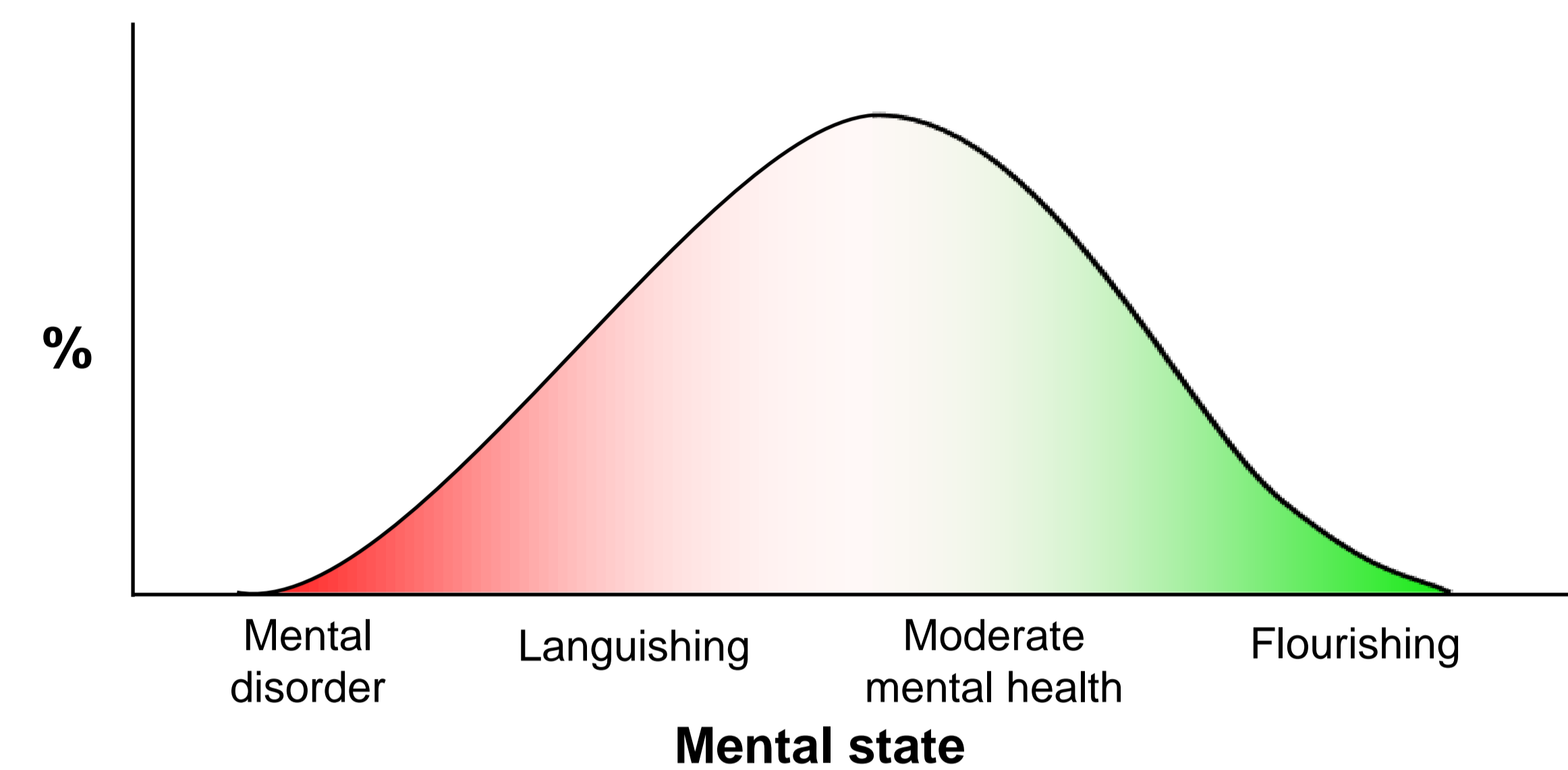


What percentage of people in Europe are flourishing and what characterises them?

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The Mental Health Spectrum

The mental health of the population can be represented as a spectrum. At any one time, the mental health of the population can be represented as a spectrum. The current mental state of each individual falls at one point along this spectrum.



Individuals can move up or down the spectrum at different times in their life. We use the term general flourishing to refer to a person who is usually near the high end of the spectrum.

In order to estimate the number of people who are flourishing and to understand the factors associated with general flourishing, we need to define it. There are many conceptual definitions of flourishing or related concepts such as psychological well-being or positive mental health, but advances in our knowledge require an operational definition of flourishing.

Developing an Operational Definition of Flourishing

Since flourishing can be regarded as the opposite end of the mental health spectrum to common mental disorders, we began with DSM and ICD operational definitions of depression and anxiety, and identified their opposites. Somatic features were not included. Surprisingly, these definitions did not cover two concepts which we felt were important to include in an operational definition of flourishing – sense of control and relationships with others.

