

Statistical bulletin

Disability, well-being and loneliness, UK: 2019

Personal well-being (UK) and loneliness (England) outcomes for disabled adults, with analysis by age, sex, impairment type, impairment severity and country.

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1 . Other pages in this release

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has explored outcomes for disabled people across a number of areas of life, through a series of bulletins – other pages in this release include:

- [Improving disability data in the UK](#)
- [Disability and education](#)
- [Disability and employment](#)
- [Disability and housing](#)
- [Disability and crime](#)
- [Disability and social participation](#)

Aims of this work

This work aims to present comparable information that uses the Government Statistical Service's (GSS) harmonised definition of “disability”, and as far as possible presents UK analysis, alongside intersections with other protected characteristics.

Definition of disability

For the purposes of this analysis, a person is considered to have a disability if they have a self-reported long-standing illness, condition or impairment that causes difficulty with day-to-day activities. This definition is consistent with the Equality Act 2010 and the GSS harmonised definition. For further information on disability and impairment definitions see the [Glossary](#).

Article scope

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) routinely reports on personal well-being but does not routinely disaggregate this information by disability. Related to well-being is loneliness, where disabled people have previously been shown to be at a disadvantage ([ONS, 2018](#)).

This bulletin uses the Annual Population Survey (APS) to explore outcomes of personal well-being for disabled adults, aged 16 to 64 years, in the UK, covering the period 2014 to 2019. The Community Life Survey (CLS) is used to explore loneliness for disabled and non-disabled adults, aged 16 to 64 years, in England, covering the period 2014 to 2018.

2 . Main Points

- Disabled people's average ratings are lower than those for non-disabled people for happiness, worthwhile and life satisfaction measures.
- Average anxiety ratings are higher for disabled people at 4.27 out of 10, compared with 2.66 out of 10 for non-disabled people.
- Disabled people with a mental impairment as a main health problem have the poorest well-being ratings.
- Disabled people whose impairments affect them more severely have poorer well-being ratings than disabled people whose impairments affect them less severely.
- The proportion of disabled people (13.3%) who report feeling lonely "often or always" is almost four times that of non-disabled people (3.4%), with the greatest disparity for young adults, aged 16 to 24 years old.

3 . Well-being by disability (UK)

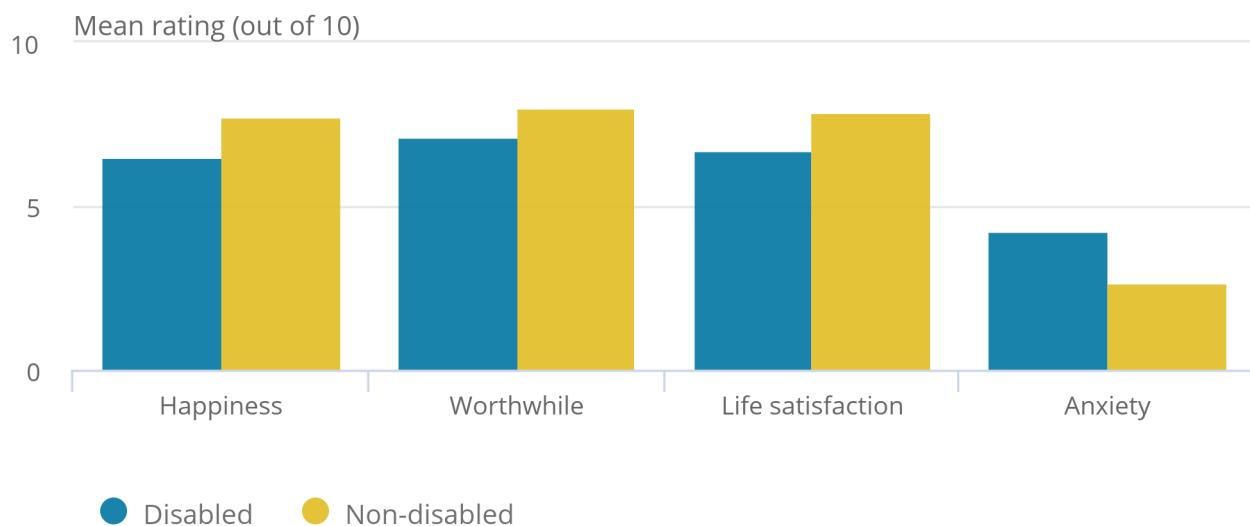
Well-being measures are taken from the Annual Population Survey (APS), using UK data from the year ending June 2019. For time series analysis, the data go back to the year ending June 2014, as this is the earliest period available for disability data using the harmonised definition (see the [glossary](#)).

