

**Deciphering the Midlife Crisis
Consumer Behaviour.**

Human vs. AI



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Permacrisis, Technology &... Age



This material tells a double story

HOW



Human vs AI

An experiment, a head-to-head comparison of a team of professionals and an AI centered team, aiming to explore the potential of the generative model in understanding complex human phenomena like the 'midlife crisis and its effect on consumption'.

As we delve into this uncharted territory, we seek not only to compare the efficiency and effectiveness of human and AI researchers, but also to uncover new unthought of insights about our topic.

WHAT



Midlife crisis

STRENGTHENS our findings on one side and **COMPLIMENTS** them on the other.



We chose a topic that is profoundly emotional and existential just so that we test the AI in its ability to emulate emotions.
We have synthesized a motivational speaker discourse in a research report.



Romanian Population

Main target:
38-55 year old, urban

Secondary target:
18-37 year old, urban
(for crisis levels comparison)

National representativity by gender



Data Collection Method

Online interviews



Human Team

Main:
1000 respondents

Secondary:
300 respondents



AI Team

Main:
710 respondents

Secondary:
300 respondents



Collection Period

September 2023

Main Questionnaire Length



Main:
~14 min

Main:
~8 min

Questionnaire for both surveys followed a similar agreed structure:

Diagnosis phase: following a shared desk research materials (one read by the human team, one 'read' by the AI), measuring the framing into low to high level of unrest, sources of anxiety and the solutions they found to cope

Impact on consumption: perspective on items like expenditure behavior, selective medical interventions, financial investments

We 'diagnosed' the symptoms of an existential turmoil, popularly described as **a midlife crisis**, as it is believed to be a turning point that people go through around the age of 38 – 55 y.o.



Crisis

42 +
score

May experience disruption in personal and professional relationships, financial instability, and a loss of self-identity or purpose.

Mild distress

30-41
score

Much more likely to be flexible in taking a degree of risks – changing the field of work completely, focusing on daily schedule and time off, rather than big life accomplishments

**Low-level /
no distress**

12-29
score

More of a precursor to more severe crises if underlying issues are not addressed.

12%

Associated with depression, significant purpose of job dissatisfaction and time gone, even questioning life value.

55%

Experiencing anxiety, stress, and a sense of dissatisfaction, but less about long term distress.

33%

Aware of the ups and downs, recognizing each moment as is, without obsessing

Based on the Developmental Crisis Questionnaire (DCQ-12) measurement developed by Nikolay Petrov, Oliver C. Robinson, Jeffrey J. Arnett.

The DCQ-12 comprises questions that encapsulate various aspects of a developmental crisis including one's awareness of time, re-evaluation of one's life and the subsequent emotional response. The goal is to generate insights into how individuals navigate through critical developmental transitions, thereby providing a framework to understand and address midlife crisis.

How would you say you've been feeling lately?

HUMAN Team

N = 1000



Emotional status

Scale 1:



Living Full Life

I feel like life has passed me by, and I won't have time to do everything I wanted



5 I lived my life to the fullest and did everything I wanted to

Self-Satisfaction

I feel like I don't have much reason to be happy with myself



Overall, I'm happy with myself

Depression

I feel depressed almost all the time



I never feel depressed

Qualities or Usefulness

I often feel useless



I am sure that I have a lot of qualities

Boredom

I feel bored almost all the time



I hardly ever get bored

Concentration

It is very difficult for me to concentrate on what I am doing



I have no problems concentrating

Bottom 2 Boxes

Top 2 Boxes

- Crisis
- Mild distress
- Low level / no distress

It's about regrets - In the dimension of living a full life, the negative sentiment is remarkably high in the hard crisis bracket (55%) compared to the lowest crisis bracket (12%). This stark contrast underscores the existential challenges that lead to a decaying self satisfaction and feelings of depression.

The whole deck of questions that 'diagnose' the emotional unrest that are signs of midlife crisis

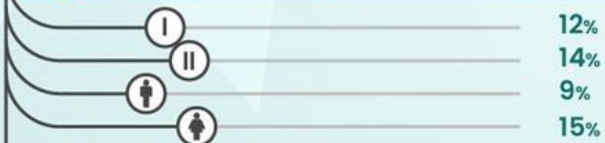
It's very interesting to see that the younger target is also significantly impacted, potentially on the road to emotional maturity, having gone through the restrictive pandemic at an age of self discovery and experimenting



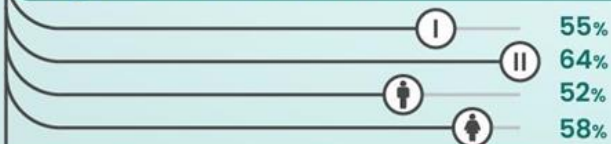
HUMAN Team

Main N = 1000 | Secondary N=300

CRISIS (42+ score)



Mild distress (30-41 score)



Low-level / no distress (12-29 score)



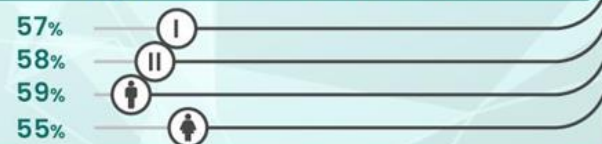
AI Team

Main N = 710 | Secondary N=300

CRISIS (46+ score)



Mild distress (31-45 score)

