

Social Capital Harmonised Question Set

*A guide to questions for use in the
measurement of social capital*

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Introduction

This guide has been produced as a practical document to support the growing number of people researching the topic of social capital. The guide is designed to accompany the harmonised set of questions on social capital developed by the Office for National Statistics in 2003.

The guide is intended to encourage the collection of a standard set of information on social capital which will allow comparisons to be made between different local studies of social capital and corresponding national indicators. The question set can be used in its entirety, or in parts, to collect data on issues relating to people's views about their local area, civic engagement, reciprocity, local trust, and people's social networks and social support.

There are many definitions of social capital but the one recommended for use by the cross government Social Capital Working Group (SCWG) is the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development definition:

“networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups” (Cote and Healy, 2001:41¹)

There is also ongoing debate in the academic community over what constitutes social capital. The developmental work for these questions built on the typology developed by Blaxter et al (2001)², the General Household Survey and Citizenship Surveys. The following five dimensions were identified:

- Views about the local area (e.g. satisfaction with living in the area, problems in area)
- Civic participation (e.g. propensity to vote, action on local and national issues)
- Social networks and support (e.g. contact with friends and relatives)
- Social participation (e.g. involvement in groups and voluntary activities)
- Reciprocity and trust (e.g. trusting other people)

Background to the harmonised social capital question set

Many government surveys have included questions relating to social capital and a variety of approaches have been used to measure the different aspects³. Some were explicitly measuring social capital while others were measuring different facets without specifically labeling them as such. These different approaches have resulted in a lack of cohesion, with differences arising in the concepts and definitions.

Thus, there was a need for a more harmonised approach to enable consistent interpretation and analysis, and hence a better understanding of society and trends within it. A harmonised approach also enables comparison to be made between local and national studies.

¹ Cote, S. and Healy, T. (2001) *The Well-being of Nations. The role of human and social capital*. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Paris.

² Blaxter, M., Poland, F. and Curran, M. (2001) *Measuring Social Capital: Qualitative Study of How Older People Relate Social Capital to Health*. Final Report to the Health Development Agency, London.

³ For further information please visit <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/socialcapital>.

The development of a harmonised social capital question set was commissioned by the Social Analysis and Reporting Division of the Office for National Statistics, and the work was carried out internally by the Social and Vital Statistics Division. A pilot was carried out in Spring 2003 after which some questions were modified and some dropped⁴.

The full social capital question set should take approximately 20 minutes to complete. A shorter list of core questions has been identified which provide measures for each dimension of social capital (see Appendix). These can be used in surveys which cannot accommodate the full set of questions.

The questionnaire

This section presents the complete set of harmonised social capital questions. The questions are presented in the order which is seen as the most appropriate for a personal interview. The table below shows which questions relate to which topic.

General notes about the questions

Additional information is given for some of the questions, and can be found in a shaded box following the relevant question. This includes notes for interviewers and other comments on use.

The following conventions apply:

- Within the questions, words in capital letters are instructions to the interviewer.
- If a section of the question is in brackets then it is optional. It is up to the interviewer to judge whether it is appropriate to ask.
- Interviewers are trained to read everything up to the final question mark. This might appear at the end of a question ('RUNNING PROMPT') or at the end of the answer categories ('INDIVIDUAL PROMPT').
- Some questions allow more than one response. These are marked with an instruction to interviewers which reads 'CODE ALL THAT APPLY'.
- Answer categories denoted as 'SPONTANEOUS' should not be prompted or listed on the showcard.

The five main topics and related questions

Topic	Question numbers
Views about the local area	1-13
Civic participation	14-18
Social networks and support	26-38
Social participation	39-50
Reciprocity and trust	19-25

⁴ Green, H. and Fletcher, L. (2003) *The Development of Harmonised Questions on Social Capital*. Final report to the Social Analysis and Reporting Division of the Office for National Statistics.

The questions on social capital

Views about the area

Personal definitions of area vary amongst respondents and with the context of the question. Rather than specifying a definition, questions *AreaLive* to *WalkDark* leave respondents to make up their own mind about what 'area' means to them. Respondents will be basing their answers on different definitions but on an entity that is meaningful and relevant to them, for example, their route to shops, station or pub.

1. *AreaLive*

How long have you lived in this area?

1. Less than 12 months
2. 12 months but less than 2 years
3. 2 years but less than 3 years
4. 3 years but less than 5 years
5. 5 years but less than 10 years
6. 10 years but less than 20 years
7. 20 years or longer
8. Don't know

2. *SatLive*

How satisfied are you with this area as a place to live?