Figure 1: Disabled people report lower well-being levels than non-disabled people

Average well-being ratings for disabled and non-disabled people, UK, 2018 to 2019

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Average well-being ratings for disabled and non-disabled people, UK, 2018 to 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Population Survey

Disabled people report lower well-being levels than non-disabled people

On average, disabled adults have poorer ratings than non-disabled adults on all four personal well-being measures. In the year ending June 2019, the mean scores on these measures were:

- for happiness yesterday, 6.54 out of 10 for disabled people, compared with 7.71 for non-disabled people
- for feeling that the things done in life are worthwhile, 7.09 out of 10 for disabled people, compared with 8.03 for non-disabled people
- for life satisfaction, 6.68 out of 10 for disabled people, compared with 7.90 for non-disabled people
- for anxiety yesterday, 4.27 out of 10 for disabled people, compared with 2.66 for non-disabled people
(higher numbers equate to poorer well-being in this measure)

Between 2014 and 2019, there were small increases in the average ratings for for happiness, worthwhile and life satisfaction for both disabled and non-disabled people. However, over this period the differences between disabled and non-disabled people on these measures remained consistent. See the [Disability and well-being dataset Table 1](#) for further information.

4 . Loneliness by disability (England)

Loneliness data are taken from the Community Life Survey, using England-only data from the year ending March 2018. For time series analysis, the data go back to year ending April 2014, as this is the earliest period available for disability data using the harmonised definition (see the [glossary](#)).

A higher percentage of disabled people feel lonely compared with non-disabled people

The proportion of disabled people who reported feeling lonely “often or always” was nearly four times that of non-disabled people. In the year ending March 2018, 13.3% of disabled people reported that they felt lonely “often or always”, compared with only 3.4% for non-disabled people.

Between 2014 and 2018, there were no significant changes in the proportions who reported feeling lonely “often or always” for both disabled or non-disabled people. See the [Disability and loneliness dataset Table 1](#) for further information.

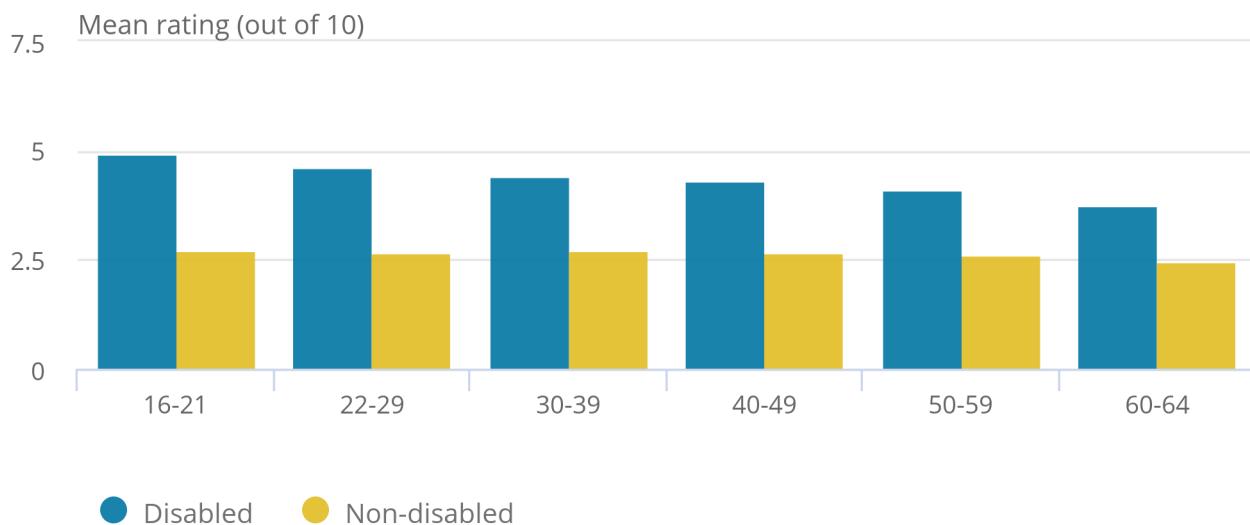
5 . Age

Figure 2: Differences between disabled and non-disabled people in average anxiety ratings decrease with age