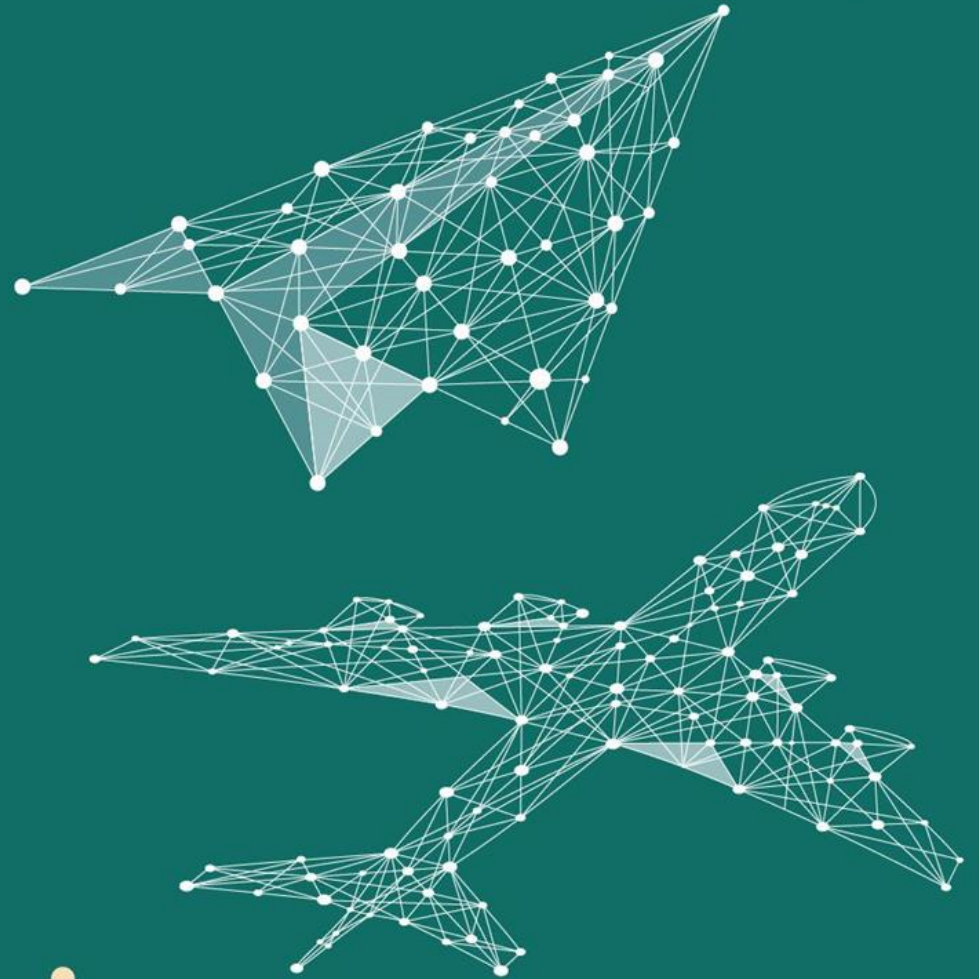


Low-level / no distress (15-30 score)



The real surprise is that significantly more women than men are affected by the **Midlife Crisis**. In popular perception, the crisis is associated mainly with men, when in fact they are more laid back. Probably because the small minority that displays outlandish behaviors and captures the public imagination is made mostly of men. The ladies just grit their teeth and get through the crisis with much less fanfare and without acting in extreme ways.

Don't obsess.
Reassess.



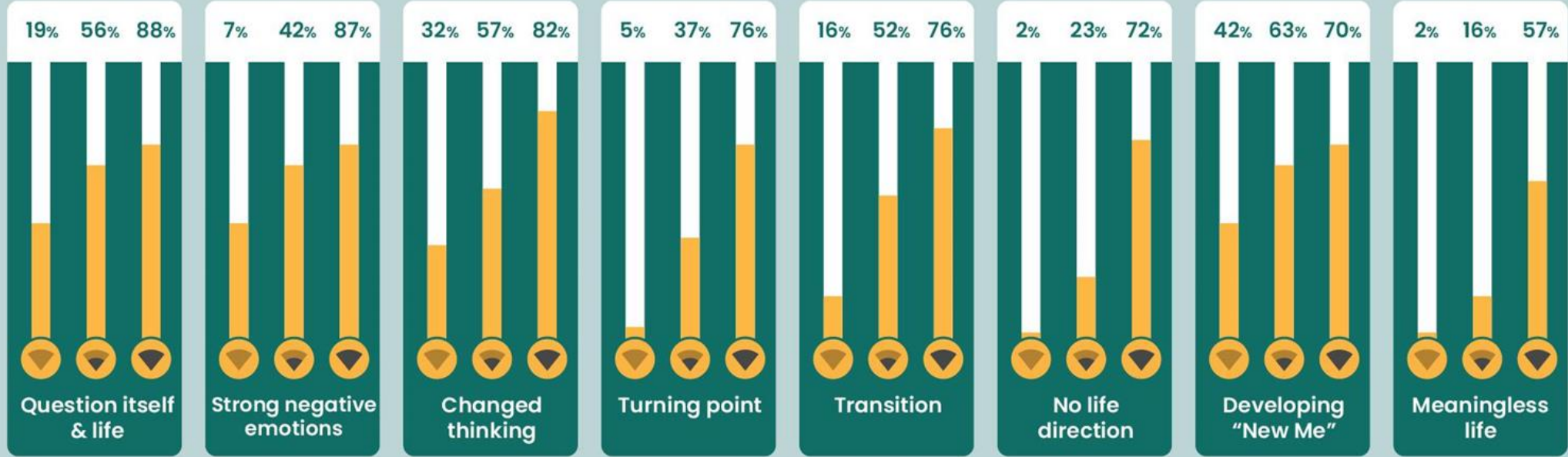
What is the emotional unrest about - obsessing over expectations vs achievements



Low-level or
no distress

Mild
distress

Crisis



About introspection and existential questioning, with a whopping 88% either partially or strongly agreeing to questioning their lives more than usual. In the middle crisis bracket, this percentage is still substantial at 56%, indicating a trend of internal questioning and reevaluation during times of perceived crisis.

We can notice that lower level crisis segments have high propensity towards 'Developing a new me' and changed thinking items (mild - 63% and low - 42%), which seems to be the key to keeping a stronghold on the state of feeling.

On the other side, while on the lower rank for HLC (High Level Crisis), the feelings of **aimlessness or loss of life direction**, especially in the hard crisis bracket where 72% of individuals partially or strongly agree to feeling like their life has lost direction.