SHOW CARD A:

1. Very satisfied
2. Fairly satisfied
3. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
4. Slightly dissatisfied
5. Very dissatisfied
6. (SPONTANEOUS) Don't know

Views about the neighbourhood

NIntro

Now I'd like to ask you a few questions about your immediate neighbourhood, by which I mean your street or block.

3. *NeighTyp*

In general, what kind of neighbourhood would you say you live in - would you say it is a neighbourhood in which people do things together and try to help each other, or one in which people mostly go their own way?

1. Help each other
2. Go own way
3. (SPONTANEOUS) Mixture
4. (SPONTANEOUS) Don't know

4. *NBackg*

To what extent do you agree or disagree that this neighbourhood is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together?

1. Definitely agree
2. Tend to agree
3. Tend to disagree
4. Definitely disagree
5. (SPONTANEOUS) Don't know
6. (SPONTANEOUS) Too few people in neighbourhood
7. (SPONTANEOUS) All same backgrounds

5. *NTrust*

Would you say that...

RUNNING PROMPT

1. most of the people in your neighbourhood can be trusted
2. some can be trusted
3. a few can be trusted
4. or that no-one can be trusted?
5. (SPONTANEOUS) Just moved here
6. (SPONTANEOUS) Don't know

6. *SLost*

Suppose you lost your (purse/wallet) containing your address details, and it was found in the street by someone living in this neighbourhood. How likely is it that it would be returned to you with nothing missing...

RUNNING PROMPT

1. very likely
2. quite likely
3. not very likely
4. or not at all likely?
5. (SPONTANEOUS) Don't know

PbIntro

I am going to read out a list of problems which some people face in their neighbourhood. For each one, please can you tell me how much of a problem it is.

7. *Drunk*

How much of a problem are people being drunk or rowdy in public places?

SHOW CARD B:

1. Very big problem
2. Fairly big problem
3. Not a very big problem
4. Not a problem at all
5. It happens but it's not a problem
6. (SPONTANEOUS) Don't know

8. *Rubbish*

SHOW CARD B. How much of a problem is rubbish or litter lying around?

9. *Vandals*

SHOW CARD B. How much of a problem are vandalism, graffiti and other deliberate damage to property or vehicles?

10. DrugUse

SHOW CARD B. How much of a problem are people using or dealing drugs?

11. Race

SHOW CARD B. How much of a problem is people being attacked or harassed because of their skin colour, ethnic origin or religion?

12. Teenhang

SHOW CARD B. How much of a problem are teenagers hanging around on the street?

13. AntiNgh

SHOW CARD B. How much of a problem are troublesome neighbours?

Teenhang and *AntiNgh* appear last in the list of problems because they have a more specific geographical context.

Participation in local issues

14. InfArea

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

I can influence decisions affecting my local area?

SHOW CARD C:

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. (SPONTANEOUS) Don't have an opinion
7. (SPONTANEOUS) Don't know

15. InfNgh

By working together, people in my area can influence decisions that affect the local area?

SHOW CARD C:

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree
6. (SPONTANEOUS) Don't have an opinion
7. (SPONTANEOUS) Don't know

16. SolvLP

In the last 12 months have you taken any of the following actions in an attempt to solve a problem affecting people in your local area?

SHOW CARD D

CODE ALL THAT APPLY

1. Contacted a local radio station, television station or newspaper
2. Contacted the appropriate organisation to deal with the problem, such as the council
3. Contacted a local councillor or MP
4. Attended a public meeting or neighbourhood forum to discuss local issues
5. Attended a tenants' or local residents' group
6. Attended a protest meeting or joined an action group
7. Helped organise a petition on a local issue
8. No local problems
8. None of these
9. (SPONTANEOUS) Don't know

Participation in national issues

17. *SolvNP*

In the last 12 months have you taken any of the following actions to show your concern over a national issue?

SHOW CARD E

CODE ALL THAT APPLY

1. Contacted a radio station, television station or newspaper
2. Contacted the appropriate organisation to deal with the problem
3. Contacted an MP
4. Attended a public meeting
5. Attended a protest meeting or joined an action group
6. Helped organise a petition
7. None of the above
8. (SPONTANEOUS) Don't know

18. *Vote*

Can I check, did you vote...

INDIVIDUAL PROMPT

CODE ALL THAT APPLY

1. In the last general election (national election)?
2. (Did you vote) In the last local council election?
3. DID NOT VOTE IN EITHER ELECTION
4. NOT ELIGIBLE TO VOTE
5. (SPONTANEOUS) Don't know

Trust

19. *PTrust*

Another topic we are interested in is trust. Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?

1. Most people can be trusted
2. Can't be too careful in dealing with people
3. (SPONTANEOUS) It depends on people/circumstances
4. (SPONTANEOUS) Don't know

TrIntro

For the following, please can you tell me how much you trust them. SHOW CARD F.

