Personal well-being in the UK: April 2022 to March 2023

Estimates of life satisfaction, worthwhile, happiness, and anxiety, by select geographies including local authority level and individual characteristics and circumstances.

Correction

13 November 2023 12:00

A correction has been made to the estimate for Northern Ireland in Figure 4 of the November 2023 bulletin. Figure 4 originally reported the average anxiety score of 3.30 (out of 10) for Northern Ireland. This has been updated to the correct figure of 2.91.

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1 . Main points

- Average ratings of personal well-being in the UK have declined across all measures in the year ending (YE) March 2023.

- Across all UK countries, average ratings of personal well-being appeared to decline between YE March 2022 and YE March 2023; these changes were only statistically significant in England.

- Most regions saw a decline in average life satisfaction ratings between the YE March 2022 and YE March 2023; the North West, Yorkshire and the Humber, East Midlands, and the East of England all saw statistically significant declines.

- Adults with "very bad" self-rated health reported the highest proportion of poor well-being across all measures; over half (57.4%) reported high levels of anxiety and over 4 in 10 (46.5%) adults reported low levels of happiness compared with those with "very good health" (14.8% and 3.8%, respectively).

- A greater proportion of women reported high levels of anxiety than men, over a quarter (26.6%) of women, compared with one in five men (20.0%).

- Self-reported health status and marital status had the largest contribution on life satisfaction, with self-reported health status having a large contribution on average ratings of all personal well-being measures.

Because of small sample sizes and large confidence intervals, estimates for local authorities should not be ranked against each other. Estimates are intended for local authorities to compare over time and with other local authorities of a similar population size and structure.

2 . Personal well-being in the UK

Rates of personal well-being have been affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. At the start of the pandemic, ratings declined, followed by an improvement in the YE March 2022. Average ratings for all measures of personal well-being have since declined in the latest YE March 2023 (Figure 1). The average ratings for YE March 2023 were:

- 7.45 out of 10 for life satisfaction (7.54 in the previous year)

- 7.73 out of 10 for feeling that the things done in life are worthwhile (7.77 in the previous year)

- 7.39 out of 10 for happiness yesterday (7.45 in the previous year)

- 3.23 out of 10 for anxiety yesterday (3.12 in the previous year)

Average ratings of personal well-being still remain below pre-pandemic levels.

Longer-term trends are discussed in our previous bulletin, Personal well-being in the UK: April 2021 to March 2022.

Figure 1: Personal well-being declined in the year ending March 2023, following improvements in the year ending March 2022

Average (mean) personal well-being ratings, UK, year ending March 2012 to March 2023.

Notes:

1. Y-axis does not necessarily start from zero.

2. Data are weighted mean averages.

Adults reporting low levels of personal well-being across the UK

The poor well-being thresholds reported in this bulletin refer to low levels of life satisfaction, worthwhile, happiness and high levels of anxiety, for further information see Section 5: Glossary.

Between the YE ending March 2022 and YE March 2023, the proportion of people reporting low levels of life satisfaction, feeling that things done in life are worthwhile, happiness, or high levels of anxiety increased. However, the change in happiness ratings to the previous year were not statistically significant. Of those surveyed:

- 5.7% reported low levels of life satisfaction (5.1% to YE March 2022)

- 4.5% reported low levels of feeling that things done in life are worthwhile (4.1% in the previous year)

- 8.9% reported low levels of happiness (8.5% in the previous year)

- 23.4% reported high levels of anxiety (22.5% in the previous year)

The proportion of people reporting poor well-being across the four measures remains higher than pre-pandemic levels (YE March 2019) (Figure 2).

Figure 2: The proportion of people reporting poor well-being increased in the year ending March 2023

Proportion of people reporting different well-being thresholds for life satisfaction, worthwhile, happiness or anxiety in the UK, year ending March 2012 to March 2023

Notes:

1. Please see Section 5: Glossary for information on the threshold grouping of ratings.

Personal well-being by country and region

Average ratings for life satisfaction, feeling that the things done in life are worthwhile, and happiness appeared to decline for England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, and improved slightly for Scotland in the latest YE March 2023, compared with the previous year. Average ratings of anxiety increased (declined) for all four countries (Figures 3 and 4).