Average anxiety ratings for disabled and non-disabled people by age group, UK, 2018 to 2019

Figure 2: Differences between disabled and non-disabled people in average anxiety ratings decrease with age

Average anxiety ratings for disabled and non-disabled people by age group, UK, 2018 to 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics - Annual Population Survey

The difference between disabled and non-disabled people in average anxiety ratings becomes smaller in older age groups. In the 16 to 21 years age-group the average rating is 2.19 points higher for disabled people compared with non-disabled people; in the 60 to 64 years age-group the difference is 1.32 points. This effect is also seen with loneliness where disparities between disabled and non-disabled people are smallest in the older age-groups.

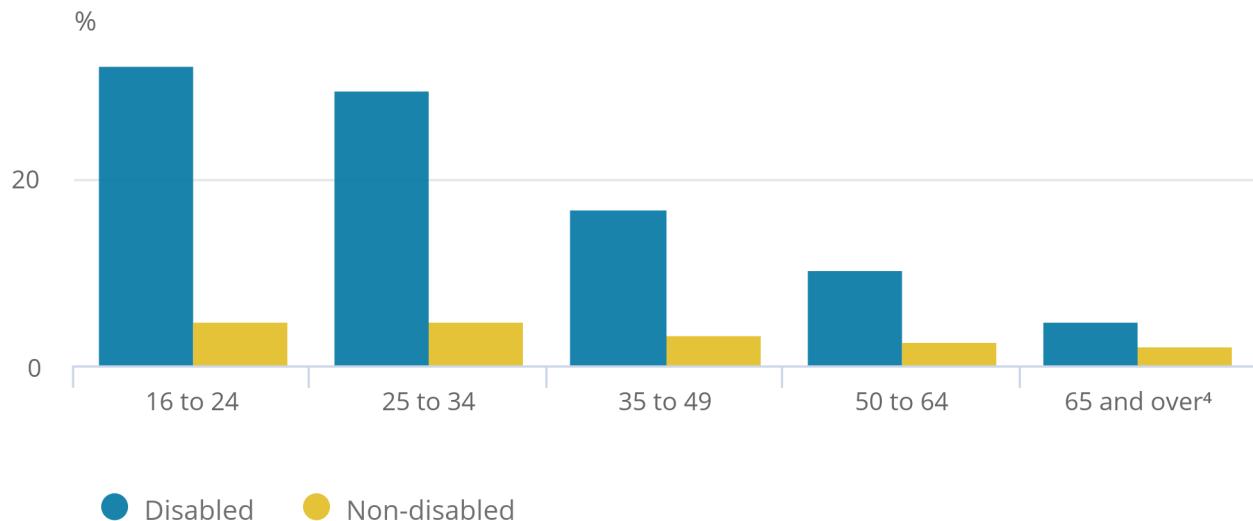
However, differences in average happiness, worthwhile and life satisfaction ratings between disabled and non-disabled people have little variation as people get older.

Figure 3: The disparity in the proportion of people who feel lonely is largest in the younger age groups

Proportion of disabled and non-disabled people who feel lonely regularly by age group, England, 2017 to 2018

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Proportion of disabled and non-disabled people who feel lonely regularly by age group, England, 2017 to 2018



Source: Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport – Community Life Survey

Notes:

1. Figures for 65 and over should be treated with caution due to low sample sizes (<31).

In all age groups the proportion of people who felt lonely “often or always” was higher for disabled people than for non-disabled people. The proportion of disabled people who reported feeling lonely “often or always” was largest in the younger age groups and decreased with age.

The disparity between disabled and non-disabled people, in terms of the proportion of people who said that they felt lonely “often or always” decreased with age, from 27.4 percentage points in the 16 to 24 years age group to 2.7 percentage points in the 65 years and over age group.

