INTRODUCTION
The goal of the current study was to assess changes in well-being across the course of the COVID-19 pandemic (from May 2020-April 2021), and how it is influenced by age and occupational status, especially essential workers and unemployed.

We hypothesized that older age would generally experience higher well-being than younger adults, in line with previous studies. We also expected unemployed to report less well-being than other employment statuses. However, older adults, being the most vulnerable population, were expected to experience quarantine-related declines in their well-being. We anticipated similar declines for Nonessential Workers, who underwent longer quarantine experiences than Essential Workers.

METHOD
An online survey was distributed via REDcap, collecting demographic information, zip codes, and MIDUS Development in the United States (MIDUS; Ryff, 1985) well-being survey responses from participants. MIDUS is composed of six dimensions: Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relations with Others, Purpose in Life and Self-Acceptance. A cross-sectional study over the course of ten years (Springer et al., 2011) reported that Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, and Positive Relations with Others increased, while senses of Personal Growth decreased, over time. In the current study, while most respondents lived in the USA, some individuals resided outside the USA. For participants willing to participate in the longitudinal part of the study, the surveys were distributed three months and six months later (i.e., over three time points). Survey responses were collected between May of 2020 and April 2021. Participation was completely voluntary, and participants received no benefits for participating. A summary of participant demographics is presented in Table 1.

LONGITUDINAL RESULTS: Age and employment statuses influence change in well-being

Table 1. Response-distribution information.

CROSS-SECTIONAL RESULTS: Influence of age and employment statuses on well-being

Figure 1. Age group differences in composite well-being and some dimensions of MIDUS. Note that note negative scores indicate greater well-being. A (top left): Older (46-80) and Middle-Older (36-45) Adults had greater Composite Well-Being than Younger (18-25) and Middle-Younger (26-35) Adults, p < .05. B (top right): Middle-Older and Middle-Younger Adults had greater Autonomy than Younger and Middle-Younger Adults, p < .05. C (bottom left): Older and Middle-Older Adults had greater Environmental Mastery than Younger Middle-Younger Adults (26-35), p < .001. D (bottom right): Older and Middle-Older Adults had greater Self-Acceptance than Younger and Middle-Younger Adults, p < .05. Error bars represent one standard error (SE).

Figure 2. Composite well-being for several types of Nonessential Workers. Students and unemployed individuals had the poorest well-being in nearly every dimension of the MIDUS, with Students having slightly less Autonomy than Unemployed individuals. Error bars represent one standard error (SE).

Figure 3. Personal senses of Positive Relationships and Life Purpose for Age Groups. Both showed a marginal Group’s Time interaction, where Middle-Older Adults and Older Adults experienced greater Positive Relationships and Life Purpose, but Older Adults experienced a decline both dimensions. Error bars represent one standard error (SE).

Figure 4. Personal senses of Autonomy and Positivity of Relations for Essential and Nonessential Workers. While Autonomy was greater for Essential Workers, Essential Workers’ Positivity of Relations showed a decline while Nonessential Workers’ did not. Error bars represent one standard error (SE).

REFERENCES

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Special thanks to Charles Wilber and John Moorman for their help in collecting these data.

ANALYSES
Univariate ANOVAs and Independent Samples t-tests were utilized to assess between-group differences for Composite Well-Being and its six dimensions, for the following variables:

• Age Group (significant results shown in Figure 1)
• Gender (no significant differences, all p’s > .22)
• Essential vs. Nonessential Workers (significant results shown in Figure 4)

Mixed-Measures ANOVAs were utilized to assess between-group differences in trends across time for Composite Well-Being and its six dimensions, for the following variables:

• Age Group (significant results shown in Figure 3)
• Gender (no significant differences, all within-group p’s > .33, and all Group x Time p’s > .19)

CONCLUSIONS
In the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, Middle-Older (age 36-45 years) and Older Adults experienced greater Composite Well-Being, Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Positivity of Relationships, and Self-Acceptance than Middle-Younger (age 26-35 years) and Younger Adults.

Additionally, in these initial stages, Students and Unemployed individuals showed the lowest well-being among Nonessential Workers, in almost all of the 6 dimensions of the MIDUS.

Older Adults, the most vulnerable group during the COVID-19 pandemic, experienced significant declines in Positivity of Relationships and Life Purpose through the course of the pandemic. These declines may have accompanied stringent quarantine experiences in Older Adults.

While Essential Workers experienced greater Autonomy over the course of the pandemic, they also experienced a decline in Positivity of Relationships that Nonessential Workers did not. This suggests that Essential Workers, who remained employed through most or all of this survey collection period, experienced a worsening of their Personal Relations.

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