However, statistically significant changes were only seen across the measures for England. Lack of statistical significance in changes in the devolved countries may be because of less data collected and therefore less certainty of estimates. For more information, see our Uncertainty and how we measure it in our surveys methodology.

Figure 3: Average ratings of life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness declined in England between the year ending March 2022 and year ending March 2023

Average life satisfaction, happiness and worthwhile ratings by country in the years ending March 2022 and March 2023

Notes:

1. Data are weighted mean averages.

Figure 4: Average ratings of anxiety declined in England between the year ending March 2022 and year ending March 2023

Average anxiety ratings by country in the years ending March 2022 and March 2023

Notes:

1. Data are weighted mean averages.

When considering regions across England between the YE March 2022 and YE March 2023, the following regions saw a statistically significant decline in average ratings of life satisfaction:

- North West (0.11 point decrease)

- Yorkshire and The Humber (0.15 point decrease)

- East Midlands (0.15 point decrease)

- East of England (0.15 point decrease)

Average ratings for happiness and feeling that the things done in life are worthwhile decreased across all regions except the West Midlands, which showed a slight increase compared with the previous year. However, these differences were not statistically significant.

Average ratings of anxiety increased slightly (declined) across all regions between the latest year and the previous year. The exception was the East Midlands, where the average rating of anxiety stayed the same (3.08 in the latest and previous year). However, these changes were not statistically significant.

The four well-being measures are available at a country, region, county, local authority and unitary authority level in our Annual personal well-being estimates dataset, published alongside this bulletin.

More timely estimates of personal well-being are also published in our:

- quarterly dataset by age, sex, country and region, including seasonally adjusted data at the UK level

- fortnightly estimates published in the public opinions and social trends bulletin

Personal well-being by local area

Our personal well-being explorer tools shown in Figures 5 and 6 give a detailed view of well-being in local areas.

Estimates are intended for local authorities to compare over time and with other local authorities of a similar population size and structure. Because of small sample sizes and large confidence intervals, estimates for local authorities should not be ranked against each other. For more information see our Uncertainty and how we measure it for our surveys methodology.

Figure 5: Personal well-being interactive map

Average ratings of personal well-being, UK, years ending March 2012 to March 2023

Notes:

1. Data are weighted mean averages.

2. Because of boundary changes in local authorities in Northern Ireland in 2015, data for Local Government Districts in Northern Ireland are only available from 2012 to 2013. Rounding processes may differ from those used in the datasets.

Figure 6: Personal well-being explorer

Average ratings of personal well-being, UK, years ending March 2012 to March 2023

Notes:

1. Data are weighted mean averages.

2. Because of boundary changes in local authorities in Northern Ireland in 2015, data for Local Government Districts in Northern Ireland are only available from 2012 to 2013.

3. Rounding processes may differ from those used in the datasets.

3 . Personal well-being and individual characteristics and circumstances

In July 2023, we published our [Review of the Measures of National Well-being](#), where one of the recommendations was to provide further demographic breakdowns to better highlight inequalities across the UK. This section provides estimates of adults with low personal well-being by both an individual's "characteristics" (such as age and sex) and "circumstances" (such as health, disability, and marital status) for the latest year ending (YE) March 2023.

Further breakdowns for other characteristics (such as ethnicity) and circumstances (such as employment status, housing tenure and religion) are available in the [accompanying datasets](#).

Characteristics of adults reporting poor well-being

In the latest YE March 2023, the proportion of adults reporting poor personal well-being (low life satisfaction, worthwhile, happiness and high anxiety) was highest among adults:

- self-reporting "very bad health"

- reporting a disability

- who were separated

- with no qualifications

Sex

The proportion of women (26.6%) reporting high levels of anxiety was significantly higher than for men (20.0%) in the YE March 2023. There were no statistically significant differences in the proportion of low levels of life satisfaction, worthwhile, and happiness reported by men and women.

Age

A greater proportion of adults aged 50 to 54 and 55 to 59 years reported low levels of life satisfaction (7.9% for both groups) and low levels of happiness (10.3% and 10.9%, respectively). The greatest proportion reporting high levels of anxiety (25.1%) were also those aged 50 to 54 years. While the highest proportion reporting low levels of feeling things done in life are worthwhile (6.8%) were those aged 85 to 89 years.