For the LD (Low-Level Distress) segment, having a flexible mindset regarding themselves and the way they look at life seems to be a valuable piece of advice for a stable state of mind.



42%

I feel like I may be in the process of leaving the “old me” behind and am developing a “new me”.



36%

I have noticed that the way I have thought about my life has changed.



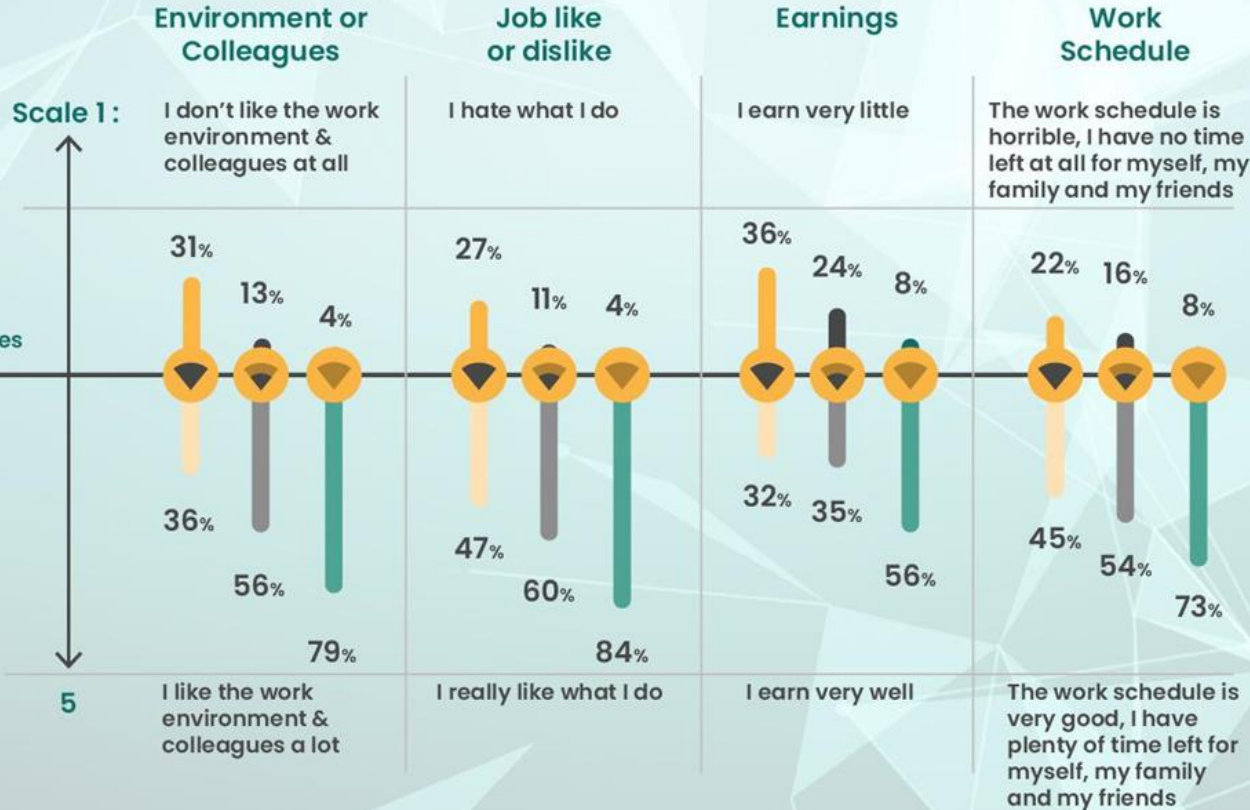
**Spend money on
what matters.**

**Not items to impress people, but
those that bring people around!**



Job enjoyment is highly impacted by crisis levels:
There is a stark contrast in job enjoyment across the crisis levels

What would you say about how things are going at work?



