

National Financial Well-Being Survey

Hector L. Ortiz, Bureau of Consumer Financial Protection¹

Defining, measuring, and studying what contributes to financial well-being—the “ultimate goal” of financial education, has been a key part of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB or Bureau)’s strategy for improving financial capability. CFPB’s rigorous set of research activities has produced a consumer-driven definition of financial well-being, and a reliable and validated scale for measuring it. Using this scale, which produces a financial well-being score that falls between 0 and 100, financial well-being can be meaningfully compared between people and over time.

In late 2016, the CFPB fielded for the first time the financial well-being scale in a nationwide survey of adults in the United States. In addition to measuring individuals’ financial well-being, the National Financial Well-Being Survey collected a host of other measures, including items related to: (1) individual characteristics; (2) household and family characteristics; (3) income and employment characteristics; (4) savings and safety nets; (5) financial experiences; and (6) financial behaviors, skills, and attitudes.

The survey results indicate that the financial well-being scale score—while correlated with traditional household financial measures such as employment status and income—is capturing something fundamentally different than these traditional measures, namely an individual’s sense of financial security and financial freedom of choice. Differences in financial well-being between groups, as well as wide variations in scores within groups, suggest that many individual, household, and situational factors play a part in the financial well-being of any given individual.

This presentation describes high level findings from the national survey, including the distribution of financial well-being scores for the U.S. adult population overall and for selected subgroups. It also introduces a new public dataset containing the financial well-being score and a host of personal and situational characteristics for more than 6,000 U.S. adults, which researchers can explore to learn more about how a wide range of factors relate to consumers’ financial well-being.

¹Policy Analyst, Office of Financial Protection for Older Americans, Bureau of Consumer Financial Protection, 1700 G Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20552, (202) 435-9776, hector.ortiz@cfpb.gov