Health status

The proportion of adults reporting poor personal well-being increased as self-reported health worsened. Over 4 in 10 adults with "very bad health" reported low levels of life satisfaction (43.5%) and happiness (46.5%) compared with those in "very good health" (1.4% and 3.8%, respectively). A higher proportion with "very bad health" also reported high levels of anxiety (57.4%) compared with those in "very good health" (14.8%).

Disability status

A greater proportion of disabled adults reported poor personal well-being (13.4% reported low life satisfaction, 10.6% reported low worthwhile, 17.6% reported low happiness and 35.8% reported high anxiety) than non-disabled adults (2.6%, 2.0%, 5.5% and 18.2%, respectively).

Marital status and dependent children

Adults separated from their partner were more likely to report poor well-being compared with those who were married or in a civil partnership (Figure 7). Those who were widowed (including surviving civil partners), are more likely to be clustered in the older age groups. Therefore, well-being ratings for this group may be affected by other factors. Of adults who were separated:

- over 1 in 10 (12.0%) reported low life satisfaction, significantly higher than adults who were divorced (9.2%), widowed (8.3%), single (6.7%), or married (3.3%)

- they were most likely to report low worthwhile (6.9%) compared with 2.2% of married individuals, and low happiness (14.1%), compared with adults who were widowed (11.2%), single (10.4%), or married (6.2%)

- around 3 in 10 (30.6%) reported high levels of anxiety compared with those who were single (25.6%), divorced (25.3%), or married (20.5%)

Figure 7: The proportion of people reporting low levels of life satisfaction, worthwhile or happiness, or high levels of anxiety was highest among those who were separated in the year ending March 2023

Proportion of people reporting poor well-being thresholds for life satisfaction, worthwhile, happiness or anxiety, by marital status, in the year ending March 2023

Figure 7: The proportion of people reporting low levels of life satisfaction, worthwhile or happiness, or high levels of anxiety was highest among those who were separated in the year ending March 2023

Proportion of people reporting poor well-being thresholds for life satisfaction, worthwhile, happiness or anxiety, by marital status, in the year ending March 2023

Single   Married   Separated   Divorced   Widowed
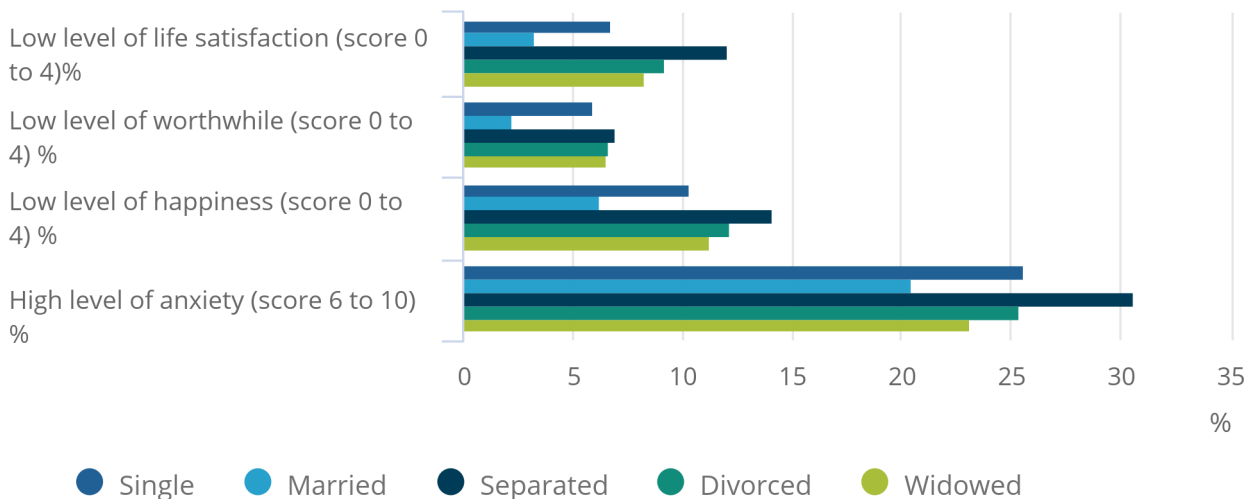
Source: Office for National Statistics - Annual Population Survey

Notes:

1. For the life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness questions a rating of 0 to 4 (out of 10) is low. For anxiety, a rating of 6 to 10 (out of 10) is high.