We also decided to adopt the DSM/ICD format:

- a set of core features
- a number of additional features

This resulted in the following operational definition of flourishing.

To be flourishing a person must have:

All core features	Additional features
Positive emotions	Self-esteem
Engagement, interest	Optimism
Meaning, purpose	Resilience
	Vitality
	Self-determination
	Positive relationships

Percentage of UK sample with different combinations of features

Combination of features	%
Core features only	23.7
Core + 1 other	23.5
Core + 2 others	22.3
Core + 3 others	18.9
All features	10.7

European Survey

The dataset to which we applied our operational definition is the European Social Survey (ESS). The latest round of the ESS incorporates a Well-being Module (Huppert et al., 2009) which has been administered in 23 countries, with a minimum of 2000 adults (aged 16+) in each country.

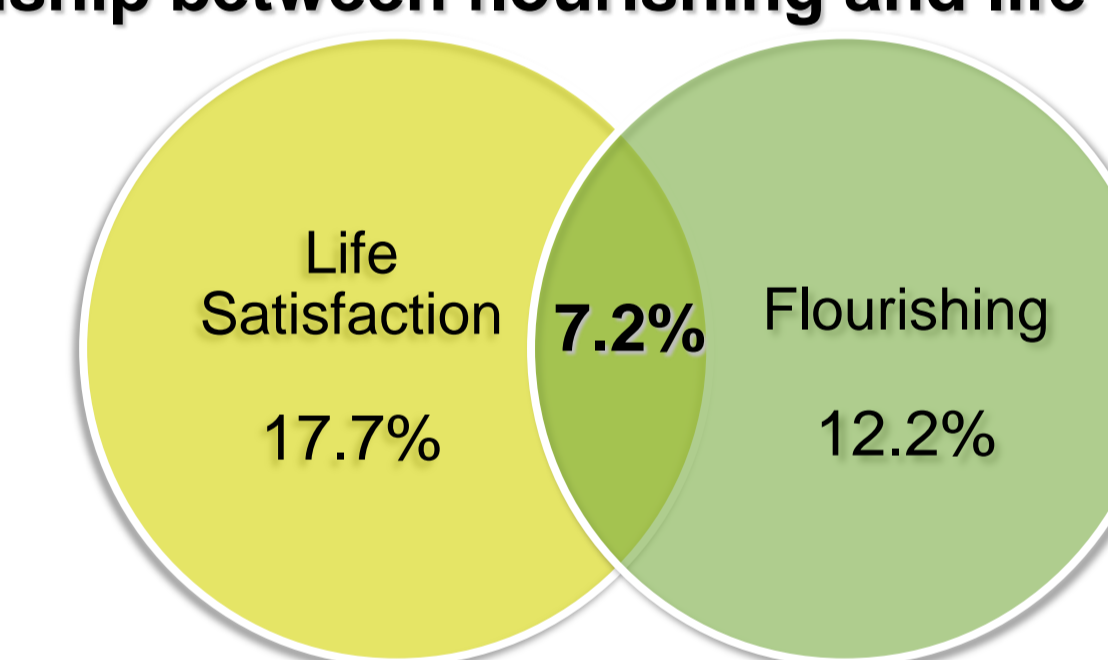
ESS items corresponded to seven of the nine features of general flourishing:

Positive emotion	Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are?
Engagement, interest	I love learning new things
Meaning, purpose	I generally feel that what I do in my life is valuable and worthwhile
Self-esteem	In general, I feel very positive about myself
Optimism	I'm always optimistic about my future
Resilience	When things go wrong in my life it generally takes me a long time to get back to normal (reverse coding)
Positive relationships	There are people in my life who really care about me

For each item we selected a cut-off score such that at least 25% of the UK sample met that criterion. To be classified as flourishing, an individual had to meet the criterion for all 3 core features and any 3 additional features.

Survey Result

Relationship between flourishing and life satisfaction



Might a single item about life satisfaction be a good indicator of flourishing? High life satisfaction was defined as a score of 9/10 on "How satisfied are you with how your life has turned out so far?". The correlation between flourishing and life satisfaction in the ESS data is .32. For the population as a whole, 12.2% met criteria for flourishing and 17.7% had high life satisfaction. The percentage who had high life satisfaction and were flourishing was 7.2%. However, since one third of flourishing people did not obtain a high score on life satisfaction and half of those with high life satisfaction did not meet criteria for flourishing, these are clearly different concepts.