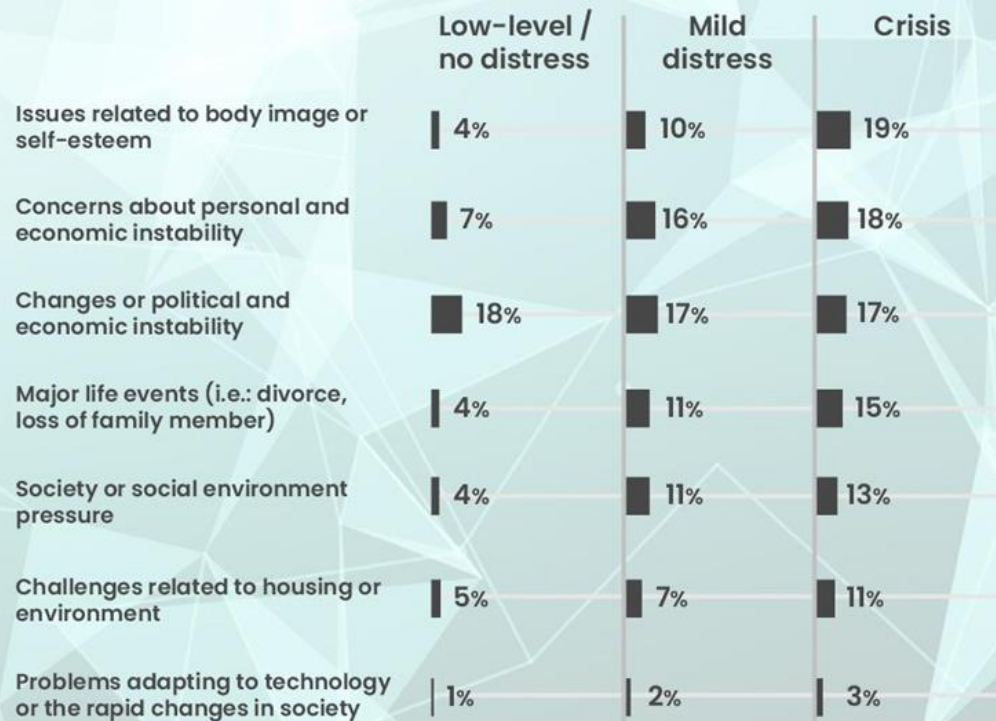
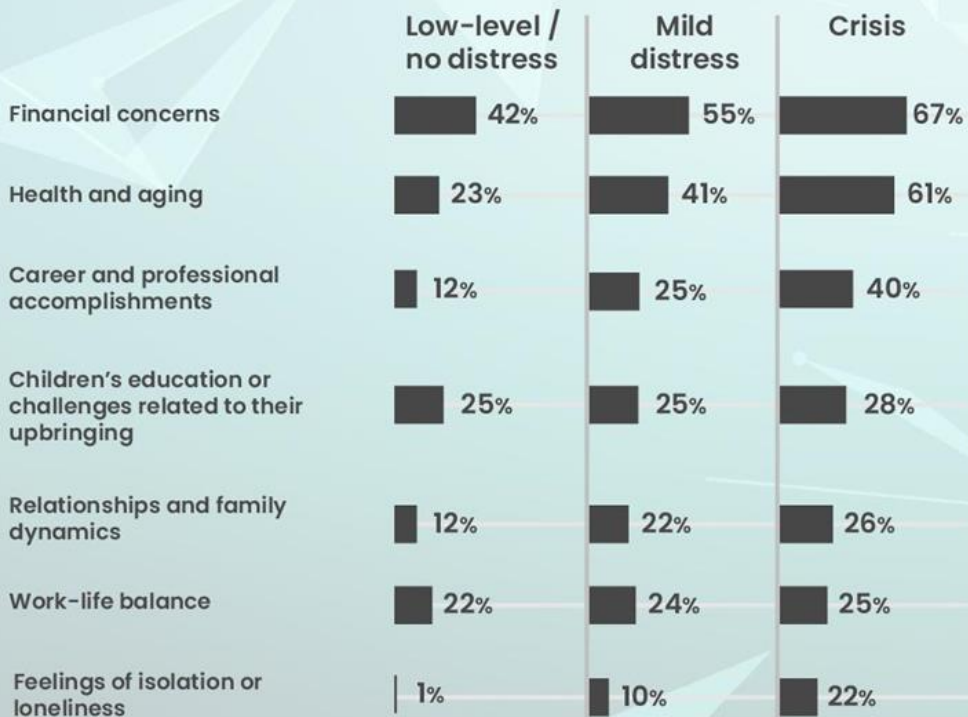
Work is a big factor in the level of emotional turmoil, especially through level of earnings, a sign that financial pressure has taken its toll on the individuals. The environment and level of professional relationships also have a significant impact.

1. Earnings Dissatisfaction Drops (crisis 36% > low 8%)
2. Work Enjoyment Negativity Lessens (crisis 27% > low 4%)
3. Schedule Discontent Decreases (crisis 22% > low 8%)
4. Work Environment Negativity Reduces (crisis 31% > low 4%)
5. Positive Perception growth (Earnings, work, schedule, environment) from hard to lowest Crisis levels.



The data reveals a high correlation between financial concerns and experiencing a hard crisis, with 67% of individuals in the hard crisis category indicating financial stress, significantly higher compared to 42% in the lowest crisis category. This underscores the profound impact financial stability can have on individuals' emotional well-being during midlife.

Health and aging emerge as substantial stressors across all crisis levels, albeit more pronounced in the hard crisis category (61%). The concern over health and the inevitability of aging may trigger deeper existential reflections, contributing to the intensity of the crisis experienced, and highlighting the need for effective coping mechanisms to navigate through such life transitions.



After a 75 years longitudinal study, Harvard came to the conclusion that...

The key to a happy life is **SOCIAL FITNESS**. We tend to think that once we establish friendships and intimate relationships, they will take care of themselves. But our social life is a living system, and it needs exercise.

Without particularly looking for it, we came with same conclusions, and found some key findings that also give some suggestions as to how to keep away from excessive emotional turmoil





HUMAN Team

Bottom 2 Boxes

Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied

Top 2 Boxes

The higher the existential distress someone is under, the higher the probability of that body image suffers.

Scale 1: Very dissatisfied

2: Somewhat dissatisfied

3: Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied

4: Somewhat satisfied

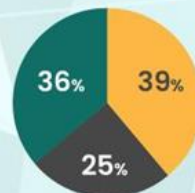
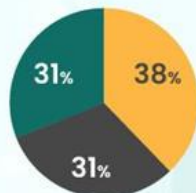
5: Very satisfied

N= 1000 Crisis=119 Mild= 549 Low=332

Are you happy with the way you look?

What about your health?

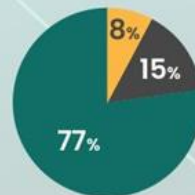
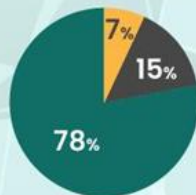
Crisis



Mild distress



Low level or no distress



Planned looks & health related changes

Are you planning to ...