6 . Sex

Both disabled men and disabled women have poorer well-being than their non-disabled counterparts

The differences between disabled and non-disabled people on all four measures of well-being are similar for both men and women. For disabled men, average happiness, worthwhile and life satisfaction ratings were between 1.03 and 1.32 points lower than for non-disabled men, while anxiety ratings were scored 1.49 higher, at 4.00 out of 10. For disabled women, average well-being ratings were between 0.92 and 1.16 points lower, with anxiety scored 1.65 higher, at 4.46 out of 10.

Average life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness ratings are higher for women than they are for men and this is true for both disabled and non-disabled people. Conversely, the average rating for anxiety is poorer for women and this is also true for both disabled and non-disabled people.

See the [Disability and well-being dataset](#) Table 3 for further information on the analysis of well-being by disability and sex.

Both disabled men and women were more likely to report feeling lonely “often or always”, compared with their non-disabled counterparts. When comparing disabled and non-disabled men, there was a difference of 10.5 percentage points. For women, this difference was 9.3 percentage points.

See the [Disability and loneliness dataset](#) Table 4 for further information on the analysis of loneliness by disability and sex.

7 . Impairment type

Figure 4: Disabled people with a mental impairment as a main health issue have the poorest well-being ratings

Average well-being ratings of people with different impairment types, UK, 2018 to 2019

Figure 4: Disabled people with a mental impairment as a main health issue have the poorest well-being ratings

Average well-being ratings of people with different impairment types, UK, 2018 to 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Population Survey

Notes:

1. Main impairment only includes disabled adults aged 16 to 64.

The average well-being ratings of disabled people vary with impairment type. Whilst the average rating for each well-being measure was poorer for disabled people in all impairment types (physical, mental or other), well-being measures were notably poor for those with a mental impairment as their main health problem.

See the [Disability and well-being dataset](#) Table 4 for further information on the analysis of well-being by disability and impairment type.

Analysis of loneliness by impairment type has not been included as these data were not collected on the Community Life Survey.

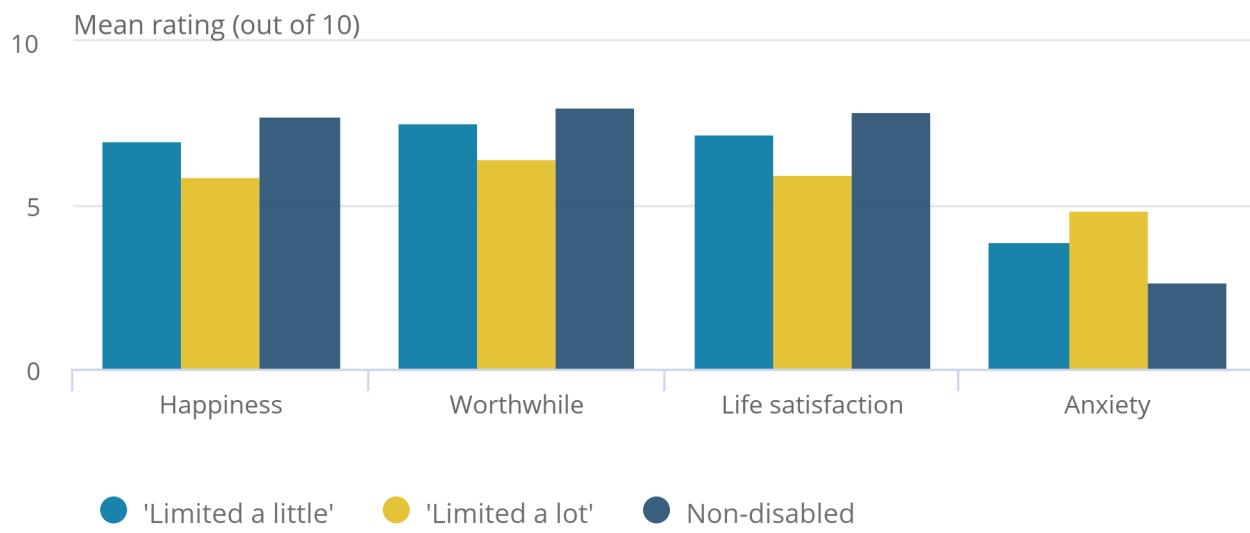
8 . Impairment severity

Figure 5: Disabled people who are "limited a lot" have poorer well-being

Average well-being ratings by impairment severity, UK, 2018 to 2019

Figure 5: Disabled people who are "limited a lot" have poorer well-being

Average well-being ratings by impairment severity, UK, 2018 to 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Population Survey

