

Statistical bulletin

Personal well-being in the UK, quarterly: April 2011 to September 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 Jun) 2011 through to Quarter 3 (Jul to Sep) 2021. Sub-population breakdowns of estimates by sex, covering the period from January 2019 to September 2021, are also included. Estimates were created using the Annual Population Survey (APS).

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1 . Main points

- Well-being levelled off across all four indicators, with no significant differences between Quarter 2 (Apr to June) 2021 and Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2021.
- During periods of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, both males and females saw an increase in anxiety and a reduction in life satisfaction, feeling that the things done in life are worthwhile, and happiness.
- At times during the coronavirus pandemic, females experienced lower life satisfaction and happiness than males, which differs from pre-coronavirus pandemic research.
- For males, happiness scores in Quarter 2 and Quarter 3 2021 and life satisfaction scores in Quarter 3 2021 returned to levels seen in the corresponding 2019 pre-coronavirus pandemic periods.
- For females, in Quarter 2 and Quarter 3 2021, happiness scores returned to levels seen in the corresponding 2019 periods, but life satisfaction remained below levels seen in the same periods of 2019.

2 . Personal well-being data over time

This bulletin reports personal well-being on a quarterly basis in the UK from April 2011 to September 2021. The accompanying datasets include unadjusted and seasonally adjusted data at the UK level. Unadjusted estimates are also provided for:

- 16 age groups (those aged 16 to 19 years through to those aged 90 years or over)
- the four UK nations
- regions of England
- both sexes

This bulletin provides over a decade long time series of well-being estimates using the Annual Population Survey (APS). More timely estimates are available in [our Coronavirus and the Social Impacts on Great Britain fortnightly statistical bulletins](#).

Figure 1: Well-being levelled off across all four indicators, with no significant difference between Quarter 2 (Apr to June) 2021 and Quarter 3 (Jul to Sep) 2021

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

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In the latest period, well-being levelled off across all four indicators (life satisfaction, feeling things done in life are worthwhile, happiness, and anxiety), with no significant differences between Quarter 2 (Apr to June) 2021 and Quarter 3 (July to Sept) 2021.

Compared with Quarter 3 2020, life satisfaction and anxiety scores improved in Quarter 3 2021, while feeling that things done in life are worthwhile and happiness scores had no significant change.

3 . Personal well-being by sex

Figure 2: During periods of the coronavirus pandemic, females experienced lower life satisfaction and happiness than males. From Quarter 2 2021, there was once again no significant difference in scores between the sexes.

Average (mean) ratings and confidence intervals of personal well-being in the UK by sex, January 2019 to September 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.

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Both sexes saw a reduction in well-being across all four indicators during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. During certain periods, females experienced lower life satisfaction and happiness than males, which differs from pre-coronavirus pandemic analysis, as seen in [our Personal well-being in the UK: October 2016 to September 2017 bulletin](#).

Females reported lower life satisfaction than males in Quarter 4 (Oct to Dec) 2020 and Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2021, and lower happiness than males in Quarter 2 2020 (Apr to June), Quarter 4 2020, and Quarter 1 2021.

The declines in life satisfaction and happiness largely recovered by Quarter 2 2021 for both sexes. There was no significant change in these indicators for either sex into Quarter 3 2021, where there was also no longer a significant difference between the sexes.

For males, there was no significant difference in life satisfaction between Quarter 3 2021 and Quarter 3 2019. However, life satisfaction scores for women were lower in Quarter 3 2021 than Quarter 3 2019.

For both sexes, there was no significant difference in happiness levels between Quarter 3 2021 and Quarter 3 2019.

Previous research in [our Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) and the different effects on men and women in the UK, March 2020 to February 2021 article](#) has shown that the coronavirus pandemic has affected males and females differently, with females seeing a greater impact on their well-being.

Health and care professions, which mainly consist of females, saw a reduction in well-being and work related quality of life, as shown in the [NHS COVID-19 and the female health and care workforce survey update \(PDF, 2.9 MB\)](#) and [the article Decreasing Wellbeing and Increasing Use of Negative Coping Strategies: The Effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the UK Health and Social Care Workforce article](#).

More females were furloughed between July 2020 and April 2021, while more males were furloughed between May 2021 and September 2021, as discussed in [HMRC's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme statistics article, published 16 December 2021](#).

As shown in [our Differences in time use between lockdowns, by vaccine status and other demographics, Great Britain dataset, published 23 June 2021](#), females did more unpaid household work and unpaid childcare than males during the coronavirus pandemic. However, the time females spent on these activities was lower during the coronavirus pandemic than in 2014 to 2015, with less of a gap between the sexes.

An equal number of males and females were homeschooling in April to May 2020, but more females reported it was negatively affecting their well-being, as shown in [our Coronavirus and homeschooling in Great Britain dataset, published 19 February 2021](#). In January to February 2021, more females were homeschooling than males, but its effect on well-being was the same between both sexes.

4 . Personal well-being data

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

Dataset | Released 7 April 2022

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 7 April 2022

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 7 April 2022

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.

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 the distribution of the data. For the life satisfaction, feeling that things done in life are worthwhile, and happiness questions, ratings are grouped:

- 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:

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

6 . Measuring the data

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

The figures in this bulletin have been rounded.

The data in this release come from the APS, which is a different source to that used for the fortnightly well-being figures given in [our Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain bulletins](#). 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.

In [our Data collection changes because of the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic and their impact on estimating personal well-being article](#), we outline why estimates of personal well-being differ between the OPN and the APS.

Estimates provided for Northern Ireland in this release will differ from [the official statistics on personal well-being for Northern Ireland produced by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency \(NISRA\)](#). This is because they use an alternative survey source, The Continuous Household Survey.

Quality

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

7 . 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 sex 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 beginning of 2022. There was a slight change to the model, which will be updated shortly in [our 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 [our Seasonal adjustment methodological note](#).

Annual Population Survey data reweighting

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 Quarter 2 (Apr to June) 2020 onwards have introduced a new weighting based on housing tenure. Further information on this can be found in [our Data collection changes because of the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic and their impact on estimating personal well-being methodology](#) and [our Labour Force Survey weighting methodology](#).

Statistical significance

Please note that:

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

8 . Related links

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

Bulletin | Released 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 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.

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) and the different effects on men and women in the UK, March 2020 to February 2021](#)

Article | Released 10 March 2021

Analysis of previously published data from across the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the government highlights the different effects on men and women throughout the first year of the coronavirus pandemic in charts.

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

Methodology technical report | Released 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.

[Labour Force Survey weighting methodology](#)

Methodology technical report | Released 17 May 2021

New population weights using PAYE Real-Time Information data to allow for changes to Labour Force Survey (LFS) collection methods, and changes to population movements in 2020. To be applied to LFS results from July 2021.

[Trends in personal wellbeing and loneliness by age and sex](#)

Dataset | Released on 18 March 2022

Data from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) containing mean personal wellbeing scores and proportions of people feeling lonely always, often and some of the time, by age and sex. Data covers the individual survey periods between March 2020 and March 2022.

[Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain](#)

Dataset | Updated regularly

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