Crisis

Mild distress

Low-level or no distress

HUMAN Team



N= 1000 Crisis=119 Mild= 549 Low=332



Dental care



Alcohol consumption decrease



Diet



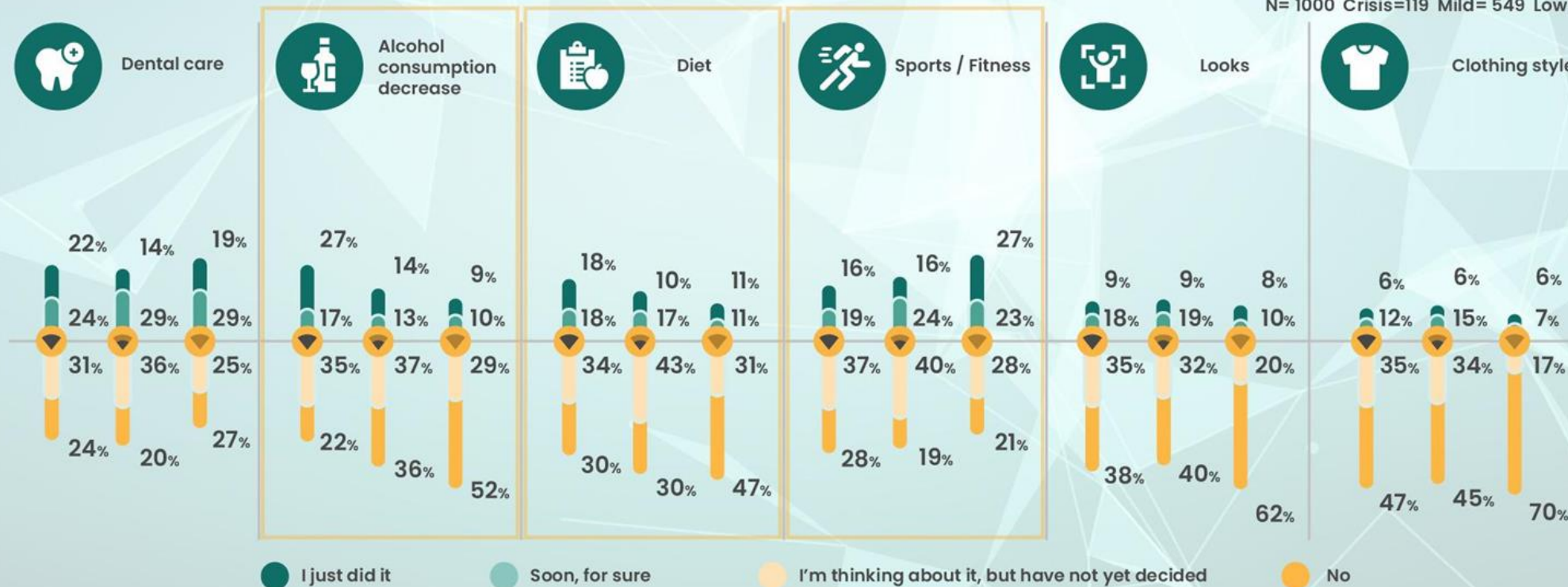
Sports / Fitness



Looks



Clothing style



As for planned lifestyle changes, compared with those less distressed, middle-aged people in crisis favor less physical labor-intensive changes (decrease alcohol intake, changing the diet) over putting the body to work more. They could be thinking first 2 are the low-hanging fruits; maybe they forgot that mental discipline is the crucial factor in such habit changes, not the physical effort involved.

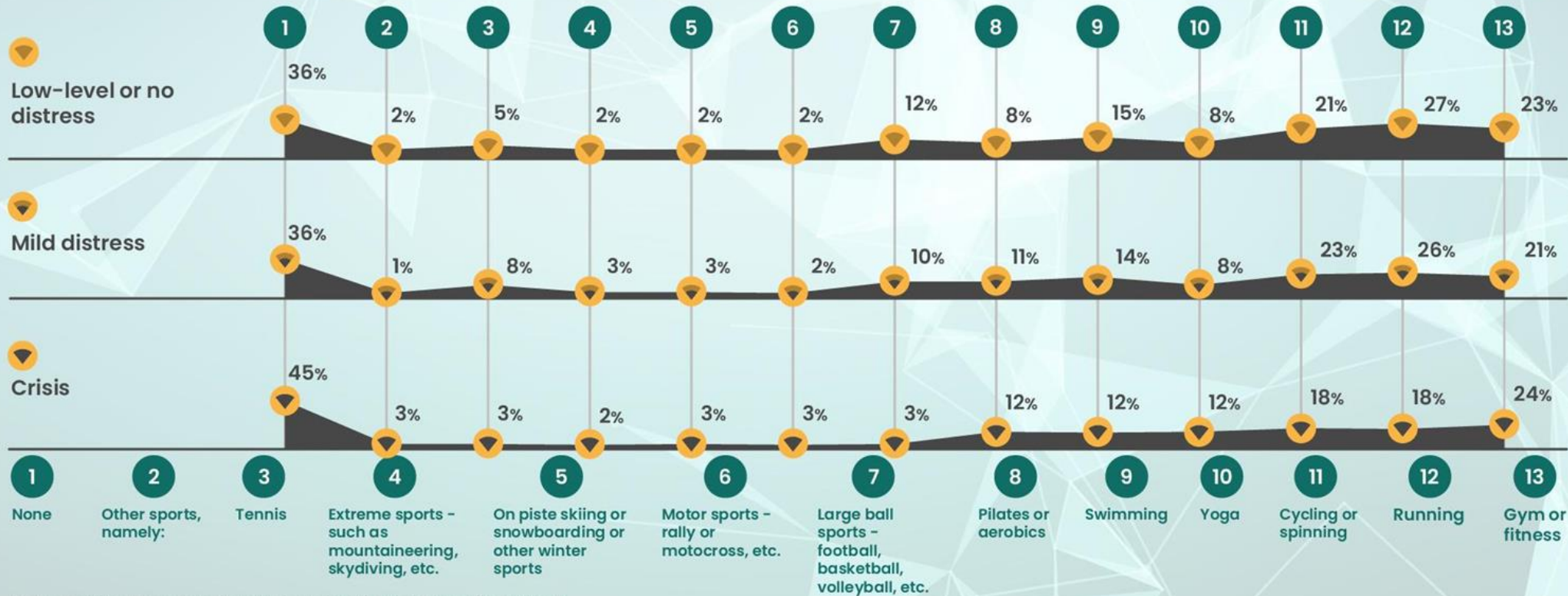
(Social) sports do wonders

Have you recently (re)started practicing a sport or are you planning to (re)start practicing it soon?