Parents living with a dependent child aged under 19 years were less likely to report low life satisfaction (4.4%), worthwhile (2.5%), and happiness (7.6%) than those without dependent children (6.2%, 5.2% and 9.4%, respectively). Similar levels of high anxiety were reported for parents with dependent children (23.5%) and for those without (23.3%).

Highest level of qualification

A greater proportion of adults (aged 16 to 69 years or in employment) with "no qualifications" reported low personal well-being than those with any other type of qualification:

- 14.0% reported low levels of life satisfaction

- 11.3% reported low levels of worthwhile

- 15.9% reported low levels of happiness

- 30.3% reported high levels of anxiety

Adults whose highest level of qualification was a degree equivalent or above were least likely to report poor well-being (3.8% reported low life satisfaction, 2.9% reported low worthwhile, and 7.2% reported low happiness). Meanwhile, those whose highest level of qualification was higher education were least likely to report high levels of anxiety (21.7%).

Most important factors affecting life satisfaction

We conducted a linear regression that assessed the likelihood of reporting higher life satisfaction, after controlling for a variety of individual characteristics and circumstances (Figure 8). We focus on life satisfaction as our [Personal and economic well-being article](#) has shown we can explain more of the variance in life satisfaction than the other three measures of personal well-being. See our [Annual personal well-being estimates dataset](#) for regression estimates for the other three personal well-being measures.

Regression techniques can identify the strength of these relationships and can be used for estimation (how likely something is to occur given certain conditions). It can estimate how likely someone is to report higher life satisfaction given their age group or their marital status, but it cannot explain cause and effect.

For further explanation, see [Section 6: Measuring the data](#).

After controlling for a range of factors, the following individual characteristics and circumstances were shown to have the largest contribution to adults' average ratings of life satisfaction:

- self-reported health (large contribution)

- marital status (large contribution)

- employment status (moderate contribution)

Figure 8: Associations between average ratings of life satisfaction and individual characteristics and circumstances

Great Britain, April 2022 to March 2023

Notes:

1. The percentage (%) indicates the difference of average reported life satisfaction between someone with a particular characteristic or circumstance and someone else with a different characteristic or circumstance.

2. A positive percentage denotes a respondent being more likely to report higher life satisfaction and a negative percentage denotes respondents being less likely to report a higher life satisfaction against the relevant reference category.

Self-reported health had a larger contribution on reported life satisfaction than any other characteristic or circumstance considered in the analysis. Adults in Great Britain reporting "good health" rate their life satisfaction 30.0% higher than those reporting "very bad health" and 16.6% higher than those reporting "bad health" in YE March 2023. Self-reported health was the only circumstance or characteristic to have a large contribution on feeling things done in life are worthwhile, happiness, and anxiety.

Marital status also showed to be a large contributor to adults' ratings of their life satisfaction. People who are married or in a civil partnership are most likely to report higher life satisfaction than those of any other marital status. Adults who are married or in a civil partnership rate their life satisfaction 7.3% higher than those who are widowed and 8.1% higher than those who are single. They were also more likely to rate their life satisfaction higher than those who are separated from a partner (5.1%) or those who are divorced (4.7%).

Adults' employment status and highest level of education had a moderate contribution towards their life satisfaction ratings. Compared with employees (both part-time and full-time workers), those who were economically inactive because of temporary sickness were 8.9% more likely to report lower life satisfaction ratings. Meanwhile, those who were inactive because of long-term sickness or disability were 5.1% more likely to report lower life satisfaction than employees. Adults who were retired were 4.4% more likely to report higher levels of life satisfaction than employees.

4 . Personal well-being in the UK data

[Annual personal well-being estimates](#)
Dataset | Released 7 November 2023
Annual estimates of life satisfaction, feeling that the things done in life are worthwhile, happiness and anxiety in the UK, by national, country, regional, county, local and unitary authority level and personal characteristics including analysis on the characteristics that are most likely to impact personal well-being.