Disabled people who self-report that their ability to carry-out day-to-day activities is "limited a lot" by their impairment have a mean anxiety rating of 4.85 out of 10; this compares with 3.87 out of 10 for disabled people who report their ability is "limited a little" by their impairment and 2.66 out of 10 for non-disabled people. This effect, of poorer outcomes for those "limited a lot" by their impairment, is seen on all four of the well-being measures.

The effect of poorer average well-being ratings in disabled people who are more severely affected by their impairment is present in people of all impairment types: mental, physical and other. The poorest well-being ratings are seen in disabled people who both have a mental impairment as a main health problem and whose ability to carry-out day-to-day activities is "limited a lot".

The greatest disparity is in anxiety ratings where disabled people, whose main health problem is a mental impairment and whose ability to carry-out day-to-day tasks were stated as "limited a lot", have an average rating of 6.13 out of 10, compared with 2.66 out of 10 for non-disabled people.

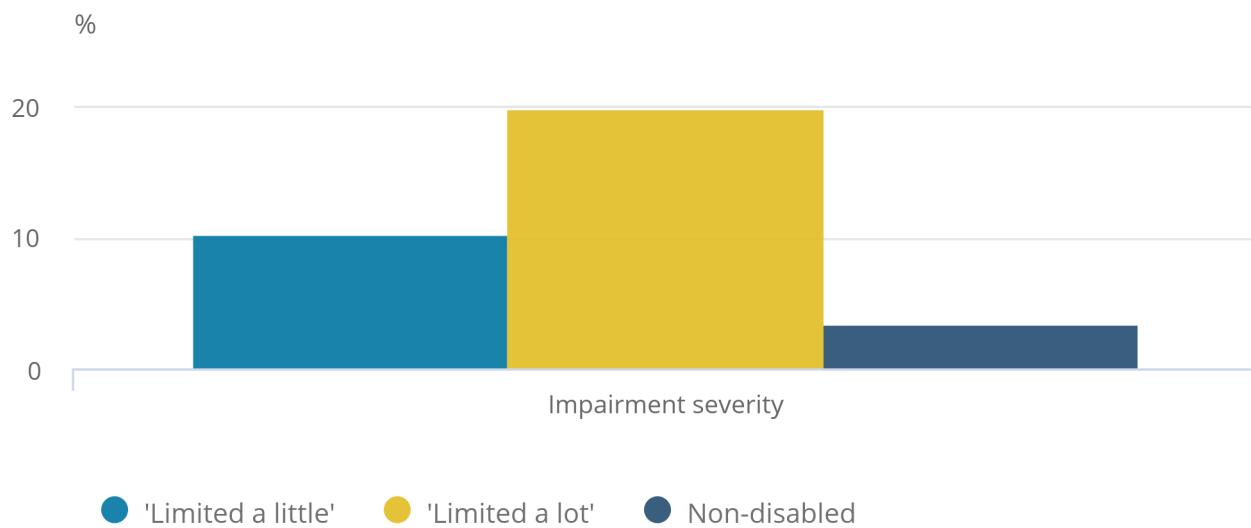
See the [Disability and well-being dataset](#) Table 5 and Table 6 for further information on the analysis of well-being by disability and impairment severity.

Figure 6: The proportion of people who feel lonely is highest in disabled people who are more severely affected by their impairment

Proportion of people who feel lonely "often or always" by impairment severity, England, 2017 to 2018

Figure 6: The proportion of people who feel lonely is highest in disabled people who are more severely affected by their impairment

Proportion of people who feel lonely "often or always" by impairment severity, England, 2017 to 2018



Source: Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport – Community Life Survey

Disabled people whose ability to carry-out day-to-day tasks are "limited a lot" (19.8%) are also almost twice as likely to feel lonely "often or always", compared with those who are "limited a little" (10.3%).