HUMAN Team



N= 1000



Comparing hard to lower levels of crisis, we find that:

- There are more of those not practicing ANY SPORTS out of those going through severe emotional distress and dissatisfaction (45% to 36%)
- Level of crisis correlates between playing a team/ partner sport (soccer, tennis – around 3% for HARD) and doing individual fitness and sportive activities (cycling, gym, swimming, Pilates – around 11-25%)



How much you've spent lately on...

N= 1000 Crisis=119 Mild= 549 Low=332

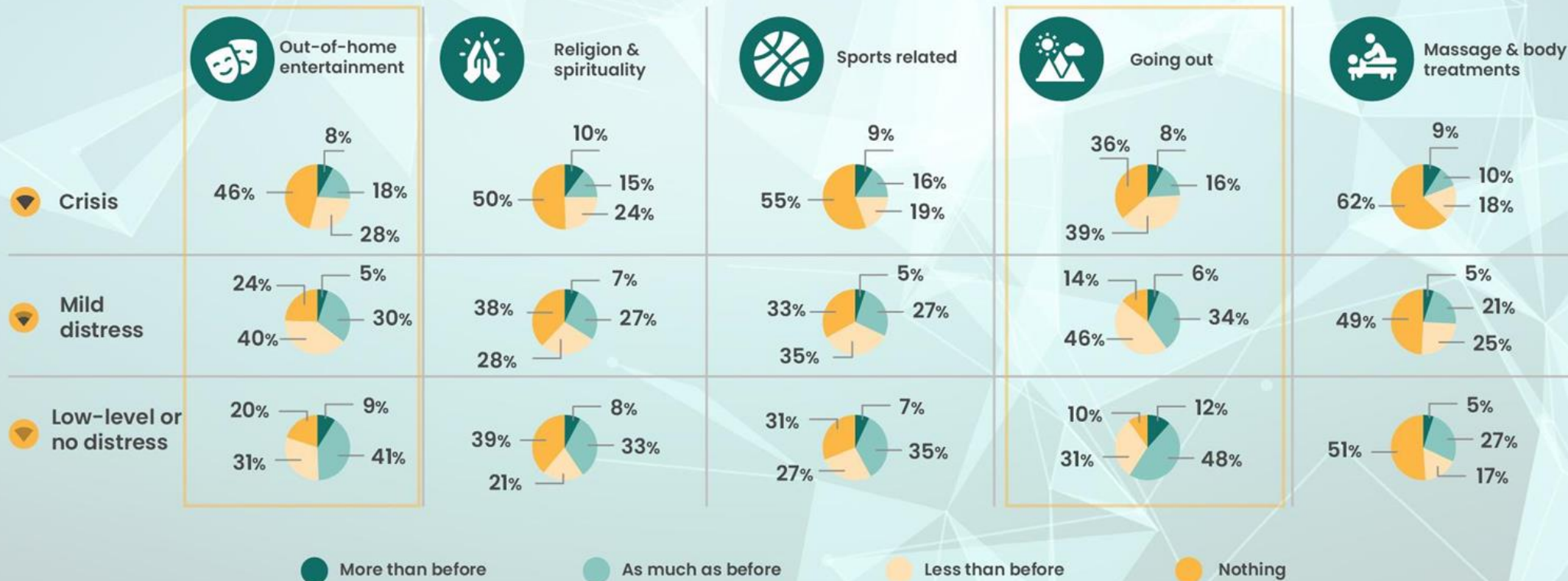


Individuals in the crisis category exhibit a subdued appetite for indulging in purchases across all categories when compared to those in milder or the lowest crisis states. This trend, particularly noticeable in categories like clothing and footwear, cosmetics and perfumes, and holidays and travel, hints at a potential reticence or financial restraint that accompanies the heightened existential and emotional turmoil of a hard crisis.



How much you've spent lately on...

N= 1000 Crisis=119 Mild= 549 Low=332

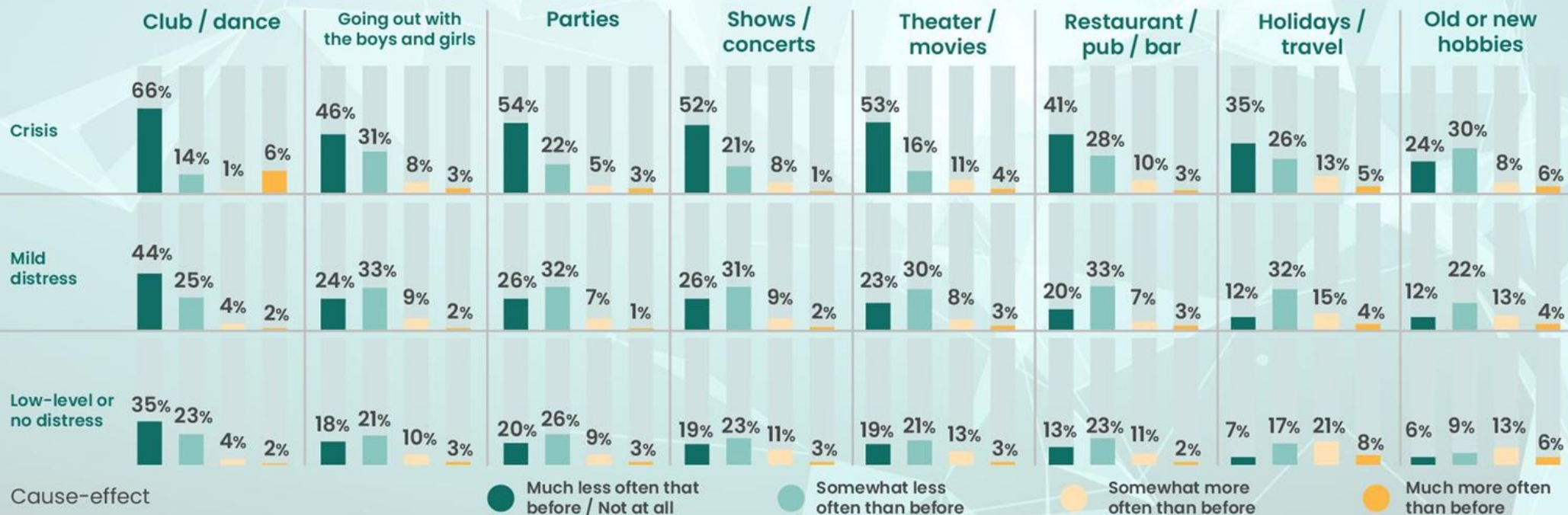




How you've been having fun lately

N= 1000 Crisis=119 Mild= 549 Low=332

Individuals going through hard and mild crises tend to retract from social activities to varying degrees. Especially those in crisis are exhibiting a significantly lower engagement with leisure activities.