[Quality information for annual personal well-being estimates](#)
Dataset | Released 7 November 2023
Confidence intervals and sample sizes for annual estimates of personal well-being in the UK, by national, country, regional, county, local and unitary authority level and personal characteristics including analysis on the characteristics that are most likely to impact personal well-being.

5 . Glossary

Personal well-being

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.

For more information, see our Personal well-being user guidance.

Thresholds

Thresholds are used to present dispersion in the data. For the life satisfaction, feeling that the things done in life are worthwhile and happiness questions, ratings are grouped. The ratings are:

- 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 are:

- 0 to 1 (very low)

- 2 to 3 (low)

- 4 to 5 (medium)

- 6 to 10 (high)

Ordinary least squares regression

An important assumption in ordinary least squares (OLS) regression is that the dependent variable is continuous. The personal well-being survey responses, however, are discrete. OLS regression assumes that the values of the dependent variable (for example, personal well-being ratings) are cardinal (the interval between any pair of categories such as between 2 and 3 is of the same magnitude as the interval between any other similar pair, such as between 6 and 7). As the personal well-being responses are rankings, we cannot know whether, for example, the distance between 2 and 3 is the same as the distance between 6 and 7.

However, OLS may still be implemented when there are more than five levels of the ordered categorical responses, particularly when there is a clear ordering of the categories, for example, levels of happiness, with 0 representing the lowest category and 10 representing the highest category (for an example see Ordinary Least Squares Regression of Ordered Categorical Data: Inferential Implications for Practice).

Probit regression

An alternative method is to treat the response variable as ordinal and use probit regression, which can deal with ordinal data. Ordinal data values can be ranked or ordered on a scale, such as from 0 to 10, with each higher category representing a higher degree of personal well-being (or lower personal well-being in the case of anxiety).

Unlike the OLS method, probit regression does not assume that the differences between the ordinal categories in the personal well-being rankings are equal. It is important to note that probit performs several regressions simultaneously, assuming that the models are identical for all scores. The latter assumption can be relaxed, but the interpretation of the results becomes more difficult.

The analysis was conducted in both OLS and probit regression methods. This also acts as a sensitivity check for the robustness of the OLS results, as the main assumptions for the OLS regression may not hold for the ordered personal well-being data. Several studies applied both methods to personal well-being data and found that there is little difference between the OLS and the probit (for example, see How important is methodology for the estimates of the determinants of happiness?).

Statistical significance

Where comparisons between estimates have been made, associated confidence intervals have been used to determine the statistical significance of the differences (see our Uncertainty and how we measure it for our surveys methodology for definitions). The figures in this bulletin have been rounded. However, comparisons have been based on unrounded data.

For the regression analysis, characteristics were found to be significant based on the p-value associated with each characteristic. The coefficients were then assessed alongside a confidence interval around each category of interest.

6 . Measuring the data

The data in this release come from the Annual Population Survey (APS). 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. Further information on the APS can be found on our APS Quality and Methodology Information (QMI).

From 2021, the local authority breakdowns for Northern Ireland derived from the APS no longer represent the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency's (NISRA's) official statistics on personal well-being for Northern Ireland. This is because they use an alternative survey source: The Continuous Household Survey.

Quality information for annual personal well-being estimates can be found in the accompanying dataset.

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.

Prior to March 2020, this will have had a particular impact on local authorities in the far north of Scotland (north of the Caledonian Canal), where all respondents complete the survey via telephone.

Weighting

Datasets are weighted to reflect the size and composition of the general population by using the most up-to-date official population data. Weighting factors account for the design of the survey (which does not include communal establishments) and the composition of the local population by age and sex.

The APS datasets are reweighted historically to use more up-to-date mid-year population estimates and subnational projection estimates. For more information, see Volume 6 of the APS user guide.

Why we undertake a regression analysis

To understand the relationship between life satisfaction (dependent variable), individual characteristics, and health and socio-economic circumstances (independent variables), regression analysis has been used to measure the size and strength of the relationship between two variables, while holding all other variables in the model equal.

