42, 46, 47, 48], Piper [14, 24], Stewart-Brown [40], Twenge [55] and Xu [3].
- Plus, four on my own [15, 31, 34, 35]. I showed [34] that there was a hump-shape in age globally and found that anti-depressant prescriptions were also hump-shaped in age [38].
- My work mostly with Alex Bryson also took us to examine other aspects of well-being including sleep [29], pulse rates [18], pain [16, 20, 23, 37], job satisfaction [21, 22], hypertension [44], Covid [7, 12], gender [9, 13, 17], abuse [5, 8], bullying [10] country rankings [11] Native American distress [25] depression [36] happiness [39, 41], distress [33], anti-depressants [38], life satisfaction [53, 55], health [45], flourishing [51].
- We found evidence for the US that there were marked differences between the married and the unmarried in life satisfaction which was not the case elsewhere [42]. This was also true with and without controls. You need controls in the US to get the U-shape [43]...now you don't...!

Gulp – oh Jean!

- I wrote several papers in 2020 [25], 2021 [27] 2022 [22] and 2023 [13, 14] arguing that the U-shape still existed. I noted in [13] in 2023 that there were over 600 published papers showing the U-shape.
- I even said in [27] in 2021.

“The overwhelming evidence .. supports the conclusion that there is a midlife low in wellbeing. This is among the most striking, persistent and consistent patterns in social science.” (Until it wasn’t.....!).

- My colleague Doug Staiger told me to read an interview Jean Twenge gave to Ezra Klein in the NYT on May 19th 2023.*
- *“So around 2012, more and more teens started to say they felt lonely and left out. And more started to say they felt like they couldn’t do anything right, or that they didn’t enjoy life. Those last two are classic symptoms of depression. Then, other data started to pop up. Clinical level depression that requires treatment started to rise. Emergency room admissions for self-harm started to rise in C.D.C. data. Same thing for suicide attempts and completed suicides”*

* <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/19/podcasts/transcript-ezra-klein-interviews-jean-twenge.html>

So... I checked if Jean was right.....she was!

- I had seen changes from 2020 but (wrongly) thought they were COVID...I hadn't looked at the data from 2015-2019...
- I had worked with the BRFSS in a couple of earlier papers [20,29] and decided to go back and look at the measure of distress or despair we had identified based on the following question – set to zero if <30 and 1 if $=30$
- Q1. *“Now thinking about your mental health, which includes stress, depression, and problems with emotions, for how many days during the past 30 days was your mental health not good?”*
- We showed for 1993-2019 there had been a big rise over time in despair for Natives and for prime-age (35-54) less-educated whites. But we didn't look at the young.
- In 2023 simply examined the data I had from 2018-2021 and this is what I saw. **The U-shape had gone..oops!** The data for 2020-2023 show a clear downward slope. Also, in the UK using the GHQ from the UK Household Longitudinal Survey.

