

Statistical bulletin

Personal well-being in the UK: April 2020 to March 2021

Estimates of life satisfaction, feeling that the things done in life are worthwhile, happiness and anxiety at the UK, country, regional, county and local authority level.



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1 . Main points

- Average ratings of well-being have deteriorated across all indicators in the year ending March 2021, continuing a trend that was seen across most indicators in the previous period, but even more sharply, and which notably takes place entirely during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.
- The most recent annual declines in personal well-being in the UK were the greatest we have seen since we started measuring personal well-being for life satisfaction (0.27 point decline), anxiety (0.26 point increase), happiness (0.17 point decline) and feeling that the things done in life are worthwhile (0.15 point decline).
- Average ratings of anxiety increased in all countries and regions of the UK compared with the previous period apart from Northern Ireland and the North East, with the largest increases being in the West Midlands (0.44 point increase) and the North West (0.38 point increase).
- Average ratings of happiness declined in all countries and regions of the UK compared with the previous period apart from the North East and the East Midlands, with the largest decreases being in the West Midlands (0.22 point decrease) and Yorkshire and The Humber (0.20 point decrease).
- Average ratings of life satisfaction declined in all countries and regions of the UK compared with the previous period, with the largest decreases being in Northern Ireland (0.32 point decrease) and Yorkshire and The Humber (0.31 point decrease).
- Average ratings of feeling that the things done in life are worthwhile declined in all countries and regions of the UK apart from the North East, with the largest decrease being in the South East (0.19 point decrease).

Because of small sample sizes and large [confidence intervals](#) estimates for local authorities should not be ranked against each other.

2 . Personal well-being data time series

The annual period covered in this release is the first to take place entirely during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Figure 1 shows how measures of personal well-being have changed on an annual basis for the UK as a whole from the year ending March 2012 to March 2021. The datasets accompanying the bulletin provide estimates for each local authority in the UK, presenting a picture of well-being in local authorities during the coronavirus pandemic.

This release contains official estimates of personal well-being from 2011 onwards collected by the Annual Population Survey at national and sub-national level. More frequent national level well-being estimates during the coronavirus pandemic are also available from the ONS Opinions Survey. For more on the difference between well-being estimates from the two surveys please read [Data collection changes due to the pandemic and their impact on estimating personal well-being](#).

Figure 1: Personal well-being deteriorated across the year ending March 2021

Average personal well-being ratings, UK, years ending March 2012 to March 2021

[Download the data](#)

Notes:

1. The y-axis has a break in it, meaning it does not necessarily start from zero.
2. Data are weighted mean averages.
3. The personal well-being measures were first collected in England, Scotland and Wales at local level in April 2011 while in Northern Ireland in April 2012. The first year from which we have a full UK baseline at local level is therefore the year ending March 2013.
4. From 2021 the local authority breakdowns for Northern Ireland derived from the Annual Population Survey no longer represent the official well-being statistics used by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, as these have been changed to the Northern Ireland Continuous Household Survey.

3 . Personal well-being by local area

Our personal well-being explorer tools shown in Figures 2 and 3 allow everyone to observe well-being in their local area and compare it with other areas.

Ranking local authorities based on their average scores may be misleading for various reasons such as different sample sizes, different [confidence intervals](#) and mode effects, as well as not comparing like with like. Comparisons between areas should be made with caution, and confidence intervals should be taken into account when assessing differences.

Figure 2: Personal well-being interactive maps

Average ratings of personal well-being, UK, years ending March 2012 to March 2021

[Download the data](#)

Notes:

1. Data are weighted mean averages.
2. The personal well-being measures were first collected in England, Scotland and Wales at local level in April 2011 while in Northern Ireland in April 2012. The first year from which we have a full UK baseline at local level is therefore the year ending March 2013.
3. From 2021 the local authority breakdowns for Northern Ireland derived from the Annual Population Survey no longer represent the official well-being statistics used by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, as these have been changed to the Northern Ireland Continuous Household Survey.
4. Rounding processes may differ from those used in the datasets.

Figure 3: Personal well-being explorer

Average ratings of personal well-being, UK, years ending March 2012 to March 2021

[Download the data](#)

Notes:

1. Data are weighted mean averages.
2. The personal well-being measures were first collected in England, Scotland and Wales at local level in April 2011 while in Northern Ireland in April 2012. The first year from which we have a full UK baseline at local level is therefore the year ending March 2013.
3. From 2021 the local authority breakdowns for Northern Ireland derived from the Annual Population Survey no longer represent the official well-being statistics used by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, as these have been changed to the Northern Ireland Continuous Household Survey.
4. Rounding processes may differ from those used in the datasets.

4 . Personal well-being data

[Annual personal well being estimates](#)

Dataset | Released 15 October 2021

Annual estimates of life satisfaction, feeling that the things done in life are worthwhile, happiness and anxiety in the UK, by local authority and UK and country level.

[Quality information for annual personal well-being estimates](#)

Dataset | Released 15 October 2021

Confidence intervals and sample sizes for annual estimates of personal well-being in the UK, by local authority and UK and country level.