While regression analysis can tell us the strength of the relationship between one variable and another, it cannot tell us about causality. The variables used in the APS regression models and their corresponding reference category were chosen to replicate our previous APS regression model datasets where possible.

The regression analysis does not include respondents from Northern Ireland, as some of the place related variables, such as rural or urban identification, could not be created from the data available.

Since March 2020, the APS has largely been conducted over the telephone for respondents in all local authorities. A very small number of respondents have been interviewed face-to-face since September 2021. Therefore, we did not include this variable in the regression model reported.

Missing values were excluded from the regression analysis where a response was not provided for a question or variable included in the model.

Regression techniques used

Ordinary least squares (OLS) and probit models were applied throughout the analysis. The main advantage of OLS is that the interpretation of the regression results is more straightforward than in alternative methods. Probit models were applied as important assumptions for the OLS regression may not hold for the ordered personal well-being data.

Regression results can be expressed in terms of differences in how people rated their life satisfaction on a scale from 0 to 10. The regression coefficient shows the number of life satisfaction points a person with a given characteristic would expect to have compared with the reference group. The findings can be expressed in terms of the percentage difference in average reported life satisfaction between someone with a particular characteristic or circumstance and someone else with a different characteristic or circumstance. A positive percentage denotes a respondent being more likely to report higher life satisfaction and a negative percentage denotes respondents being less likely to report a higher life satisfaction.

It should be noted that our regression models explain between 11% and 22% of the differences in levels of personal well-being between people, suggesting that most of what influences a person's well-being is not explained by our data. This is to be expected, as many factors that affect well-being are not quantified in our data sources or included in our regression models. These include genetic and personality factors, which have been claimed to account for about half of the variation in personal well-being in Ed Diener's Lessons from subjective well-being paper.

7 . Strengths and limitations

Strengths

- The annual estimates of personal well-being have been certified by the UK Statistics Authority as being compliant with the [Code of Practice for Official Statistics (PDF, 42.6KB)](#) and are designated National Statistics.

- Personal well-being questions are [harmonised by the Government Statistical Service (GSS)](#), making the data more comparable, consistent and coherent.

- The Annual Population Survey (APS) provides a representative sample of those living in private residential households in the UK.

- The annual data from the APS used in this analysis provides the timeliest data on well-being at the granular level by local authority.

- Estimates for the year ending (YE) March 2020 and YE March 2021 have been revised based on a new set of weights, which are based on the latest population estimates available at the time.

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

Limitations

- People living in communal establishments (such as care homes), or other non-household situations are not represented in the APS.

- Estimates for small groups (for example, respondents from a single local authority) are less reliable and tend to be more volatile than for larger aggregated groups, as the sample size is smaller.

- We have seen a decline in the number of responses to the APS, which can lead to higher sampling variability, especially for estimates for smaller geographies and subgroups of the population; as a result, estimates, especially for smaller geographies or groups, should be used with caution.

Further information can be found in our [Personal well-being in the UK Quality and Methodology Information report](#).

8 . Related links

[UK Measures of National Well-being Dashboard](#)
Data dashboard | Released 11 August 2023
A visual dashboard providing an overview of how people in the UK are doing across 10 domains of national well-being. National level data, trend over time and the assessment of change are presented for each measure. The data sources and associated insight reports for each measure can be accessed through the dashboard by following the source link.

[Quarterly personal well-being estimates - non-seasonally adjusted](#)
Dataset | Released on 11 August 2023
Non-seasonally adjusted quarterly estimates of life satisfaction, feeling that the things done in life are worthwhile, happiness and anxiety in the UK.

[Quality of information for quarterly personal well-being estimates](#)
Dataset | Released on 11 August 2023
Confidence intervals and sample sizes for quarterly estimates of personal well-being in the UK.

[Quarterly personal well-being estimates - seasonally adjusted](#)
Dataset | Released on 11 August 2023
Seasonally adjusted quarterly estimates of life satisfaction, feeling that the things done in life are worthwhile, happiness and anxiety in the UK.

[Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: 18 to 29 October 2023](#)
Bulletin | Released on 3 November 2023
Social insights on daily life and events, including the cost of living, location of work, health and well-being from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN).

9 . Cite this statistical bulletin

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