

Statistical bulletin

Personal well-being in the UK, quarterly: April 2011 to June 2021

Quarterly estimates of life satisfaction, feeling that the things done in life are worthwhile, happiness and anxiety in the UK, covering the periods from Quarter 2 (Apr to June) 2011 through to Quarter 2 2021. Age, country and sex sub-population breakdowns of estimates, covering the periods from October 2020 to June 2021, are also included. Estimates were created using the Annual Population Survey (APS).

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Next release:
To be announced

Notice

8 December 2021

Publication of the “Personal well-being in the UK, quarterly” release was suspended due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This release covers the interim three quarters: Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2020, Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2021 and Quarter 2 (Apr to June) 2021.

Table of contents

1. [Main points](#)
2. [Personal well-being data over time](#)
3. [Personal well-being data](#)
4. [Glossary](#)
5. [Measuring the data](#)
6. [Strengths and limitations](#)
7. [Related links](#)

1 . Main points

- Personal well-being in the UK during the first and second wave of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is among the lowest levels since we started collecting data in 2011; by the end of the second wave in Quarter 2 (Apr to June) 2021, ratings for feeling that things done in life are worthwhile, happiness and anxiety recovered to levels seen before the coronavirus pandemic in Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2019.
- Soon after the start of the second wave, Quarter 4 2020, average ratings for happiness at the UK level fell to among the lowest scores in a decade (7.23 out of 10); anxiety rose to 3.43 out of 10, which was similar to the highest score recorded at the start of the coronavirus pandemic in Quarter 2 2020
- In Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2021, anxiety fell by 0.20 points to 3.23 at the UK level; the decrease in anxiety was notable for people aged between 50 to 59 and 65 to 74 years, perhaps indicating a sense of optimism as vaccines continued to roll out.
- Improvements in life satisfaction, happiness or anxiety were observed for most age groups by Quarter 2 2021, except for young people (16 to 24 years), those aged between 35 and 39 years and those aged over 84 years.

2 . Personal well-being data over time

This release reports personal well-being on a quarterly basis in the UK from April 2011 to June 2021. The datasets accompanying this bulletin include unadjusted and seasonally-adjusted data at the UK level. Unadjusted estimates for 16 age bands (16 to 19 years through to those aged 90 years or over), the four nations of the UK and both sexes are also provided. This release provides the long-term picture of well-being using the Annual Population Survey (APS). For shorter-term, more timely estimates see results of the [ONS Opinions Survey](#) (OPN).

Figure 1: All measures of personal well-being in the UK had largely recovered in Quarter 2 (Apr to June) 2021, from Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2020

Average (mean) ratings of personal well-being in the UK, April 2011 to June 2021

Notes:

1. The y-axis has a break in it, meaning it does not start from zero.
2. Data are non-seasonally adjusted weighted mean averages on a scale of 0 to 10.

Download the data

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Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2020

All personal well-being measures continued to worsen in Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2020. Ratings of happiness and anxiety were the most impacted. Both happiness and anxiety deteriorated by 0.23 points from the previous quarter, from 7.46 to 7.23 out of 10 and from 3.20 to 3.43 out of 10, respectively. Quarter 4 2020 saw ratings of happiness fall to among the lowest scores recorded for a decade, while anxiety ratings were similar to those seen at the start of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in Quarter 2 (Apr to Jun) 2020. Levels of anxiety during the coronavirus pandemic are the highest since we started collecting well-being data in 2011.

Changes in happiness were driven by a 5.2 percentage point decrease in the proportion of people reporting “very high” happiness levels (32.4% to 27.2% of respondents). During the same period, those reporting “very low” levels of anxiety fell by 4.0 percentage points (34.7% to 30.7% of respondents). Figure 2 shows the changes in thresholds for each well-being measure in each quarter during the period of March 2019 to June 2021

Figure 2: The proportion of people reporting "very high" levels of personal well-being increased across October 2020 to June 2021 in the UK

Notes:

1. Please see the glossary for information on the threshold grouping of ratings.
2. Data are non-seasonally adjusted.

Download the data

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Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2021

By Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2021, anxiety fell by 0.20 points to 3.23. Those reporting "very low" anxiety rose by 2.9 percentage points, while respondents with "low" and "high" levels of anxiety declined by 1.4 and 2.0 percentage points, respectively. These changes are observed within the context of positive developments in the coronavirus response. Vaccines were rolling out at pace and roadmaps to the end of lockdown were announced.

Quarter 2 (Apr to June) 2021

In Quarter 2 (Apr to June) 2021, a "bounce-back" from the downturn of Quarter 4 2020 was seen in all personal well-being measures. Life satisfaction, feeling that the things done in life are worthwhile, and happiness all increased (by 0.27 points to 7.55, 0.11 points to 7.78 and by 0.26 points to 7.52, respectively). Anxiety continued to steeply decline, falling by 0.19 points to 3.04. During this period, lockdown restrictions continued to ease, while the vaccine programme accelerated to being available to all adults in the UK by June 2021.