The hump-shape in unhappiness has gone from Blanchflower, Bryson and Xu, 2025

Chart 2. Despair in the USA 1993-2024

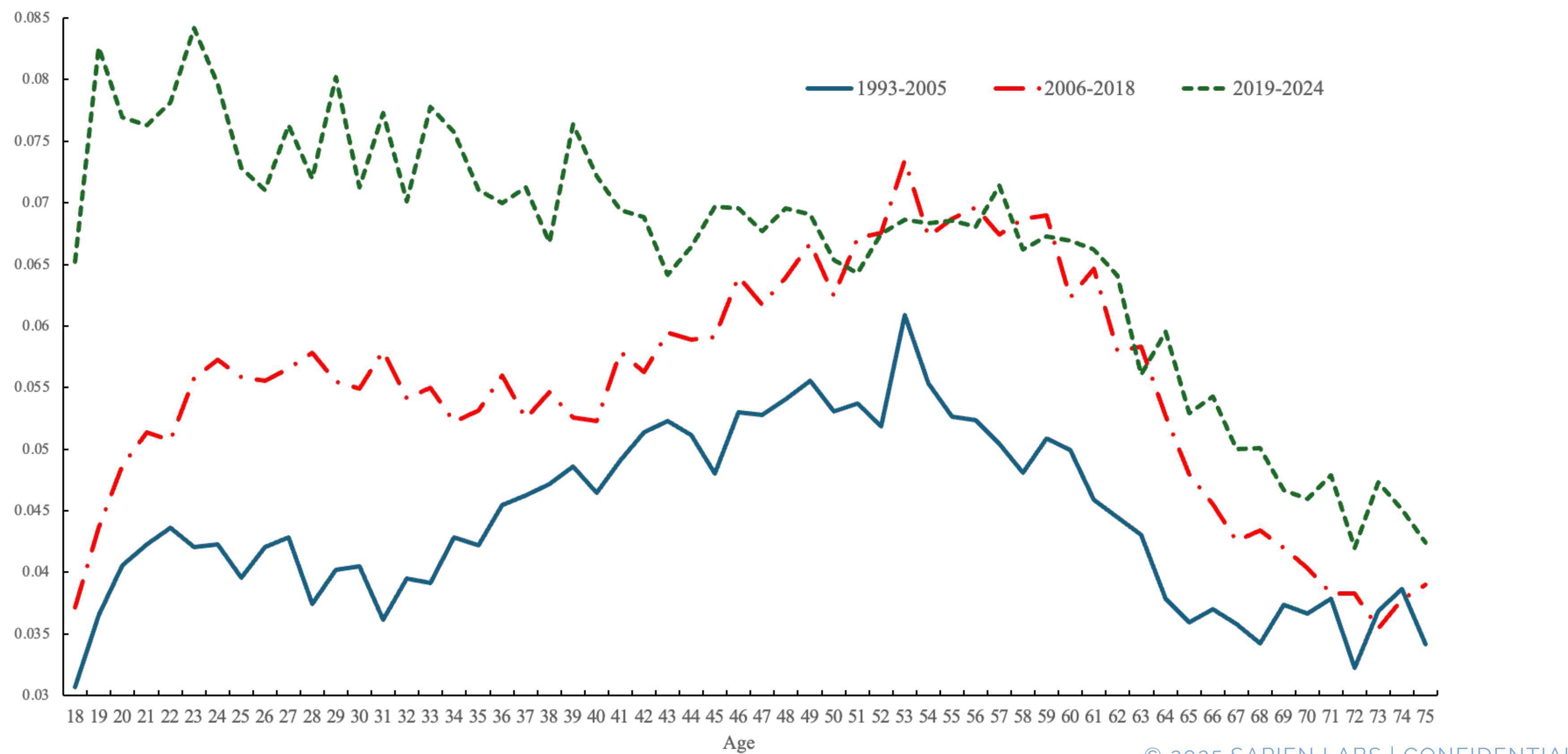
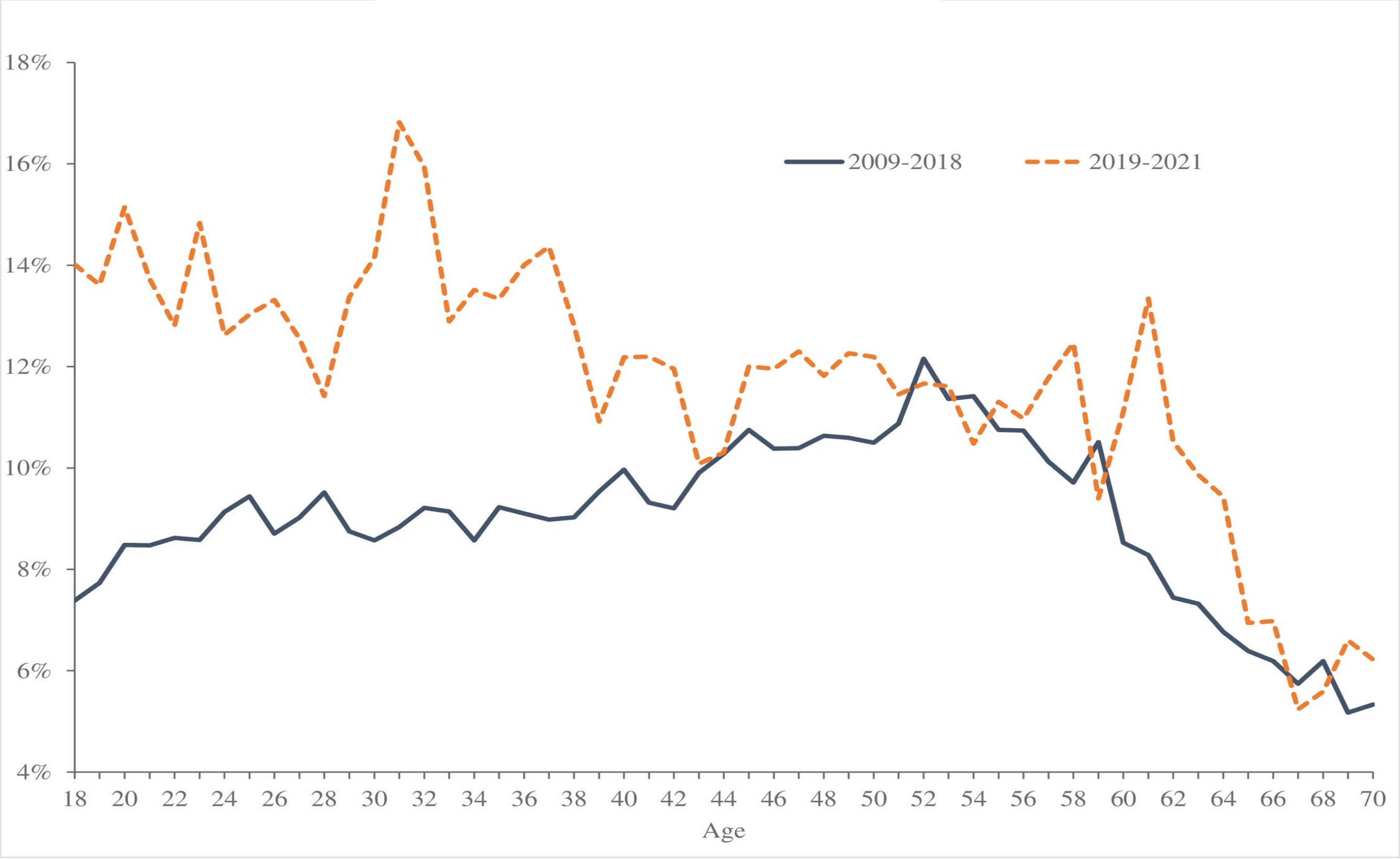
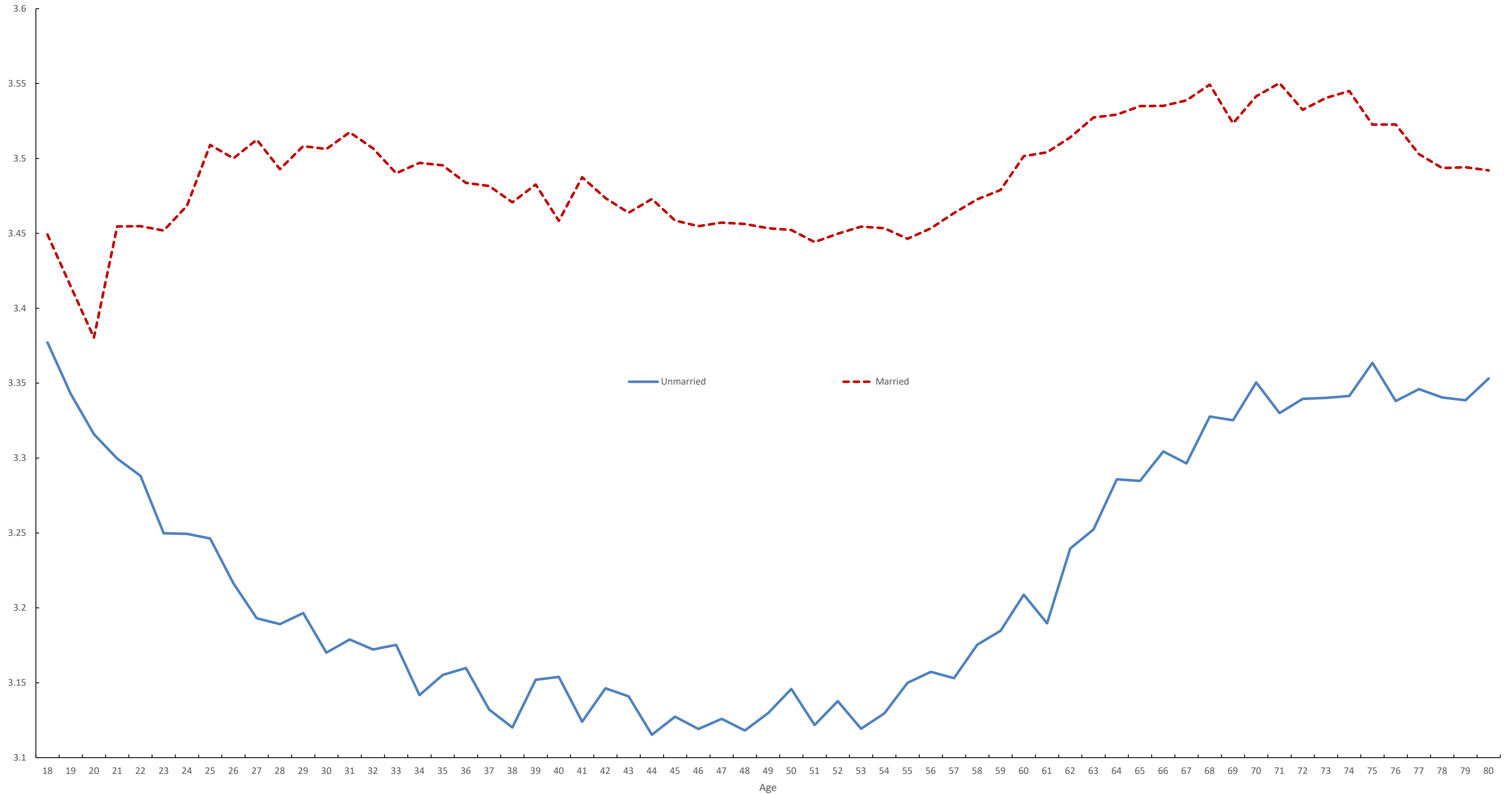