Figure 1. Prevalence of flourishing across European countries participating in the European Social Survey 2006/7

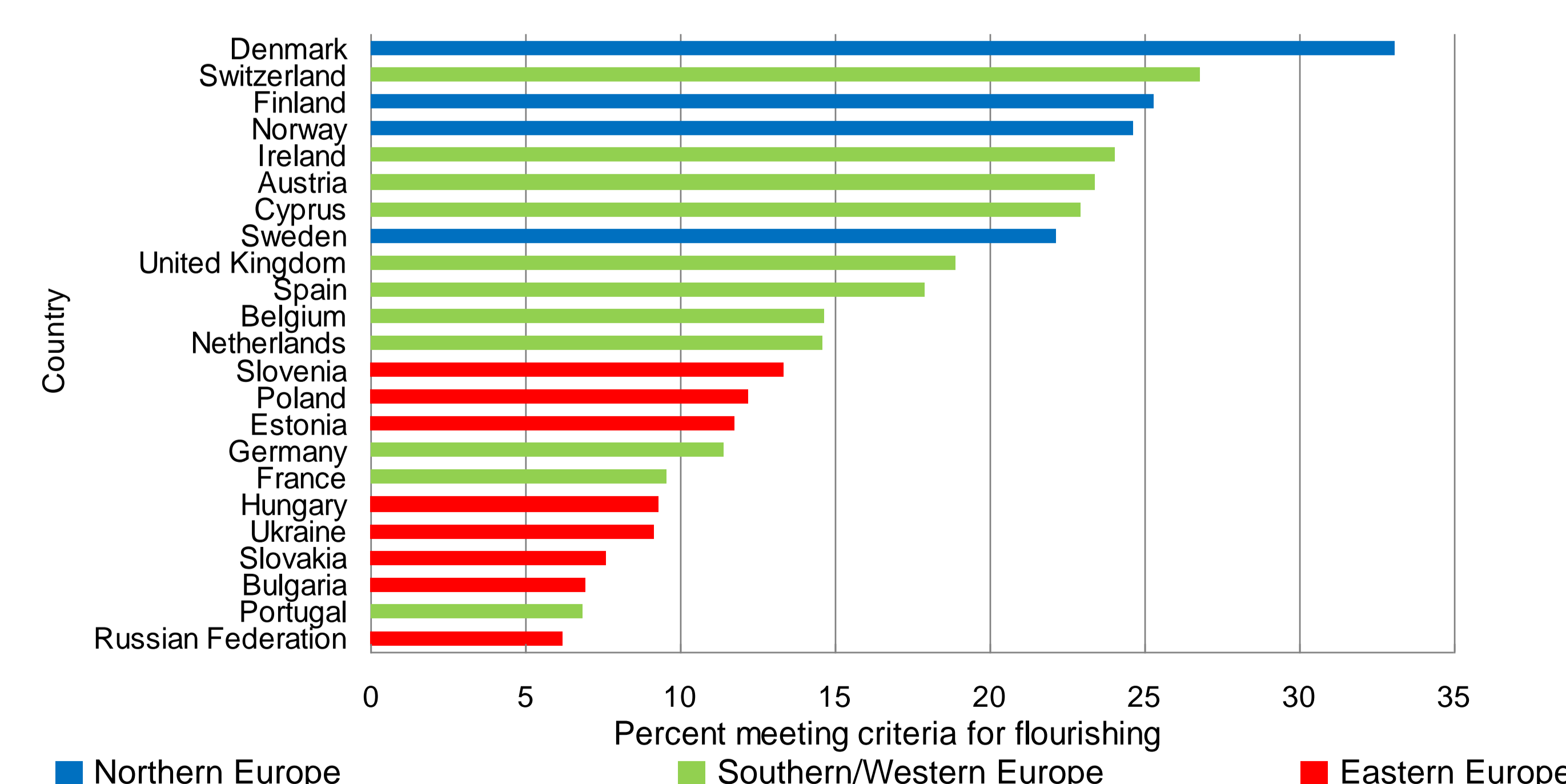


Figure 1 shows a very wide variation in the prevalence of flourishing across Europe. The highest rates are in Northern Europe and the lowest rates in Eastern Europe. Figures 2-6 show that in all regions, gender differences are small, higher flourishing is associated with higher education and income, and married people are happier than those no longer married. While flourishing generally declines with age, the gradient is fairly flat in South/West Europe. Indeed, in some individual countries in this region, people aged 65+ show the highest rates of flourishing (Ireland; UK men).