The percentage of people reporting "very high" levels of life satisfaction, feeling that the things done in life are worthwhile, and happiness all increased by 4.3, 2.2 and 6.1 percentage points, respectively. The number of respondents with "very low" levels of anxiety rose by 3.6 percentage points. These changes drove the improvements in well-being measures from the previous quarter.

People aged 20 to 24 years did not "bounce back" from the high levels of anxiety seen in October to December 2020

By Quarter 2 2021, when on average the UK was experiencing pre-coronavirus pandemic levels of well-being, anxiety in 20- to 24-year-old respondents was significantly higher than the national average (score of 3.56 compared to 3.04 out of 10, respectively). This is a change from the [characteristic trend of anxiety over a lifetime](#). Anxiety tends to peak in middle years (45 to 59 years).

[Previous analysis](#) has linked anxiety with loneliness, and young people aged between 16 and 24 years were more likely to experience "lockdown loneliness" during the early stages of the coronavirus pandemic. Over the period covered by Quarter 4 2020 and Quarter 1 2021, [higher rates of loneliness](#) were reported in areas with a high population of young people and those who were unemployed. [Employment rates of young people aged 16 to 24 years](#) have been the most affected by the coronavirus pandemic, with levels seen in Quarter 2 2021 (51.7%) still below those recorded a year earlier or before the coronavirus pandemic.

In the population aged under 40 years, people aged 25 to 29 years saw the greatest improvement in well-being from October 2020 to June 2021

At the UK level, Quarter 2 2021 saw average life satisfaction return to levels seen at the start of the coronavirus pandemic in Quarter 2 2020. Scores for feeling that things done in life are worthwhile, happiness and anxiety returned to levels last seen before the coronavirus pandemic in Quarter 4 2019.

During the period from Quarter 4 2020 to Quarter 2 2021, improvements in personal well-being for the younger population (those aged under 40 years) were greatest for those aged 25 to 29 years. Life satisfaction of those aged 25 to 29 years rose by 0.34 points (from 7.36 to 7.70), ratings for happiness rose by 0.46 points (from 7.12 to 7.58) and anxiety fell by 0.68 points (from 3.62 to 2.94).

People aged between 16 and 24 years and 35 to 39 years did not report any improvements to any of the personal well-being measures between Quarter 4 2020 and Quarter 2 2021. Those aged 30 to 34 years only reported improvements in life satisfaction, which rose from 7.42 to 7.69.

As a group above the compulsory educational age and below that of the average national age at birth, it is possible that people aged 25 to 29 years are less likely to have been impacted by changes to education and care arrangements for young children during the coronavirus pandemic.

Figure 3: Improving life satisfaction, happiness and anxiety of people aged 25 to 29 years in the UK, over the period Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2020 to Quarter 2 (Apr to June) 2021

Notes:

1. The y-axis has a break in it, meaning it does not start from zero.
2. Data are non-seasonally adjusted weighted mean averages on a scale of 0 to 10.

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

People aged 50 to 59 and 65 to 74 years saw a notable fall in anxiety from January to March 2021

In Quarter 1 2021, anxiety fell considerably for people aged 50 to 59 years and 65 to 74 years. This coincides with the progress of the vaccination programme. By the end of March, 77% of those aged 50 to 54, 83% of those aged 55 to 59, 90% of people aged 65 to 69 years and 93% of those aged 70 to 74 years in England had [received their first coronavirus vaccine](#) in the first phase of the vaccine roll out.

3 . Personal well-being data

[Quarterly personal well-being estimates - seasonally adjusted](#)

Dataset | Released 8 December 2021

Seasonally adjusted quarterly estimates of life satisfaction, feeling that the things done in life are worthwhile, happiness and anxiety in the UK.

[Quarterly personal well-being estimates - non-seasonally adjusted](#)

Dataset | Released 8 December 2021

Non-seasonally adjusted quarterly estimates of life satisfaction, feeling that the things done in life are worthwhile, happiness and anxiety in the UK.

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

Dataset | Released 8 December 2021

Confidence intervals and sample sizes for quarterly statistics of life satisfaction, feeling that the things done in life are worthwhile, happiness and anxiety in the UK.