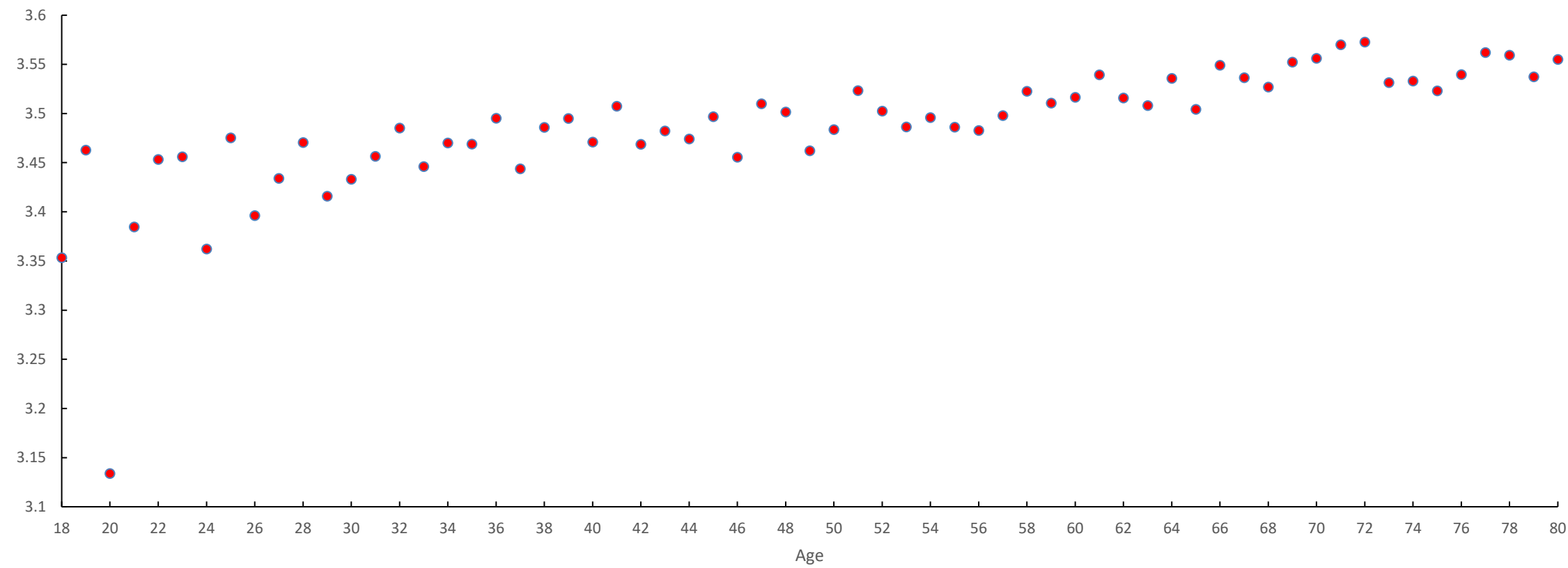
Fig 5. Age profile in GHQ despair UK, UKHLS from Blanchflower, Bryson and Xu.



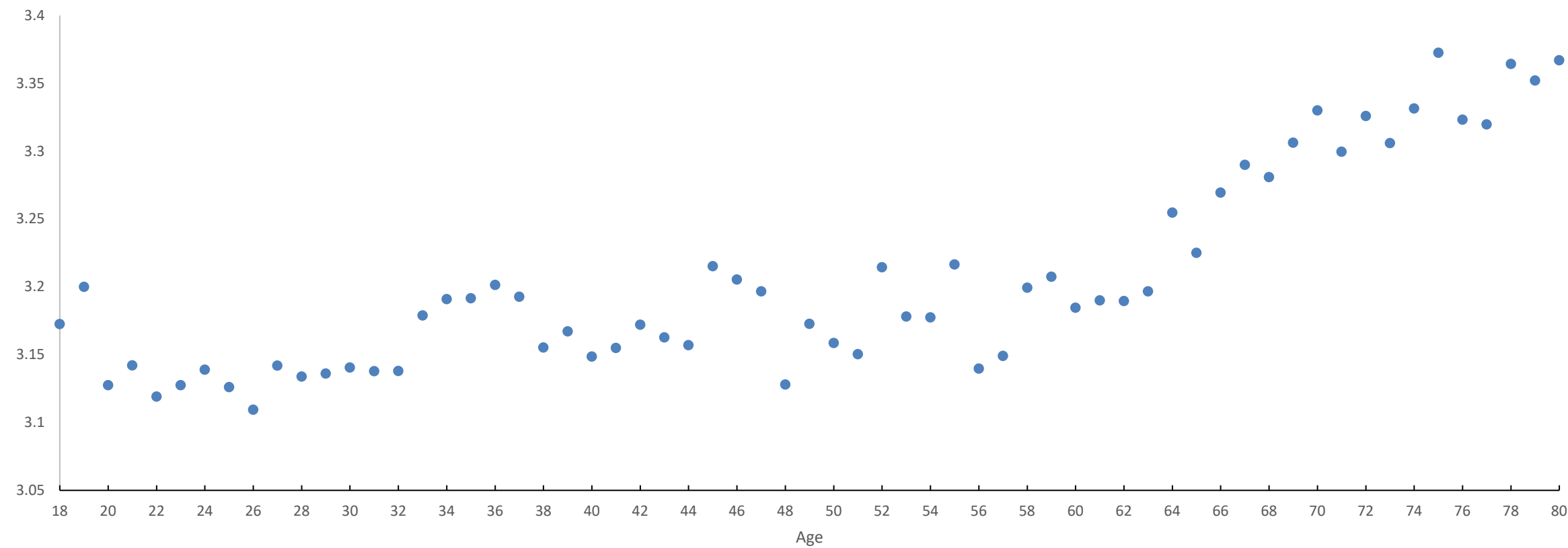
Life satisfaction BRFSS 2005-2010



Life satisfaction Married 2020-2024, BRFSS



Life satisfaction Unmarried, 2020-2024, BRFSS



Jean was right.....

- Jean and I wrote a paper showing the U-shape gone in life satisfaction in six English speaking countries
- Alex Bryson and I have now shown U-shape/hump shapes have gone with papers on Africa [58], Latin America [4], Ex-Soviets [57], UK (With Bell) [59], Middle East and Asia [6], Northern Europe [53], on US College Students (with Sacerdote) [54] and in 167 UN countries [56]
- We primarily estimate well-being and ill-being equations and look at the sign and significance of the age 18-24 variable, with controls for female, year and country.
- We now find the young have the lowest well-being of any age group in 167 countries
- We find evidence in the US it is worse for **women** than men, for the **least educated** and for **whites, workers and Native Americans**.
- We do see evidence of **social desirability bias**. That is young people give different answers when there is an interviewer present.
- Objective evidence is consistent with the self-reports – suicide, hospitalizations. Anti-depressants prescriptions are all up for the young globally.