20. Police

Can you tell me how much you trust the police?

21. Courts

Can you tell me how much you trust the courts (Magistrates Courts and Crown Court)?

22. Parlmt

Can you tell me how much you trust Parliament?

23. Welsh (for respondents living in Wales)

Can you tell me how much you trust the Welsh Assembly?

24. Scot (for respondents living in Scotland)

Can you tell me how much you trust the Scottish Executive?

25. LocC

Can you tell me how much you trust your local council?

SHOW CARD F:

1. A lot
2. A fair amount
3. Not very much
4. Not at all
5. (SPONTANEOUS) No experience
6. (SPONTANEOUS) Don't know

Social networks

SNIntro

The next few questions are about how often you *personally* contact your relatives, friends and neighbours. Not counting the people you live with, how often do you do any of the following?

26. Spkrel

Speak to relatives on the phone

SHOW CARD G:

1. On most days
2. Once or twice a week
3. Once or twice a month
4. Less often than once a month
5. Never
6. (SPONTANEOUS) Don't know

27. Wrtrel

Write a letter or note to relatives

SHOW CARD G

28. *Txtrel*

Text or email relatives, or use chatrooms on the internet to talk to relatives
SHOW CARD G

29. *Spkfr*

Speak to friends on the phone
SHOW CARD G

30. *Wrtfr*

Write a letter or note to friends
SHOW CARD G

31. *Txtfr*

Text or email friends, or use chatrooms on the internet to talk to friends
SHOW CARD G

32. *Spkng*

Speak to neighbours
SHOW CARD G

SNIntro to *Spkng* emphasise how often the respondent *personally* contacts relatives, friends and neighbours to deter married or cohabiting people from including contacts made by their partner.

33. *FreqMtR*

How often do you meet up with relatives who are not living with you?
SHOW CARD G

34. *FreqMtF*

How often do you meet up with friends?
SHOW CARD G

Social support

SitIntro

I am going to describe two situations where people might need help. For each one, could you tell me if there is anyone you could ask for help?

(IF MORE THAN ONE PERSON IN HOUSEHOLD ADD: Please include people living with you and people outside the household)

35. *Illbed*

You are ill in bed and need help at home. Is there anyone you could ask for help? Yes/no

‘Help at home’ means help with domestic tasks such as cooking, cleaning and making a cup of tea.

36. *Money*

You are in financial difficulty and need to borrow some money to see you through the next few days. Is there anyone you could ask for help? Yes/no

Loans from banks or other financial institutions should be excluded.

If *Illbed* = Yes then *Whohlp*; If *Money* = Yes then *Whohlp2*:

37. WhoHelp/WhoHelp2

Please can you look at this card and tell me who you could ask for help?

SHOW CARD H

CODE ALL THAT APPLY

1. Husband/wife/partner
2. Other household member
3. Relative (outside household)
4. Friend
5. Neighbour
6. Work colleague
7. Voluntary or other organisation
8. Other
9. Would prefer not to ask for help
10. (SPONTANEOUS) Don't know

38. PCrisis

If you had a serious personal crisis, how many people, if any, do you feel you could turn to for comfort and support?

IF MORE THAN 15, CODE AS 15.

(0-15, Don't know)

This question needs to be dealt with sensitively, as it can be upsetting for people who are socially isolated.

If respondents have difficulty giving a number, the interviewer should ask them to give an estimate.

Involvement in groups, clubs and organisations

The questions ask about involvement in three types of group: informal, local and national. The three questions act as probes and although they may seem repetitive to respondents, this approach increases the number of groups reported.

The questions are wide-ranging and the concepts are not easily defined. Interviewers should be instructed that the questions aim to measure social participation so any group activity which involves interacting with others should be included. Simply paying a subscription or being a member of a group but not interacting with other members does not qualify.

It does not matter whether responses are recorded at *GrpInf*, *GrpLoc* or *GrpNat*. The responses from all three questions should be combined to give an overall measure of involvement.

GrpIntro

The next questions are about involvement in groups, clubs and organisations. These could be formally organised groups or just groups of people who get together to do an activity or talk about things. Please exclude just paying a subscription, giving money and anything that was a requirement of your job.

39. Intro2

I am going to ask about 3 different types of groups:

First, in the last 12 months, have you been involved with any groups of people who get together to do an activity or to talk about things? These could include evening classes, support groups, slimming clubs, keep-fit classes, pub teams and so on.

(If *Intro2* = yes) then:

40. GrpInf

Please can you look at this card. Which of the categories on this card best describe the groups you have taken part in?