There is a clear correlation between spending time in various free time activities and the level of emotional turmoil and existential turbulence. Conclusion is that there is a vicious cycle of the less you participate in these actions, the less of a healthy social circle one has, the deeper one gets in feelings of dissatisfaction and depression, fueling afterwards the potential decreasing in participation.

What has recently helped you get through difficult times and find peace?

N= 1000 Crisis=119 Mild= 549 Low=332



Low-level or no distress



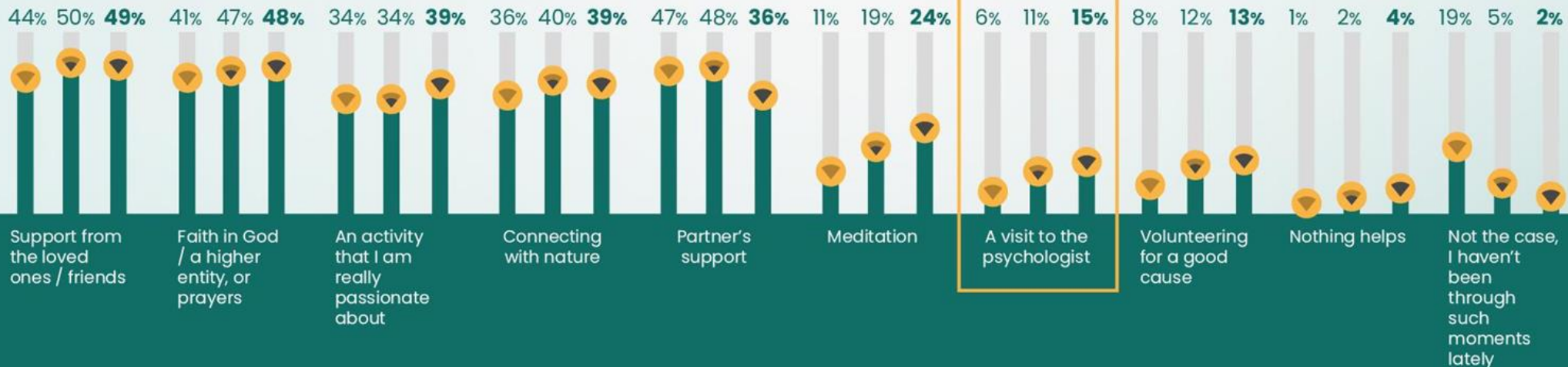
Mild distress



Crisis

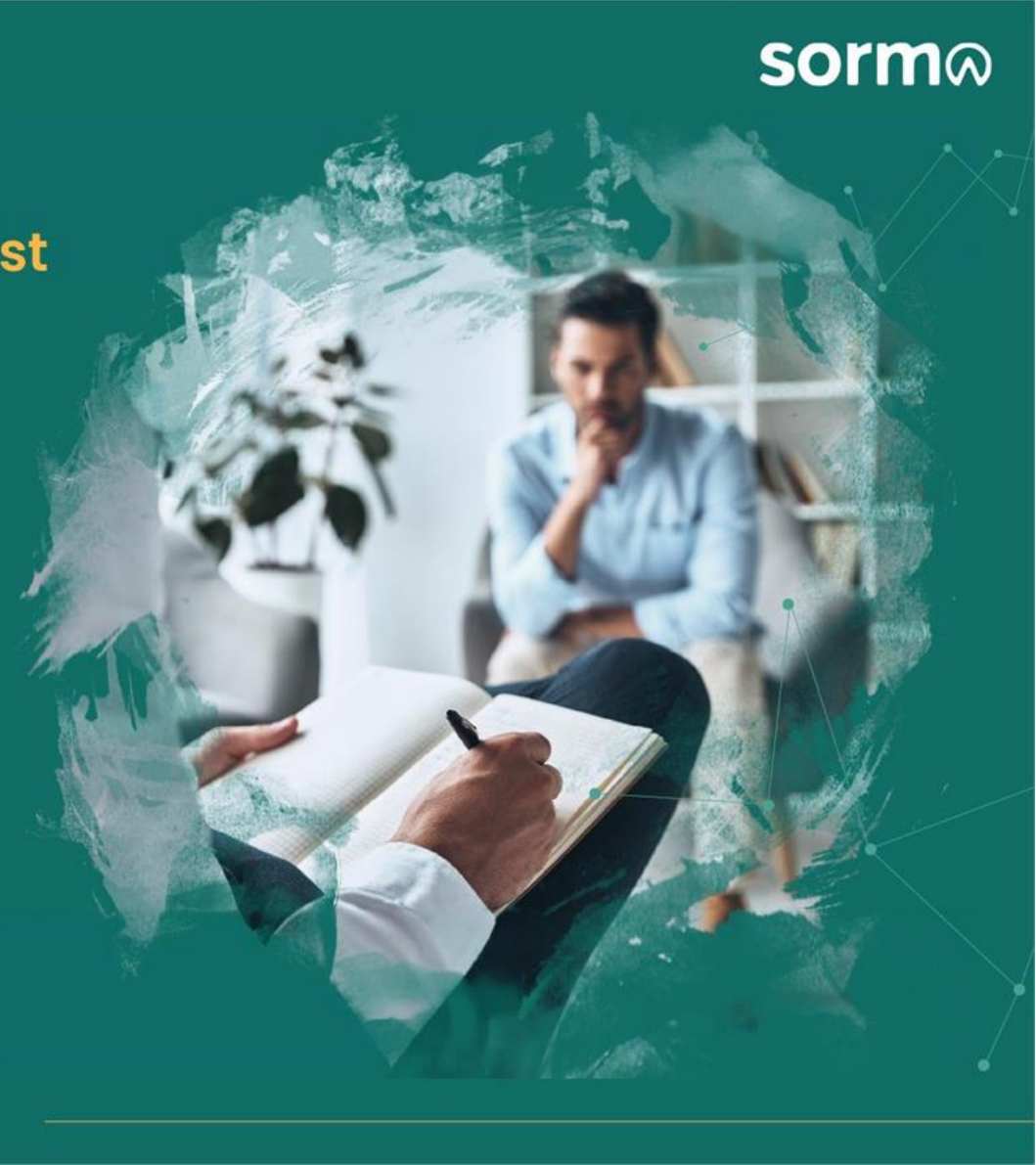
Be there for people! Improve your social. This dependency on personal relationships perhaps underscores the significant role of a supportive social network in providing solace and a sense of stability during tumultuous life phases. Highest rated solutions include support from loved ones/friends and partner's support, with respective percentages of 50% and 48% in the mild distress bracket, and 49% and 36% in the hard crisis bracket.