The countries are Afghanistan; Algeria; Andorra; Angola; Antigua & Barbuda; Argentina; Armenia; Australia; Austria; Azerbaijan; Bahamas; Bahrain; Bangladesh; Barbados; Belarus; Belgium; Belize; Benin; Bhutan; Bolivia; Bosnia & Herzegovina; Botswana; Brazil; Brunei Darussalam; Bulgaria; Burundi; Cabo Verde; Cambodia; Cameroon; Canada; Central African Republic; Chad; Chile; China; Colombia; Comoros; Congo; Costa Rica; Côte d'Ivoire; Croatia; Cuba; Cyprus; Czechia; DR Congo; Denmark; Djibouti; Dominica; Dominican Republic; Ecuador; Egypt; El Salvador; Equatorial Guinea; Estonia; Eswatini; Ethiopia; Fiji; Finland; France; Georgia; Germany; Ghana; Greece; Grenada; Guatemala; Guinea-Bissau; Haiti; Honduras; Hungary; Iceland; India; Indonesia; Iran; Iraq; Ireland; Israel; Italy; Jamaica; Japan; Jordan; Kazakhstan; Kenya; Kiribati; Kuwait; Kyrgyzstan; Latvia; Lebanon; Libya; Liechtenstein; Lithuania; Luxembourg; Madagascar; Malawi; Malaysia; Maldives; Malta; Marshall Islands; Mauritania; Mauritius; Mexico; Monaco; Mongolia; Montenegro; Morocco; Mozambique; Myanmar; Namibia; Nepal; Netherlands; New Zealand; Nicaragua; Niger; Nigeria; North Korea; North Macedonia; Norway; Oman; Pakistan; Panama; Paraguay; Peru; Philippines; Poland; Portugal; Qatar; Republic of Moldova; Romania; Russian ; Rwanda; Saint Kitts & Nevis; Samoa; San Marino; Saudi Arabia; Senegal; Seychelles; Singapore; Slovakia; Slovenia; Solomon Islands; South Africa; South Korea; South Sudan; Spain; Sri Lanka; Sudan; Sweden; Switzerland; Syria; Tajikistan; Tanzania; Thailand; Togo; Trinidad & Tobago; Tunisia; Türkiye; Tuvalu; Uganda; Ukraine; UAE; UK; USA; Uruguay; Uzbekistan; Venezuela; Viet Nam; Yemen; Zambia and Zimbabwe.

SOURCE Global Minds, 2020-2025 n=2 million

Despair by work education and race age<25 (BRFSS, weighted)

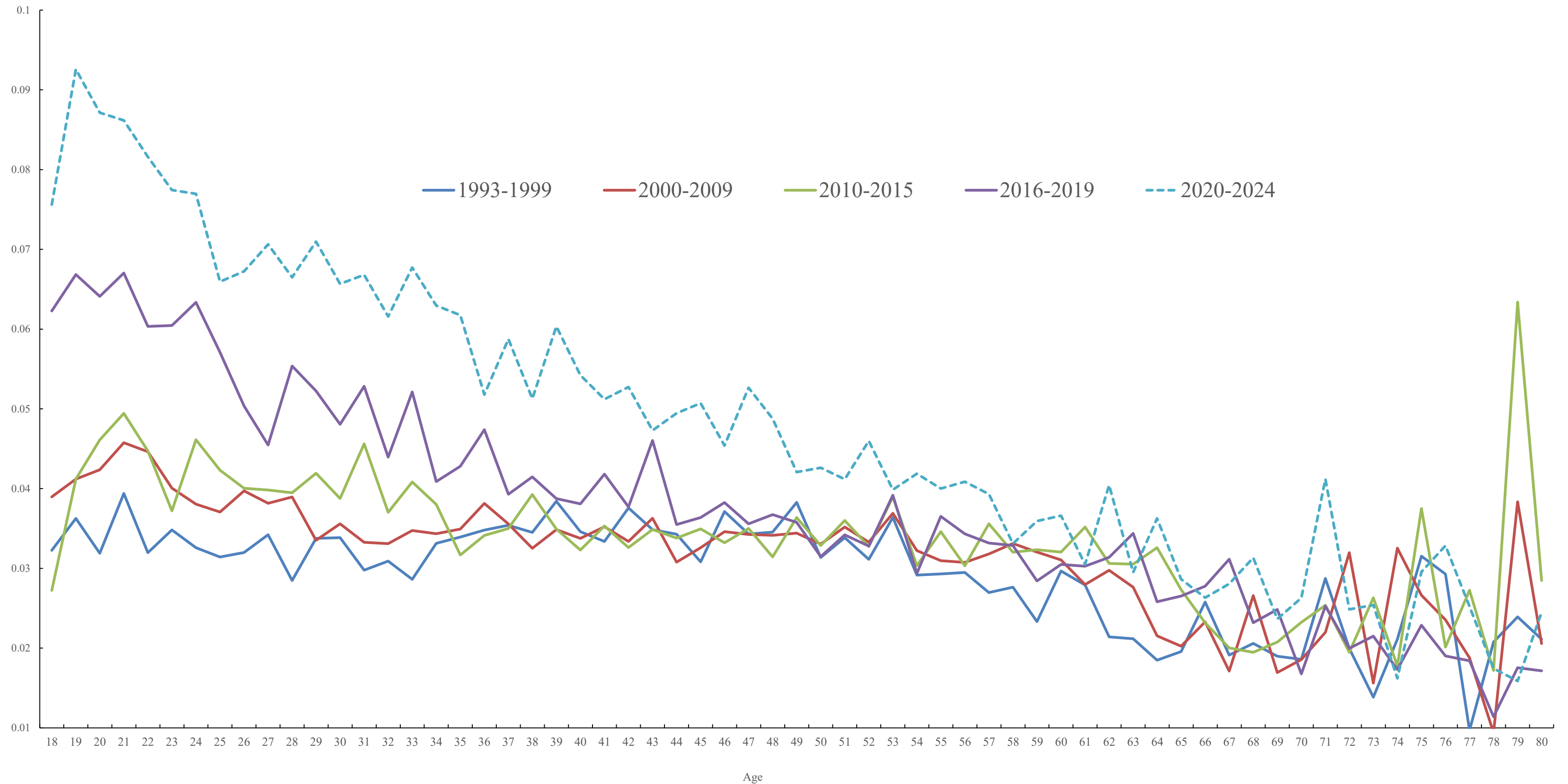
	2012	2024/5
All	4.9	7.0
Females	5.9	8.4
Males	4.0	5.6
Whites	5.0	7.5
Blacks	5.7	6.6
Asians	2.6	4.3
Natives	6.5	12.1
Hispanics	4.9	6.0
Dropouts	7.9	8.9
HS graduates	5.1	7.4
Some college	4.3	7.0
>=4 yrs college	2.5	3.9
Workers	4.3	7.5
Male workers	3.1	6.0
Female workers	4.3	9.5
Non-workers	5.4	6.4