4 . 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 the distribution of the data. For the life satisfaction, feeling that things done in life are 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)

Coronavirus pandemic timeline

A summary of the context with respect to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is provided for the period covered by Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2020, Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2021 and Quarter 2 (Apr to June) 2021

Key events during the COVID-19 pandemic – Quarter 4 2020

- Introduction of local restriction tier systems - England: 14 October; Scotland: 2 November.
- National lockdowns - England: 5 November to 2 December; Northern Ireland: 16 October to 11 December; a third lockdown began on 26 December; Wales: 23 October to 9 November.
- Tier 4: “Stay at Home” alert level – introduced in London and South East on 21 December after new coronavirus variant identified in South-East England; Wales: 19 December.
- Reversals of plans to relax restrictions over the Christmas period – 24 November: UK-wide measures for up to three households to meet between 23 to 27 December announced; 19 December: rules tightened to single households and support bubbles.
- Vaccinations - appointments available for those aged 80 years or over, those who are carers and care home residents: 8 December.

Key events during the COVID-19 pandemic – Quarter 1 2021

- National lockdowns – England: 6 January to 29 March (stay-at-home restrictions end); Scotland: lockdown begins 5 January; Wales: stay-at-home restrictions end on 13 March; Northern Ireland: lockdown continues.
- Vaccinations – appointments available in all four nations for frontline health and social care workers, clinically extremely vulnerable and 70 to 79 years age group (January); clinically vulnerable 65 years and over and clinically vulnerable (February); 50 years and over (March).
- Roadmap to stepwise end of lockdowns in all four nations is announced in February and March.
- Mandatory hotel quarantines for those travelling into the UK from “red list” countries introduced from 15 February.

Key events during the COVID-19 pandemic – Quarter 2 2021

- Stay-at-home restrictions end in Scotland (2 April) and Northern Ireland (16 April).
- Relaxation of lockdown restrictions:
 - April to May: non-essential retail, leisure, hairdressers, public buildings and indoor venues open in all four nations
 - May to June: outdoor gatherings of up to 30 people, indoor gathering of up to six people or two households in England, Scotland and Wales; up to 10,000 spectators at outdoor seated venues allowed in England and Wales.
- Vaccinations – appointments available for all aged 40 years and over (April), all aged 30 years and over (May), all adults over 18 years (May to June).

Sources: Institute for Government, Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe), Senedd Research and Northern Ireland Audit Office.

5 . Measuring the data

These quarterly personal well-being estimates are from the Annual Population Survey (APS), which is a continuous household survey covering the UK with the aim of providing estimates between censuses of important social and labour market variables at a local area level.

The figures in this bulletin have been rounded.

The data in this release comes from the APS, which is a different source to that used for the fortnightly well-being figures given in the [Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain](#) bulletin. Data for the fortnightly well-being figures come from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN), which allows for much more current results. The APS data use a larger sample size and allow for comparison with the back series of data starting in 2011. The estimates will therefore differ slightly for methodological reasons, but the overall trends are the same.

Information [on data collection changes because of the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic and their impact on estimating personal well-being](#) has been published. The article also outlines why estimates of personal well-being differ between the OPN and the APS.

Quality

More quality and methodology information on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the data were created is available in the [Personal well-being in the UK QMI](#). For more information on personal well-being, please see the [Personal well-being user guidance](#) and [Harmonised principles of personal well-being](#).

6 . Strengths and limitations

Data quality

We first published quarterly data for the personal well-being figures in November 2019 as Experimental Statistics. The aim is to use the quarterly data to explore short-term changes in personal well-being by looking at fluctuation over the years and comparisons over quarters one year apart.

Seasonal adjustment

The data published for our quarterly personal well-being figures are not seasonally adjusted to aid discussion between UK level and non-seasonally adjusted age-splits. Seasonally adjusted estimates at the UK level are available. Seasonal adjustments aid interpretation by removing recurring fluctuations caused, for example, by holidays or other seasonal patterns.

The regARIMA model used to correct the series before applying moving average filters to the seasonal adjustment was reviewed at the end of 2020. There was a slight change to the model, which will be updated in the Personal well-being quarterly estimates technical report.

From reviewing the model, two series within the happiness sub-group were identified as having an Easter effect. The effect was negative for the mean and positive for the “low” happiness threshold series. The implication is that happiness seems to decrease in the period immediately before Easter. More information on this modelling can be found in the Seasonal adjustment methodological note.

Annual Population Survey data reweighting

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

Statistical significance

Please note that:

1. any changes mentioned in this publication are "statistically significant"
2. comparisons have been based on unrounded data
3. the [statistical significance](#) of differences noted within the release are determined based on non-overlapping [confidence intervals](#) in the unadjusted data

7 . Related links

[Personal well-being in the UK: April 2020 to March 2021](#)

Bulletin | Released on 15 October 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.

[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.

[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.

[Mapping loneliness during the coronavirus pandemic](#)

Article | Released on 7 April 2021

Areas with a higher concentration of younger people and areas with higher rates of unemployment tended to have higher rates of loneliness during the study period.