9 . Country

Trends vary for each of the well-being measures. The smallest disparities between disabled and non-disabled people were seen in England on all four measures. The differences in average well-being ratings were greater in Wales than in England on worthwhile, life satisfaction and anxiety.

The largest disparities between disabled and non-disabled people were seen in Northern Ireland and Scotland for happiness, life satisfaction and anxiety. Whilst these disparities were not significantly different between these two countries, they were different from the other UK countries.

See the [Disability and well-being dataset](#) Table 7 for further information on well-being by disability and country analysis.

10 . Disability, well-being and loneliness data

Well-being data

[Disability and well-being dataset](#)

Dataset | Released 2 December 2019

Average well-being ratings of disabled and non-disabled people in the UK, with breakdowns of year, impairment type, impairment severity, age, sex and country.

Loneliness data

[Disability and loneliness dataset](#)

Dataset | Released 2 December 2019

The proportion of disabled and non-disabled people in England who feel lonely "often or always", with breakdowns of year, impairment severity, age and sex.

11 . Glossary

Disability

To define disability in this publication we refer to the [Government Statistical Service \(GSS\) harmonised "core" definition](#): this identifies "disabled" as a person who has a physical or mental health condition or illness that has lasted or is expected to last 12 months or more, that reduces their ability to carry-out day-to-day activities.

The GSS definition is designed to reflect the definitions that appear in legal terms in the [Disability Discrimination Act 1995 \(DDA\)](#) and the subsequent [Equality Act 2010](#).

The GSS harmonised questions are asked of the respondent in the survey, meaning that disability status is self-reported.

Impairment

An impairment is defined as any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last 12 months or more. Respondents were presented with a list of impairments and then asked to select all that apply and subsequently their "main health problem". The commentary in this bulletin refers to the main health problem. Analysis is limited to those who are also defined as disabled and does not explore where disabled people experienced more than one impairment. For further details see [Volume 3: Detail of Labour Force Survey variables](#).

Mental impairments

Mental impairments are those with "depression, bad nerves or anxiety", "epilepsy", "learning difficulties" or "mental illness or nervous disorder".

Physical impairments

Physical impairments are those with "problems with arms or hands", "problems with legs or feet", "problems with back or neck", "difficulty in seeing", "difficulty in hearing", "speech impediment", "severe disfigurement, skin conditions or allergies", "chest or breathing problems" "heart, blood pressure, or blood circulation problems", "stomach, liver, kidney or digestion" or "diabetes".

Other impairments

Other impairments are those with "progressive illness not included elsewhere (for example, cancer, symptomatic HIV or multiple sclerosis)" or "other health problems or disabilities".

Severity

Disabled people whose ability to carry-out day-to-day activities is self-reported as "limited a lot" or "limited a little" by their impairment. Respondents were asked: "Does your condition or illness reduce your ability to carry out day-to-day activities?" with the responses, "yes, a lot" and "yes, a little" being taken to indicate severity of disability.

Personal well-being

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.

Loneliness

Those who feel lonely "often or always" refers to those who when asked: "How often do you feel lonely?" selected the answer "often or always" from the following list of responses: "often or always", "sometimes", "occasionally", "hardly ever" and "never". These responses have been grouped together into an "other" category. This analysis is available in the [datasets](#).

Statistical significance

Any changes or differences mentioned in this bulletin are "statistically significant". The statistical significance of differences noted within the release are determined based on non-overlapping confidence intervals.

12 . Measuring the data

The Annual Population Survey

Well-being estimates are based on data collected from the [Annual Population Survey \(APS\)](#).

The APS is an annual survey based on data collected in wave 1 and wave 5 on the Labour Force Survey (LFS), combined with an annual local area boost sample run in England, Wales, and Scotland.

The survey does not cover communal establishments, except for NHS staff accommodation. Those living in student halls of residence or boarding school are included as part of their family household. The APS dataset contains approximately 300,000 individuals.

The APS datasets are produced for four different overlapping 12-month periods: January to December, April to March, July to June and October to September. The analysis in this publication was conducted on the July 2018 to June 2019 period as it provides the most up-to-date information.