Despair Equations for US from BRFSS

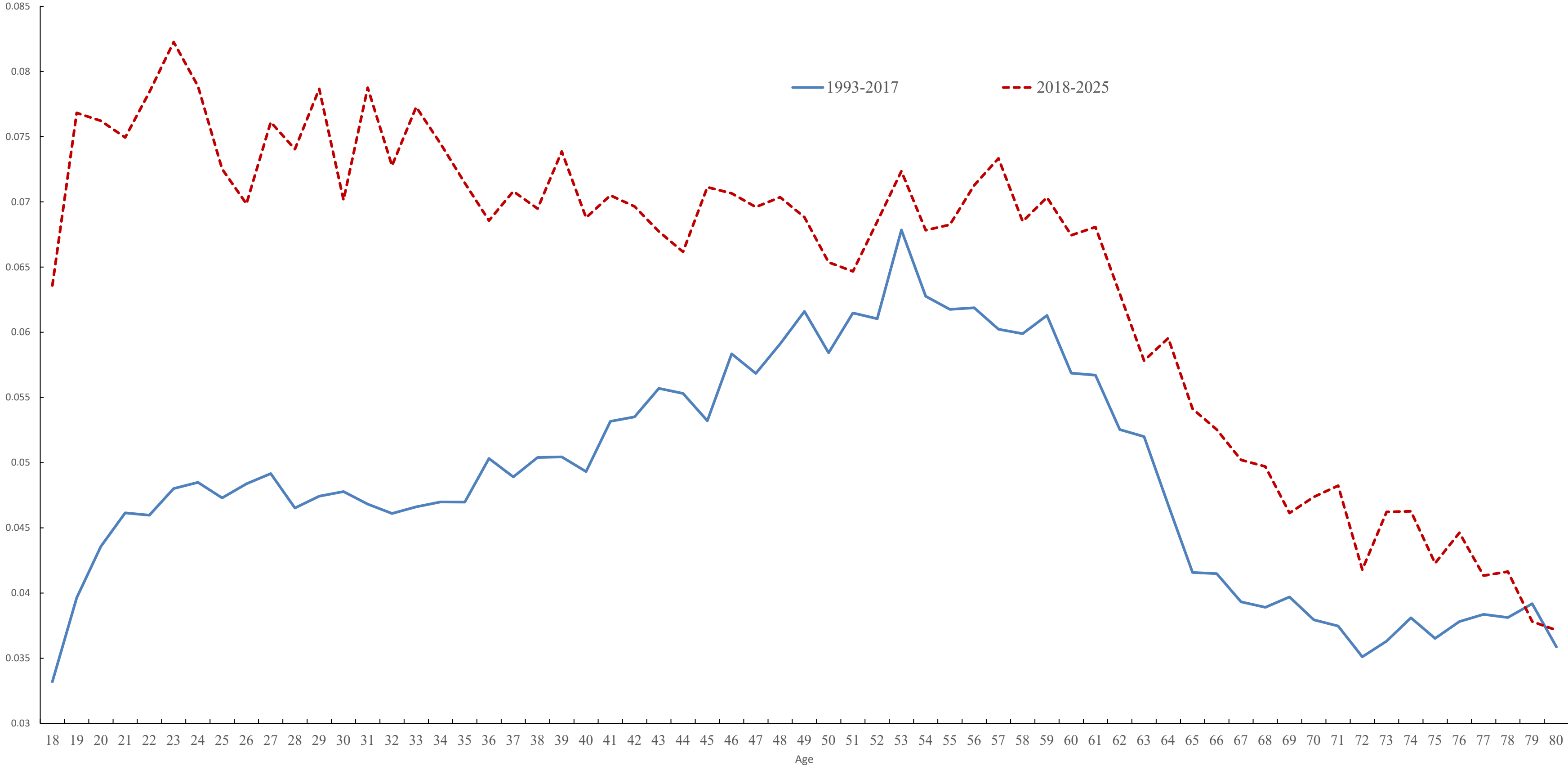
	1993-1999	2000-2009	2010-2015	2016-2019	2020-2024
Age 25-34	+.0031 (3.47)	-.0001 (0.20)	+.0068 (8.99)	+.0009 (1.01)	-.0023 (2.49)
Age 35-44	+.0106 (12.22)	+.0057 (8.76)	+.0091 (12.62)	+.0010 (1.18)	-.0049 (5.61)
Age 45-54	+.0164 (18.02)	+.0165 (25.87)	+.0209 (30.17)	+.0056 (6.67)	-.0091 (10.49)
Age 55-64	+.0110 (11.24)	+.0098 (15.29)	+.0156 (22.97)	+.0013 (1.57)	-.0127 (15.12)
Age 65-74	-.0002 (0.28)	-.0107 (16.03)	-.0084 (12.21)	-.0212 (26.08)	-.0336 (40.43)
Age 75-80	+.0027 (2.53)	-.0150 (21.74)	-.0167 (23.51)	-.0322 (37.84)	-.0437 (50.47)
Female	.0153 (33.95)	.0162 (61.02)	.0141 (51.00)	.0154 (44.11)	.0185 (51.09)
N	873,937	2,978,477	2,758,188	1,765,927	1,704,398