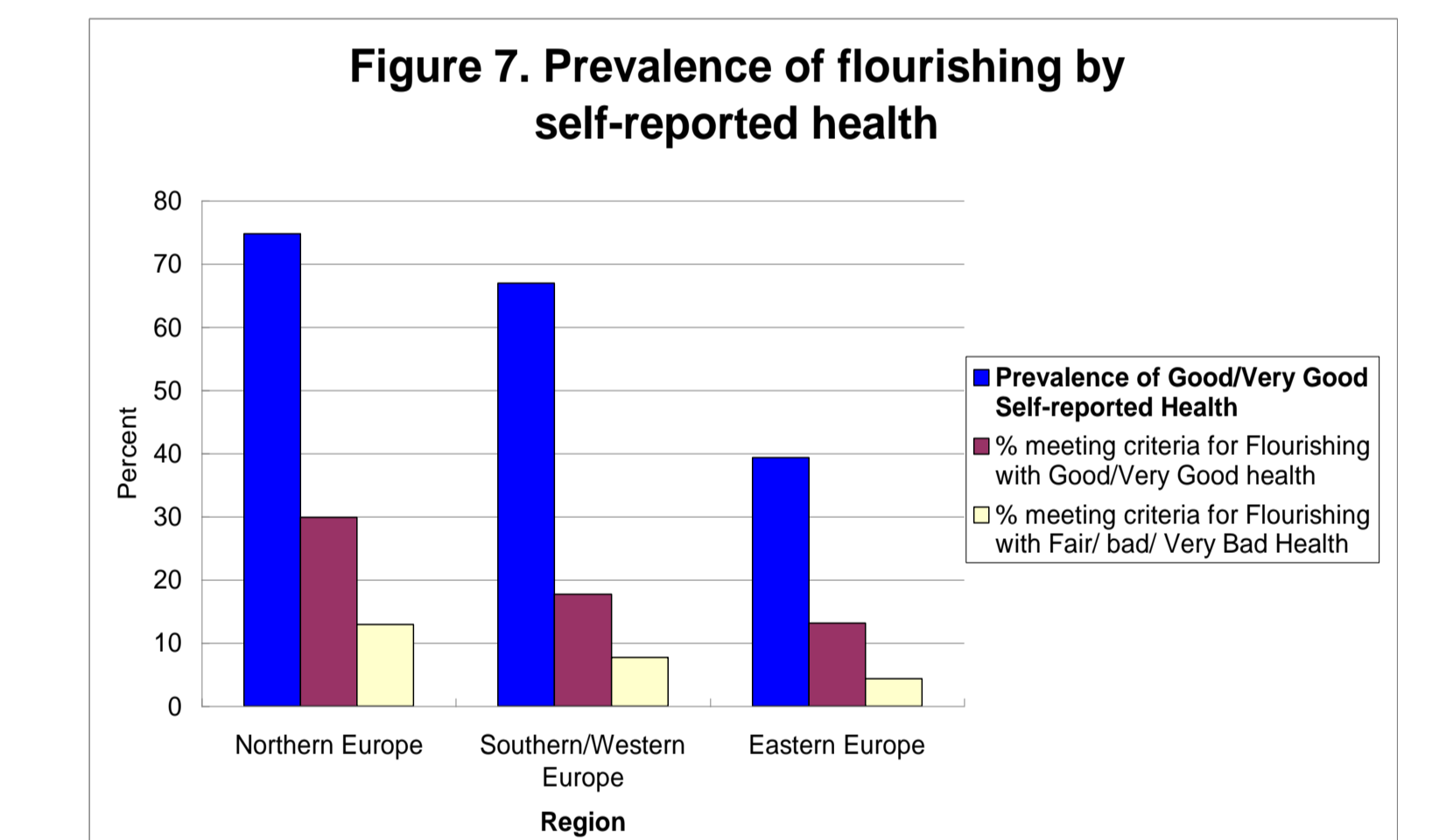
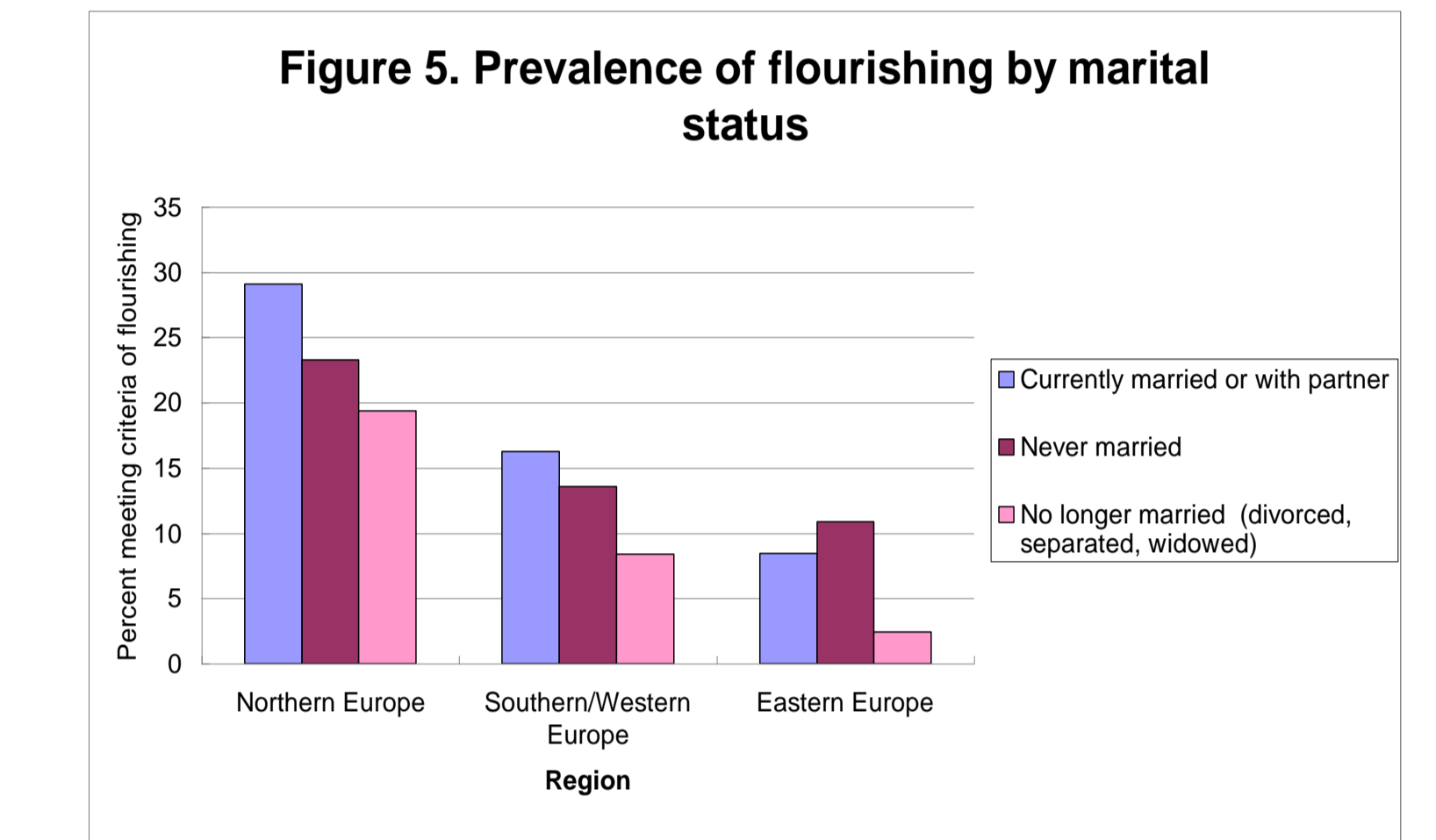
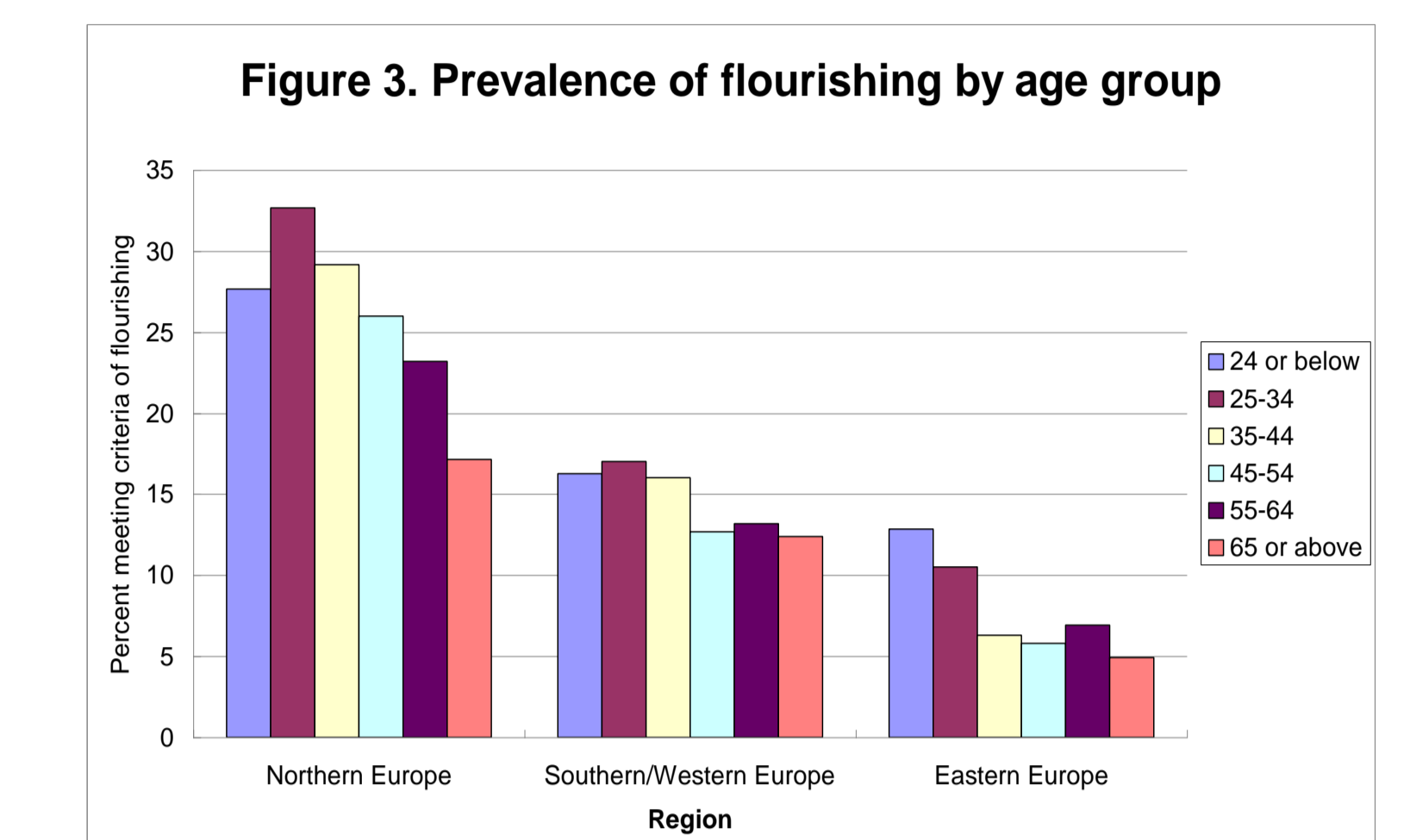
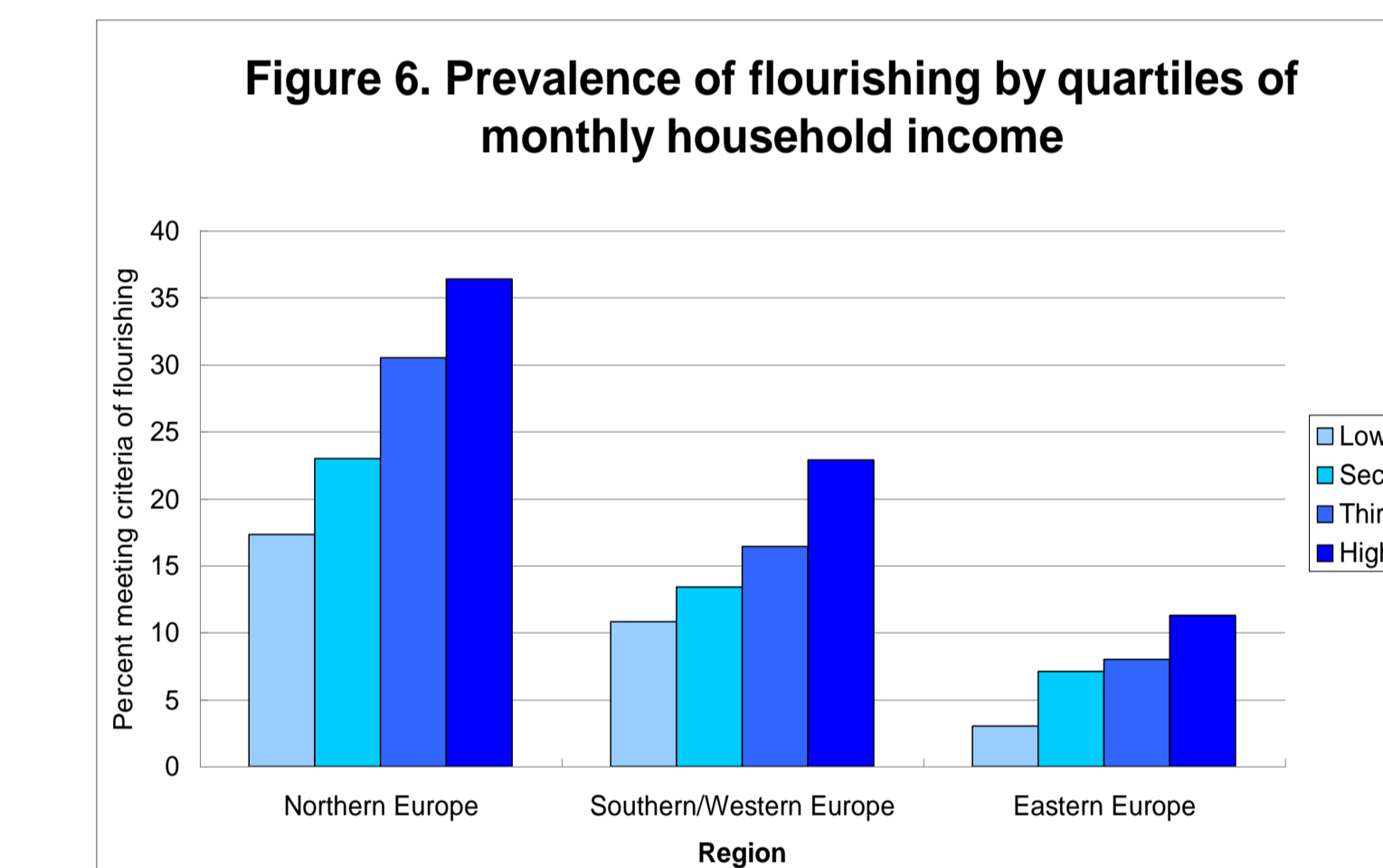
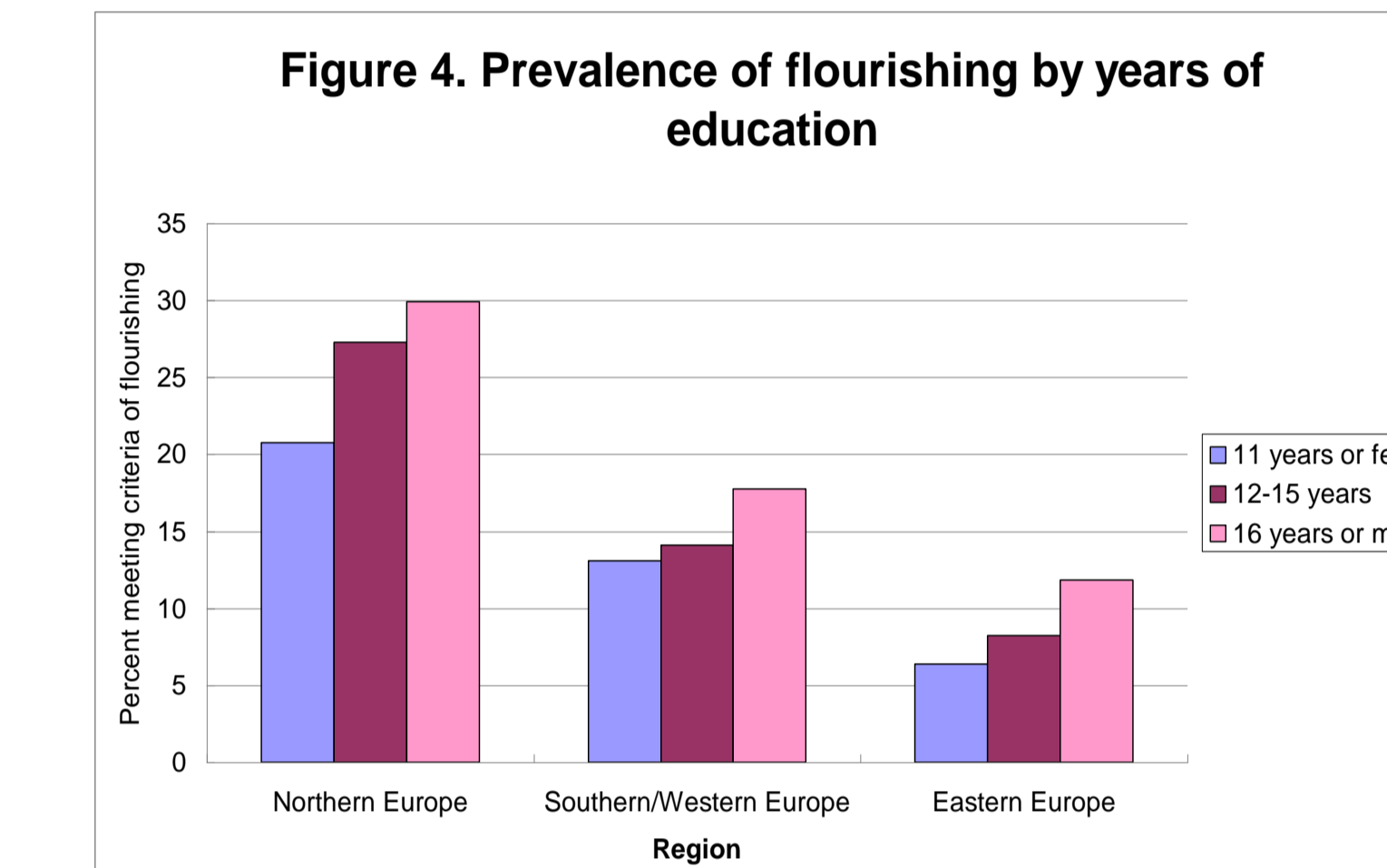
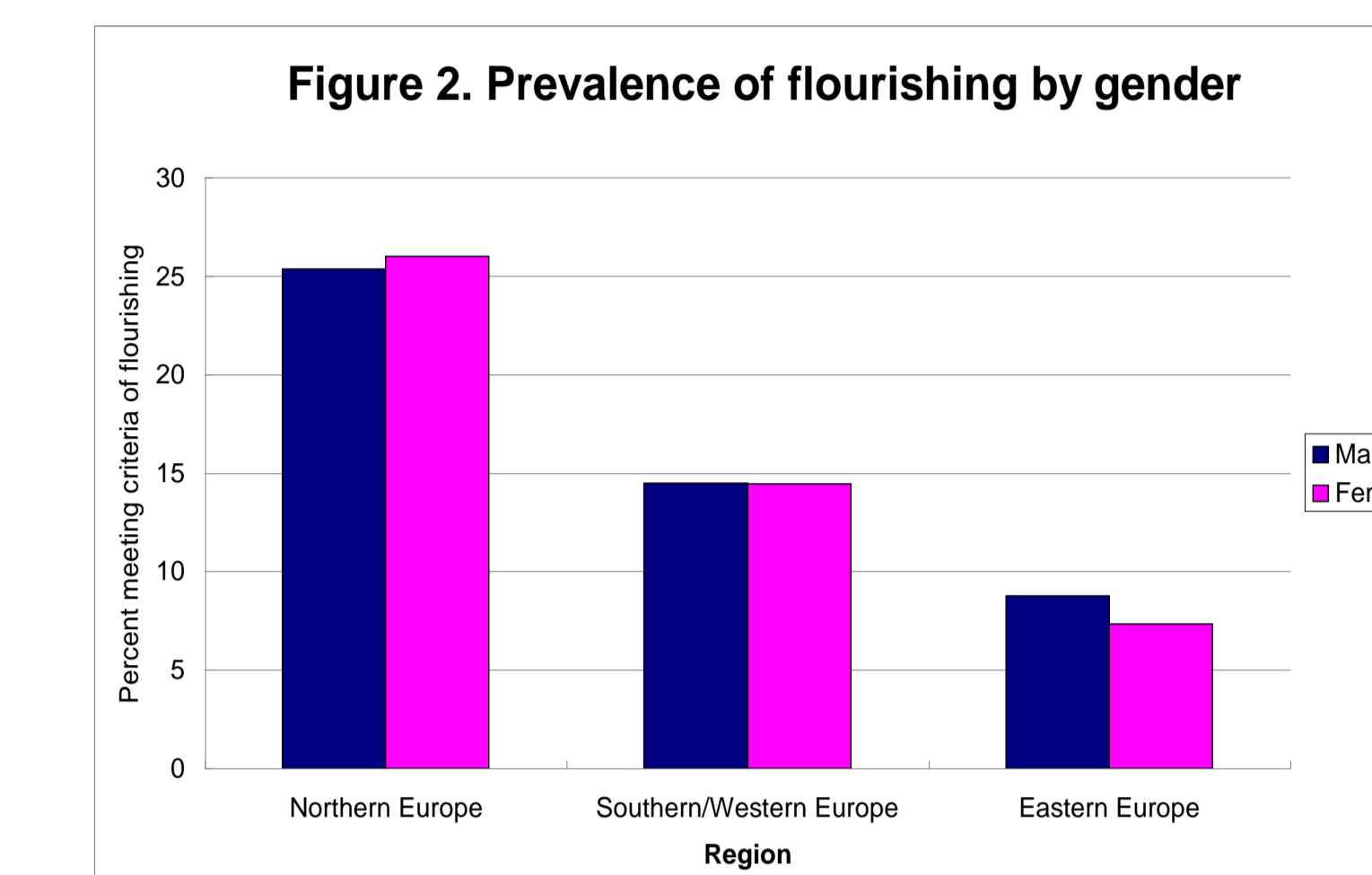


Figure 7 shows the association between psychological flourishing and self-reported general health. The overall correlation is .17. For all regions, the prevalence of flourishing is substantially higher in people with good self-reported health, although only around one third of people with good self-reported health are flourishing.

Low levels of flourishing in Eastern Europe are related in part to lower education, income and self-reported health. However, regression analysis shows that large regional differences persist when health and sociodemographic variables have been controlled for. Cultural factors, recent declines in social welfare provision, and increases in income inequalities probably influence the lower rates of flourishing in Eastern Europe.

Conclusions and Future Directions

This preliminary work on developing an operational definition of flourishing and applying it to data across Europe has proved fruitful and informative. Next steps include:

- Seeking an international consensus on an operational definition of flourishing
- Applying this definition to existing data sets from representative national and international population samples
- Advancing our understanding of the correlates, causes and consequences of flourishing
- Creating or refining measures of flourishing to be used in future surveys
- Using the new measures to examine the impact of social change or policy interventions.

Reference

Huppert, F. A., Marks, N., Clark, A., Siegrist, J., Stutzer, A., Vitters, J., & Wahrendorf, M. (2009). Measuring well-being across Europe: Description of the ESS Well-being Module and preliminary findings. *Social Indicators Research*, 91, 301-315.