The Community Life Survey

The [Community Life Survey](#) is a household self-completion survey of approximately 10,000 adults aged 16 years and over in England. The survey can be completed either in a paper or online format; the question regarding disability status is asked online only. Data for the 2017 to 2018 year were collected between August 2017 and March 2018.

13 . Strengths and limitations

Causality

The analysis conducted is for the purpose of comparing the outcomes of disabled and non-disabled people. The analysis describes differences in these two populations, but does not explore the cause of this difference. Further analysis, which is outside the scope of this article, is required to make judgements on causality. Please see the “Improving Disability Data in the UK” article for details of our future workplan.

Coverage and population

Analysis using the Annual Population Survey (APS) has been restricted to 16- to 64-year-olds because the survey does not collect data for under 16s and the disability variable is not robust for those aged over 64. Disability status is only collected for people aged 65 years or older at their first contact resulting in less data for this population. The weighting used does not account for the reduced sample size for this age group, making the data not fully representative of the population.

The survey's sampling method excludes communal establishments. Therefore, the findings of this analysis are not representative of disabled people who reside in medical or residential care establishments.

Approximately 100,000 APS respondents are used in the analysis in this bulletin -- this is notably lower than the 300,000 people who are in the survey. This is because of the use of the working age population only and no proxy responses recorded on the well-being modules.

Uncertainty and quality

The results in this bulletin are survey-based estimates, so they are subject to a level of uncertainty as they are based on a sample rather than the whole population. Confidence intervals are provided around every estimate and give an indication of the range in which the true population value is likely to fall. The estimates in this bulletin are supported with confidence intervals at the 95% level. This means that, if we repeated the sample, we would expect the true population value to fall within the lower and upper bounds of the interval 95% of the time (that is, 19 times out of 20).

Impairments

Analysis by impairment is based on the "main impairment" as reported by the respondent. People often experience more than one impairment, but this analysis does not account for co-morbidities or the cumulative impact of living with more than one impairment simultaneously.

Well-being

The [Personal well-being in the UK Quality and Methodology Information](#) report contains important information on the strengths and limitations and uses of the data as well as how outputs are created and the quality and accuracy of those outputs. For more information on personal well-being, please see the [Personal well-being user guidance](#) and [Harmonised principles of personal well-being](#).

All analysis of well-being measures in this bulletin compares mean scores between groups. Another method of comparing well-being scores between groups is to look at the proportions of people who are within certain thresholds that indicate well-being levels.

Loneliness

Loneliness proportions were calculated using the Community Life Survey, which is used in England only. Links to data for other UK countries are included in the Related links section.

14 . Related links

[Personal well-being in the UK: April 2018 to March 2019](#)

Statistical bulletin | Released 23 October 2019

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.

[Loneliness -- What characteristics and circumstances are associated with feeling lonely?](#)

Article | Released 10 April 2018

Analysis of characteristics and circumstances associated with loneliness in England using the Community Life Survey, 2016 to 2017.

[Community Life Survey: Focus on Loneliness 2017 to 2018](#) (PDF, 545KB)

Article | Released 17 January 2019

Estimated levels of loneliness in England, using the Community Life Survey, 2017 to 2018.

[Scotland's Wellbeing: national outcomes for disabled people](#)

Article | Released 31 July 2019

Analysis of the National Performance Framework (NPF) outcome indicators from the perspective of disability in Scotland.

[National Survey for Wales, 2016 to 2017: Mental Wellbeing](#) (PDF, 825KB)

Statistical bulletin | Released 10 October 2017

An overview of mental well-being among adults living in Wales from the National Survey for Wales.

[National Survey for Wales, 2016 to 2017: Loneliness](#) (PDF, 1.3MB)

Statistical bulletin | Released 13 February 2018

Detailed analysis of the National Survey for Wales results on loneliness.

[Health survey Northern Ireland: first results 2017 to 2018](#) (PDF, 1.05MB)

Statistical bulletin | Released November 2018

A summary of the main topics included in the 2017 to 2018 Health Survey in Northern Ireland.

[Disability pay gaps in the UK: 2018](#)

Article | Released 2 December 2019

Earnings and employment for disabled and non-disabled people in the UK, raw disability pay gaps and factors that affect pay for disabled people.