T-statistics in parentheses – also includes state and year dummies

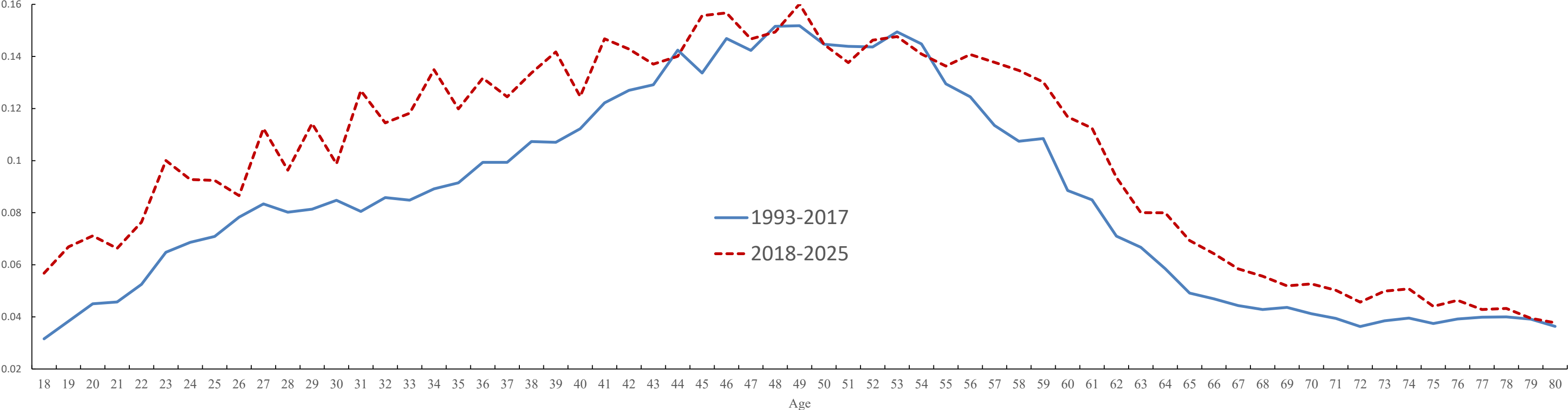
US Despair for Workers by Age



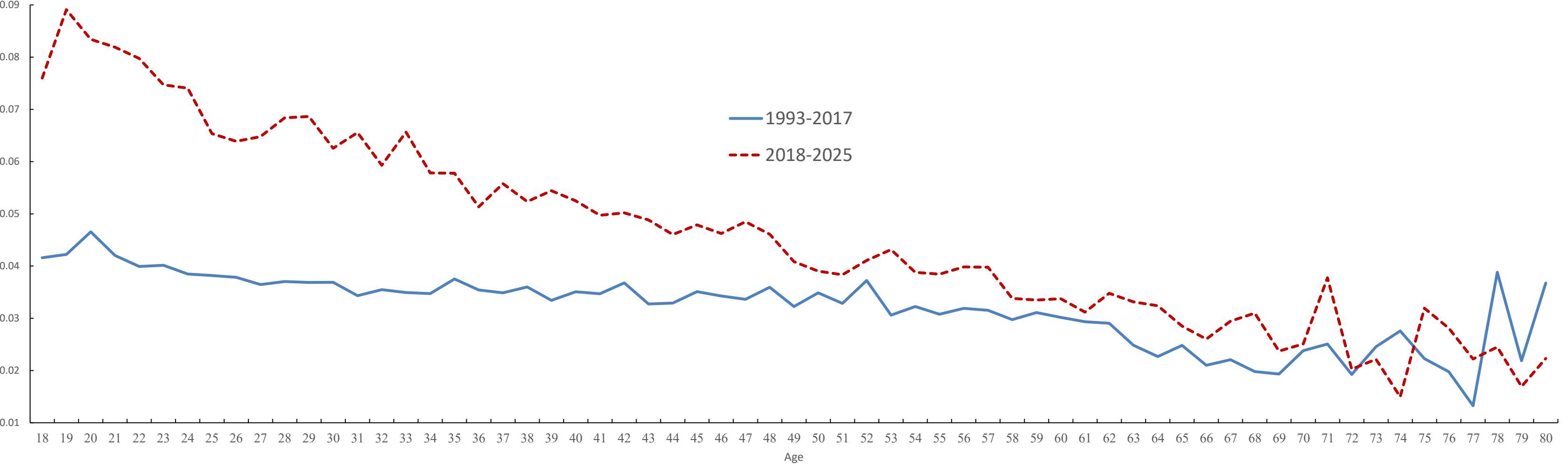
USA Despair - all



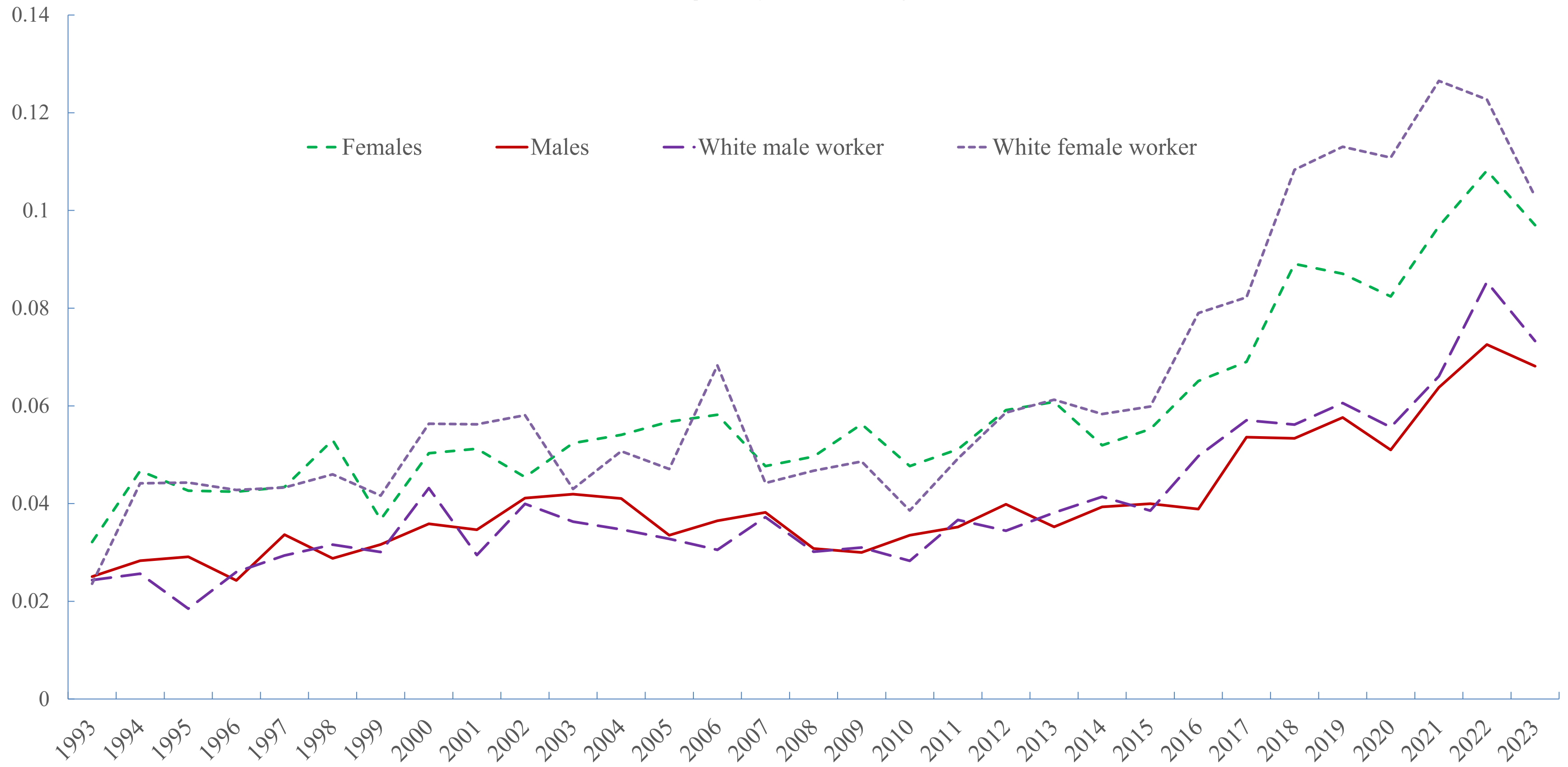
USA Despair Non-workers



USA Despair Workers

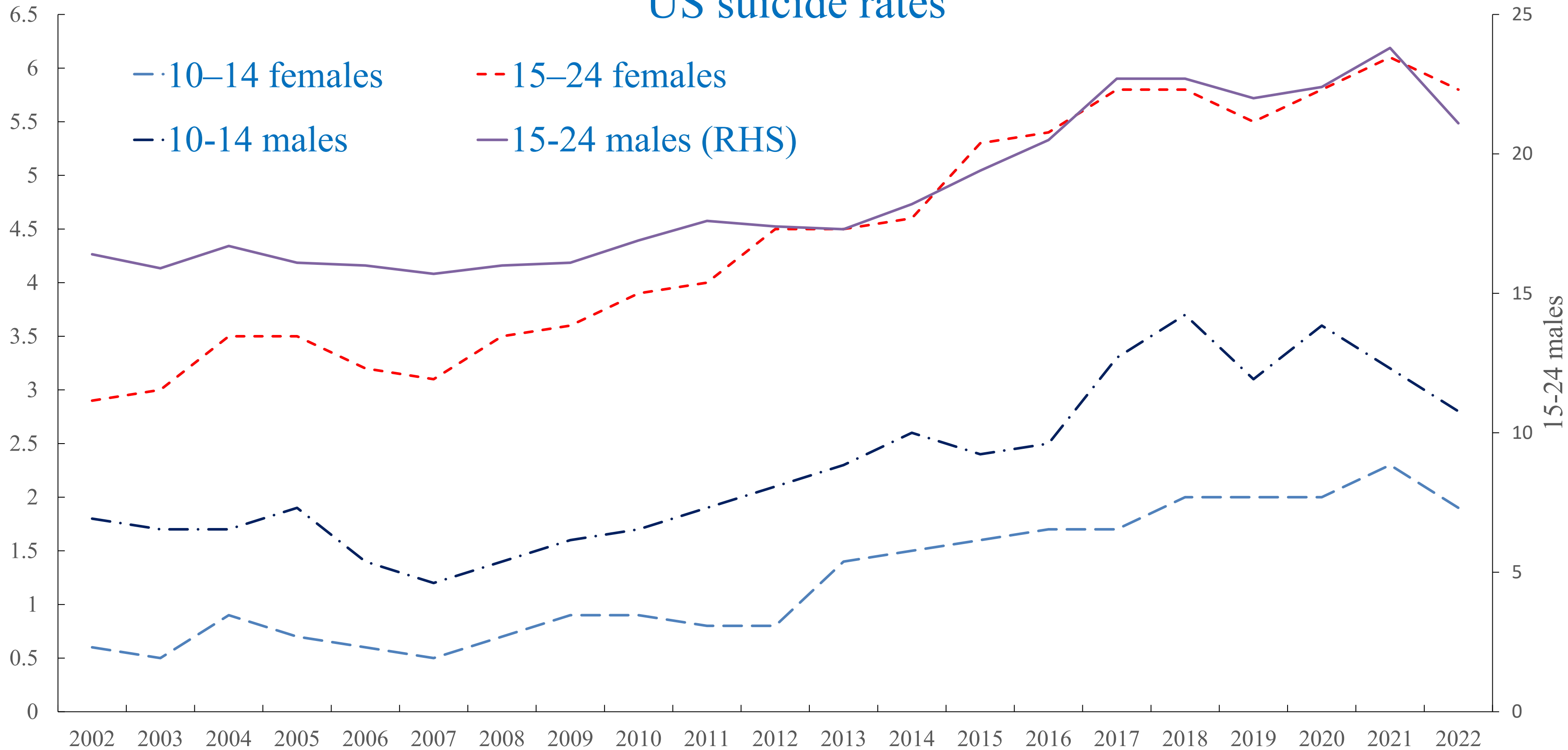


Youth Despair US by Gender for those Age <25



Global Flourishing Survey — coefficient on age 18–24 dummy			
	14 countries with both		8 countries with only CAWI
	Telephone CATI	Internet	Internet
1. Depressed	-	+	+
2. Worry	-	+	+
3. Anxious	-	+	+
4. No interest	-	+	+
5. Cantril	+	-	-
6. Satisfied with life	+	-	-
7. Happiness	+	-	-
8. Satisfied with relationships	+	-	-
9. Worthwhile	+	-	-
10. Life in 5 years	+	-	-
11. Never feel lonely	+	-	-
12. Mental health rating	+	-	-
13. Physical health rating	+	+	+
14. No bodily pain	+	-	+
15. Approve of national govt	+	+	+
16. # cigarettes/day	-	-	-
17. # drinks/day	-	-	-

US suicide rates



European Suicide Rates ages 15-19 /100000

TIME	2015	2022	Change
Austria	6.7	7.9	+1.2
Belgium	5.1	5.4	+0.4
Bulgaria	3.2	3.7	+0.5
Croatia	5.0	7.4	+2.4
Cyprus	1.9	2.1	+0.2
Czechia	4.6	7.4	+2.8
Denmark	1.4	4.1	+2.6
Finland	5.6	7.9	+2.3
France	3.3	3.8	+0.6
Greece	1.3	1.7	+0.4
Hungary	5.3	4.5	-0.8
Ireland	6.7	6.8	+0.1
Italy	2.5	2.7	+0.3
Luxembourg	3.0	5.9	+2.9
Netherlands	4.1	6.4	+2.3
Portugal	1.6	3.4	+1.8
Slovakia	2.4	3.4	+1.0
Slovenia	5.3	6.2	+0.9
Spain	2.6	2.9	+0.3
Norway	4.6	6.5	+1.9
Türkiye	2.3	6.7	+4.4

% US high school students saying they feel ‘sad or hopeless every day’ - YRBS

	Females	Males
1999	36	21
2001	35	22
2003	35	22
2005	37	20
2007	36	21
2009	34	19
2011	36	21
2013	39	21
2015	40	20
2017	41	21
2019	46	27
2021	56	29
2023	53	28

Then the question is why – no myth?

- The phenomenon to be explained a) started in 2015 b) applies disproportionately to the young in general and females in particular c) is global d) is **getting worse**.
- Obvious candidates include access to the internet/broadband and smartphones as argued by John Haidt (*The Anxious Generation*, 2024) and Jean Twenge (*Generations*, 2025).
- Maurizio Pugno (*Academia Mental Health and Well-being*, 2025) has shown that the effect is causal. The random spread of broadband by area preceded declining youth well-being. Long duration on phone take time from beneficial activities.
- Bryson and I do find evidence though in Southern Europe that declining youth unemployment rates – which were >50% in 2015 and have now declined sharply - have raised youth well-being in Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece so youth *better* off.