Psychologists still avoided
- A lot of other strategies are used for getting through difficult moments, with a visit to the therapist being significantly lagging at 15% for those with a 'hard emotional turmoil'



Still resisting going to the therapist

Significantly down the list for ways to deal with their emotions, **around 15%** of those going through **hard crisis** and **6-10%** of those going through **mild emotional turmoil** go to check their feelings with a psychologist.

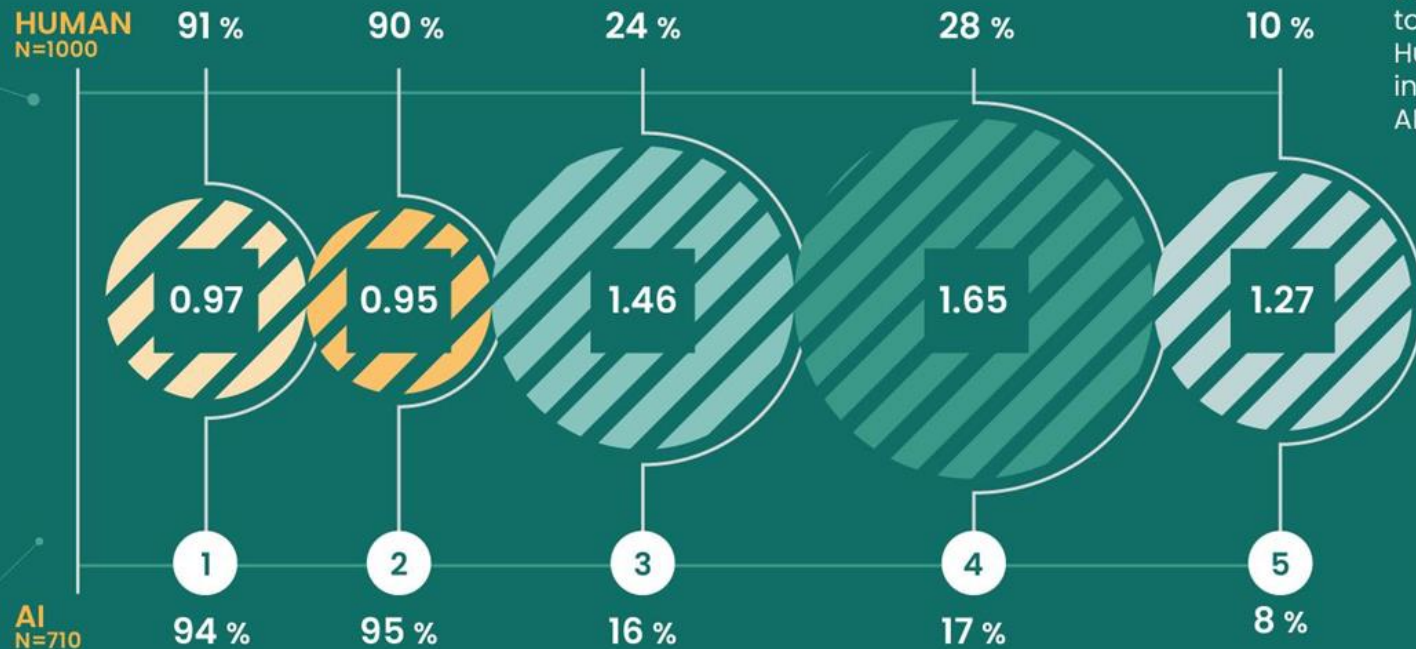


Ratio of Human survey to AI survey

(>1 depicts increased agreement on specific statement)

Main target
38-55 y.o.

The AI survey slightly outperformed the human survey with respect to how interesting the respondents found the subject, how well the questions matched the topic and related to the appropriate tone. However, differences are in the error margin, but considering it seems to outperform on all topics, it shows the pattern: Human-crafted survey to be somewhat invasive and lengthy as compared to the AI-crafted survey.



- 1 The questions match the topic.
- 2 It uses an appropriate tone.
- 3 It takes too long.
- 4 Some questions are way too personal, I don't feel comfortable answering.
- 5 It uses cumbersome and tiresome wording.

Very clearly, however, the human approach of the questionnaire on an emotional level comes from a more personal and intimate angle. The data suggests a key advantage of AI over human in crafting survey questions that are concise and less invasive, thus possibly promoting a more comfortable and efficient respondent experience.



MIDLIFE CRISIS

Thank for your attention!