SHOW CARD I

CODE ALL THAT APPLY

1. Hobbies/social clubs
2. Sports/exercise groups, including taking part, coaching or going to watch
3. Local community or neighbourhood groups
4. Groups for children or young people
5. Adult education groups
6. Groups for older people
7. Environmental groups
8. Health, disability and welfare groups
9. Political groups
10. Trade union groups
11. Religious groups, including going to a place of worship or belonging to a religious based group
12. Other group
13. (SPONTANEOUS) Don't know

41. Intro3

Second, in the last 12 months, have you taken part in any (other) group activities as part of a local or community group, club or organisation? These could include residents' associations, sports groups, parent-teacher associations, school or religious groups and so on.

If *Intro3* = yes) then:

42. GrpLoc

Please can you look at this card. Which of the categories on this card best describe the groups you have taken part in? (SHOW CARD I)

43. Intro4

And third, in the last 12 months, have you taken part in any (other) group activities as part of a national group, club or organisation? These could include pressure groups, charities, political groups, environmental groups and so on.

(If *Intro4* = yes) then:

44. GrpNat

Please can you look at this card. Which of the categories on this card best describe the groups you have taken part in? (SHOW CARD I)

The following questions are about unpaid help given to people either on an individual basis or through a group.

The questions do not use the term 'voluntary work' because people tend to think narrowly of formal volunteering. The questions in this set use the term 'unpaid help' which has a broader coverage. Activities involving religious organisations or schools are often omitted and these are therefore specified in code 11.

Unpaid help to groups and individuals

45. *DoVolWk*

During the last 12 months have you given any unpaid help to any groups, clubs or organisations in any of the ways shown on this card?

SHOW CARD J

CODE ALL THAT APPLY

1. Raising or handling money/taking part in sponsored events
2. Leading the group/ member of a committee
3. Organising or helping to run an activity or event
4. Visiting people
5. Befriending or mentoring people
6. Giving advice/information/counselling
7. Secretarial, admin or clerical work
8. Providing transport/driving
9. Representing
10. Campaigning
11. Other practical help (e.g. helping out at school, religious group, shopping)
12. Any other help
13. None of the above
14. (SPONTANEOUS) Don't know

Respondents can see all the activities covered before they answer. This makes them less likely to say that they have not given unpaid help when in fact they have.

46. *VolFreq*

Thinking about the unpaid help you have mentioned, would you say you give this kind of help...

RUNNING PROMPT

CODE FIRST THAT APPLIES

1. at least once a week
2. at least once a month
3. at least once every three months
4. or less often?
5. Other

(If Less Often or Other at *VolFreq*) then:

47. *VolOther*

ASK OR RECORD

About how many times in the last 12 months have you given unpaid help through a group, club or organisation?

VolOther is useful for people who give or have given unpaid help on a sporadic basis.

48. Care

Some people have extra responsibilities because they look after someone who has long-term physical or mental ill health or disability, or problems due to old age.

May I check, is there anyone living with you who is sick, disabled or elderly whom you look after or give special help to, other than in a professional capacity. (For example, a sick or disabled (or elderly) relative/husband/wife/child/friend/parent, etc.) Yes, No.

This question covers those who give help to people at home, whose work would not be covered by *DoVolWk* (above) or *HlpGiv* (below).

49. HlpGiv

Now I'd like to talk about any unpaid help you may have given to people who do not live with you. In the past month have you given any unpaid help in any of the ways shown on the card. Please do not count any help you gave through a group, club or organisation.

SHOW CARD K

CODE ALL THAT APPLY

1. Domestic work, home maintenance or gardening
2. Provision of transport or running errands
3. Help with child care or babysitting
4. Teaching, coaching or giving practical advice
5. Giving emotional support
6. Other
7. None of the above
8. (SPONTANEOUS) Don't know

DoVolWk and *VolKind* are asked first, then *Care* (asking about caring for people inside the household) followed by giving unpaid help to people outside the household (*HlpGiv*). With this order it should be clear to respondents that they should not include help given through a group or to people living with them in response to *HlpGiv*.

50. HlpInt

Now I'd like to talk about any unpaid help you may have received. In the past month have you received any unpaid help in any of the ways shown on the card. Please do not count help from people who live with you or from an organisation or group.

SHOW CARD K

CODE ALL THAT APPLY

1. Domestic work, home maintenance or gardening
2. Provision of transport or running errands
3. Help with child care or babysitting
4. Teaching, coaching or giving practical advice
5. Giving emotional support
6. Other
7. None of the above
8. (SPONTANEOUS) Don't know

Appendix: Core questions

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<i>Teenhang</i>	8
<i>AntiNgh</i>	8
2. Civic participation	
<i>SolvLP</i>	8
3. Social networks and support	
<i>Spkrel</i>	10
<i>Spkfr</i>	11
<i>Spkng</i>	11
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