- Bryson and I have also shown the collapse in the U-shape in US is primarily among young workers. Labor markets matter. Some evidence of effects of Great Recession

Conclusion

- There is global evidence on the worsening in the mental health of the young.
- The hump-shape in unhappiness and the U-shape in happiness has gone. Now well-being rises in age.
- The evidence is strongest in internet-based surveys which use self-reports such as Global Minds and the EU Loneliness Survey. It is less apparent from interviewer - based surveys such as the Gallup World Poll.
- In the Global Flourishing Study where fourteen countries used both CATI and CAWI the young were happier than other age groups in the former samples and less happy in the latter relating to mental health and happiness. The answers were consistent regarding physical health and pain. We see evidence of social desirability bias.
- We reported evidence that the young were least happy in 167 UN countries.
- The main culprits it seems are access to the internet and smartphones. Plus we do see some evidence for labor market effects. Lack of social connections is an issue
- The question is what to do about it?

A Global Turning Point: Why Youth Well-Being Is In Crisis — and What We Must Do About It

A Symposium Co-hosted by Dartmouth and the United Nations Development Programme

Sunday, October 26 – Tuesday, October 28, 2025

Dartmouth and the United Nations Development Programme are proud to host a three-day symposium bringing together leading experts, senior policymakers, and youth advocates to examine the global decline in youth well-being and its implications for development in an era of rapid societal transformation.

The symposium will be held in person at Dartmouth in Hanover, N.H., with a livestream enabling virtual participation worldwide. Through engaging discussions, workshops, panels, and immersive experiences, we will address this urgent crisis and explore innovative strategies to foster youth well-being globally.

Speakers – Danny Blanchflower, Jon Haidt, Jean Twenge, Bob Putnam, John M Barry, Andrew Clark, Maurizio Pugno, Doug Staiger, Tom Kane, and 7 US Surgeons General
<https://home.dartmouth.edu/events/global-turning-point-why-youth-well-being-crisis-and-what-we-must-do-about-it>

62 Blanchflower Well-being Papers

1. 'The Global Decline in the Mental Health of the Young,' NBER Reporter, April 2025
2. With Alex Bryson – on Jon Haidt's After Babel blog: 'The global loss of the U-shaped curve of happiness', 2024.