5 . Glossary

Personal well-being

Our personal well-being measures ask people to evaluate, on a scale of 0 to 10, how satisfied they are with their life overall, whether they feel they have meaning and purpose in their life, and about their emotions (happiness and anxiety) during a particular period.

Thresholds

Thresholds are used to present dispersion in the data. For the life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness questions, ratings are grouped in the following way:

- 0 to 4 (low)
- 5 to 6 (medium)
- 7 to 8 (high)
- 9 to 10 (very high)

For the anxiety question, ratings are grouped differently to reflect the fact that higher anxiety is associated with lower personal well-being. The ratings for anxiety are grouped as follows:

- 0 to 1 (very low)
- 2 to 3 (low)
- 4 to 5 (medium)
- 6 to 10 (high)

Mode effects

Testing has shown that people respond more positively to the personal well-being questions when interviewed by telephone rather than face-to-face. As people are interviewed using both methods on the Annual Population Survey, this will have some effect on the personal well-being results.

6 . Measuring the data

Since 2011, we have asked personal well-being questions to adults aged 16 years and over in the UK to better understand how they feel about their lives. This release presents headline results for the year ending March 2021, along with changes over time since we started collecting well-being data in 2011. It provides data at a national level, country and local authority level. The four personal well-being questions are:

- Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?
- Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?
- Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?
- Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?

People are asked to respond on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is "not at all" and 10 is "completely". We produce estimates of the mean ratings for all four personal well-being questions, as well as their distributions.

Annual Population Survey (APS)

The annual APS used in this analysis provides the timeliest data on well-being at the granular level by local authority. Further information on the APS can be found on the [Annual Population Survey \(APS\) QMI](#).

Quality and methodology information covering the elements of the APS related to well-being can be found in the [Personal well-being in the UK Quality and Methodology Information report](#).

There have been some data collection changes to the method used for the Annual Population Survey in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. As a result, the data for this period (April 2020 to March 2021) have a new weighting based on housing tenure. Further information can be found on the following web page: [Data collection changes because of the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic and their impact on estimating personal well-being](#).

7 . Strengths and limitations

Accuracy of the statistics: estimating and reporting uncertainty

The personal well-being estimates are from the Annual Population Survey (APS), which provides a representative sample of those living in private residential households in the UK. People living in communal establishments (such as care homes) or other non-household situations are not represented in this survey. This may be important in interpreting the findings in relation to those people reporting lower personal well-being.

As the number of people available in the sample gets smaller, the variability of the estimates that can be made from that sample size gets larger. Estimates for small groups -- for example, respondents from a single local authority (LA) -- which are based on small subsets of the APS, are less reliable and tend to be more volatile than for larger aggregated groups.

From the year ending March 2021, a new set of weights has been used to produce the annual estimates, which are more up to date than the previous weights. Reweighting of the periods prior to the year ending March 2021 will take place at a future date.

From the year ending March 2018, the sample for Northern Ireland received a boost, resulting in greater accuracy in a set of LAs that had had relatively small sample sizes compared with other LAs in the UK.

Statistical significance

Please note that:

- the [statistical significance](#) of differences noted within the release are determined based on non-overlapping [confidence intervals](#)
- comparisons have been based on unrounded data

8 . Related links

[Personal and economic well-being in Great Britain: May 2021](#)

Bulletin | Released on 25 May 2021

Estimates from multiple sources for personal and economic well-being to understand the economic impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on households in Great Britain from March 2020 to April 2021.

[Optimism and personal well-being: technical report](#)

Methodology Technical report | Released on 12 March 2020

Exploratory analysis of the relationship between optimism and personal well-being using questions from the 2019 Opinions and Lifestyle (OPN) survey.

[Data collection changes due to the pandemic and their impact on estimating personal well-being](#)

Methodology Technical report | Released on 4 February 2021

During the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the Office for National Statistics has published estimates of personal well-being using both the Annual Population Survey and the weekly module of the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey. This methodology article considers the impact that the pandemic has had on data collection, how this has influenced estimates of personal well-being and the comparability of these estimates.

[Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain: 8 October 2021](#)

Dataset | Released on 22 October 2021

Indicators from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey to understand the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on people, households and communities in Great Britain.

[Measures of national well-being dashboard](#)

Dashboard | Released on 23 October 2019

Latest data, times series data and detailed information for the measures of national well-being.

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) latest insights: Well-being](#)

Web portal | Regularly updated

[Coronavirus and anxiety, Great Britain: 3 April 2020 to 10 May 2020](#)

Article | Released 15 June 2020

The number of people reporting high levels of anxiety has sharply elevated during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This article will provide insights into which socio-demographic and economic factors were most associated with high levels of anxiety during the first weeks of lockdown.

[Beyond GDP: How ONS is developing wider measures of well-being](#)

Article | Released 4 February 2019

A summary of how the ONS is continuing to develop new ways of measuring and reporting the UK's economic and social progress and an introduction to the Personal and economic well-being publication.