1) Publications

3. With Alex Bryson and Xiaowei Xu (2025), 'The declining mental health of the young and the global disappearance of the hump shape in age in unhappiness', *Plos One*.
4. With Alex Bryson (2025a), 'The mental health of the young in Latin America', *Social Indicators Research*,
5. With Alex Bryson (2025b), 'The consequences of abuse, neglect and cyber-bullying on the wellbeing of the young,' *Plos One*, 2025.
6. With Alex Bryson (2025c), 'The mental health of the young in Asia and the Middle East: The Importance of Self-Reports,' *Quality and Quantity*.
7. With Alex Bryson (2024a), 'Were COVID and the Great Recession well-being reducing?' *Plos One*.
8. With Alex Bryson (2024b), 'The adult consequences on wellbeing of abuse and neglect in childhood,' *International Journal of Wellbeing*.
9. With Alex Bryson (2024c), 'The gender well-being gap,' *Social Indicators Research*
10. With Alex Bryson (2024d), 'The adult consequences of being bullied in childhood,' *Social Science and Medicine*.
11. With Alex Bryson (2023a), 'Wellbeing rankings,' *Social Indicators Research*.
12. With Alex Bryson (2023b), 'Long Covid in the United States,' *Plos One*.
13. With Alex Bryson (2023c) 'Seasonality and the female happiness paradox', *Quality and Quantity*.
14. With Carol Graham and Alan Piper (2023), 'Happiness and age – resolving the debate', *National Institute Economic Review*.
15. Blanchflower (2021), 'A Response To 'Another attempt to move beyond the cross-sectional U shape of happiness: a reply' By Galambos, Krahn, Johnson and Lachman', *International Journal of Psychiatry*.
16. With Alex Bryson (2022a) 'Chronic pain: Evidence from the national child development study', *Plos One*.

17. With Alex Bryson (2022b), 'The female happiness paradox,' *Journal of Population Economics*.
18. with Alex Bryson (2022c), 'Taking the pulse of nations: a biometric measure of well-being', *Economics and Human Biology*, 2022.
19. With Alex Bryson (2022d), 'Covid and Mental Health in America', *Plos One*.
20. With Alex Bryson (2022e), 'Further decoding the mystery of American pain: The importance of work', *Plos One*.
21. With Ben Artz and Alex Bryson, (2022), 'Unions increase job satisfaction in the United States,' *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*.
22. With Alex Bryson and Colin Green, 'Trade unions and the well-being of workers', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 60(2), pp255-277, June 2022.
23. With Alex Bryson and Alan Piper (2022), 'Is pain associated with subsequent job loss? A panel study for Germany', *Kyklos*.
24. With Alan Piper (2022), 'There is a midlife low in well-being in Germany,' *Economics Letters*.
25. With Donn Feir (2022), 'Native Americans' experience of chronic distress in the USA', *Journal of Population Economics*.
26. With Carol Graham (2022), 'The U-shape of happiness: A response', *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 2020.
27. With Gondek, Lacey and Patalay (2021), 'How is the distribution of psychological distress changing over time? Who is driving these changes? Analysis of the 1958 and 1970 British birth cohorts,' *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*.
28. With Carol Graham (2021), 'The mid-life dip in well-being: a critique,' *Social Indicators Research*.
29. With Alex Bryson (2021), 'Unemployment and sleep: evidence from the United States and Europe', *Economics and Human Biology*.
30. With David Bell (2021), 'The U-shape of happiness in Scotland', *Scottish Journal of Political Economy*.
31. Blanchflower (2021), 'Is happiness U-shaped everywhere? Age and subjective well-being in 145 countries', *Journal of Population Economics*.
32. With Andrew Clark (2021), 'Children, unhappiness and family finances', *Journal of Population Economics*.

33. With Andrew Oswald (2020), 'Trends in extreme distress in the United States, 1993–2019', *American Journal of Public Health*.
34. Blanchflower (2020a), 'Unhappiness and age', *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*.
35. Blanchflower (2020b), 'Experienced life cycle satisfaction in Europe: A comment,' *Review of Behavioural Economics*.
36. With David Bell (2019) 'The well-being of the overemployed and the underemployed and the rise in depression in the UK', *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*
37. With Andrew Oswald (2019), 'Unhappiness and pain in Modern America: a review essay, and further evidence, on Carol Graham's Happiness for All?', the *Journal of Economic Literature*.
38. With Andrew Oswald (2016), 'Antidepressants and age: a new form of evidence for u-shaped well-being through life', *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* 127.
39. With David Bell, Alberto Montagnoli, and Mirko Moro (2014), 'The happiness tradeoff between unemployment and inflation', *Journal of Money Credit and Banking*.
40. With Andrew Oswald and Sara Stewart-Brown (2013), 'Is psychological well-being linked to the consumption of fruit and vegetables?', *Social Indicators Research*.
41. With Andrew Oswald (2011), 'International happiness: a new view on the measure of performance', *Academy of Management Perspectives*.
42. With Andrew Oswald (2009), 'The U-shape without controls: a response to Glenn ', *Social Science and Medicine*.
43. With Andrew Oswald (2008a), 'Is well-being U-shaped over the life cycle?', *Social Science & Medicine*, 2008
44. With Andrew Oswald (2008b), 'Hypertension and happiness across nations', *Journal of Health Economics*, 2008
45. With David Bell (2007), 'The Scots may be brave, but they are neither healthy nor happy', *Scottish Journal of Political Economy*.
46. With Andrew Oswald (2006), 'On Leigh-Wolfers and wellbeing in Australia,' *The Australian Economic Review*.
47. With Andrew Oswald (2005), 'Happiness and the Human Development Index: The Paradox of Australia', *The Australian Economic Review*

48. With Andrew Oswald (2004a), 'Money, sex and happiness: an empirical study,' *Scandinavian Journal of Economics*, 2004,
49. With Andrew Oswald (2004b), 'Well-being over time in Britain and the USA,' *Journal of Public Economics*.
50. Blanchflower (2001), 'Unemployment, well-being and wage curves in Eastern and Central Europe', *Journal of Japanese and International Economies*.

2) Recent Working Papers

51. With Alex Bryson (2025d), 'Not flourishing', September, working paper.
52. With Alex Bryson (2025e), 'Rising young worker despair in the United States', NBER Working Paper #34071, July, resubmitted to *SSM Journal of Population Health*.
53. With Alex Bryson (2025f), 'Life satisfaction in Western Europe and the gradual vanishing of the U-shape in age', NBER WP #33950, resubmitted to *Academia Mental Health and Wellbeing*.
54. With Bruce Sacerdote (2025), 'US college students' well-being', NBER WP #33742, resubmitted to *European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education*.
55. With Jean Twenge (2025) 'Declining life satisfaction and happiness among young adults in six English-speaking countries,' NBER WP #33490, submitted to *Frontiers in Psychiatry*.
56. Blanchflower (2025), 'Declining youth well-being in 167 UN countries. does survey mode, or question matter?', resubmitted to *SSM Mental Health*.
57. With Alex Bryson (2024e), 'The mental health of the young in ex-Soviet states', NBER Working Paper #33356, January 2025, resubmitted to *Review of Development Economics*.
58. With Alex Bryson (2024f), 'The mental health of the young in Africa' NBER Working Paper #33280, 2024, resubmitted to *Journal of African Economics*.
59. With Alex Bryson and David N.F. Bell (2024), 'The declining mental health of the young in the UK', NBER Working Paper #32879. resubmitted to *Scottish Journal o Political Economy*.
60. With Alex Bryson, Anthony Lepinteur and Alan Piper (2024), 'Further evidence on the global decline in the mental health of the young,' NBER Working Paper #32500.
61. With Andrew Oswald (2019), 'Do modern humans suffer a psychological-low in midlife? Two approaches (with and without controls) in seven data sets', in *The Economics of Happiness: How the Easterlin Paradox Transformed Our Understanding of Well-Being and Progress*, edited by M. Rojas, Springer.
62. With Carol Graham, 'Happiness and Aging in the United States', in *Handbook of the Economics of Ageing*, edited by David Bloom, Alfonso Sousa-Poza and Uwe Sunde, Routledge.