

People asked to rate 'life satisfaction' as new well-being questions revealed

Date: 24 February 2011

Coverage: UK **Theme:** Social and Welfare

Around 200,000 people are to be asked to rate their 'life satisfaction' on a scale of nought to ten in the UK's biggest household survey as part of the Office for National Statistics' programme to measure the nation's well-being.

This is part of the National Statistician's programme to measure national well-being, which aims to provide a fuller picture of 'how society is doing' than is given by economic indicators such as GDP alone.

Understanding the economic performance of a country is important, but there is a need to look at broader measures, 'quality of life' indicators and the impact progress has on the environment when assessing national well-being.

From April 2011, the ONS will be including subjective well-being monitoring questions on the Integrated Household Survey (IHS) to capture what people think and feel about their own well-being. The questions draw on subjective well-being questions in other surveys and were developed with advice from a wide range of experts and organisations, including members of the National Statistician's Advisory Group on Measuring National Well-being.

The questions, which have been published as part of the Social Trends: 'Spotlight on' series are

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

The questions will be added to the IHS from April 2011 and the first annual experimental estimates derived from them are planned for summer 2012. These questions will be supplemented with the

Opinions Survey which is a smaller survey with around 1,000 adults responding each month and which will be used for further testing and for questions about different aspects of well-being.

Meanwhile, the national well-being debate continues(*) online and at events across the UK, to find out what matters most in people's lives and to help develop broader measures of national well-being, as well as the survey questions.

National Statistician Jil Matheson said on 25 November last year, when the national well-being debate was launched: "New survey questions would be a powerful way to understand the well-being of people across the country and for different places, different age groups, whether people are in work or not, and for other groups. But we want to do more than that. We need to show a wider picture, such as the environment, key statistics on health, levels of education and inequality in income and so on."

ONS Programme Director Paul Allin, said: "Subjective well-being is one approach to understanding and measuring the well-being of the nation. Subjective well-being can be measured, but there are different ways to do this and ONS' approach is to cover these different methods in a way that is appropriate for our household surveys.

"While we want to produce consistent results over time, we will initially regard the results as experimental. There is more work to be done to check that the questions work and that they meet public policy and other needs, including international developments.

"We will publish information about the way responses vary between different groups of the population, as well as the 'average'. The results will be available for all government and commercial organisations to use in the way which helps them make decisions based on a broader assessment of well-being than just on the economic standing of the UK. We believe they will also be of interest to the public. With around 200,000 interviews each year in our Integrated Household Survey, this will be the largest regular survey asking questions on subjective wellbeing in the UK "

(*) People can still join in with the national debate by visiting www.ons.gov.uk/well-being, calling 0845 601 5075 or following us on www.twitter.com/statisticsONS. You can also see what other people are saying at <http://well-being.dxwconsult.com> or comment on well-being discussion items at <http://well-being.dxwconsult.com/blog/>.

Background Notes

1. The 'Spotlight on' article also includes an explanation of the differences between objective and subjective well-being and discusses the different measures of overall, individual and domain-specific subjective well-being it can be found here <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/socialtrends/stspotlight/>
2. Also published today is an article by Professor Paul Dolan which explores the potential different measures of subjective well-being in relation to public policy making. It sets out measures that can be used for 1) Monitoring progress; 2) Informing policy design; and 3) Policy appraisal and makes recommendations of questions for inclusion in ONS surveys. Full details can be found at <http://www.ons.gov.uk/well-being/wellbeing/understanding-wellbeing/index.html>
3. On 25 November 2010 the National Statistician Jil Matheson announced plans to lead a national debate on measuring the nation's well-being (see <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about/newsroom/statements/national-statistician-launches-well-being-debate.pdf>) Measuring National Well-Being - What matters to you? Join the debate at <http://www.ons.gov.uk/well-being>
4. Experimental statistics are those which are in the testing phase, are not yet fully developed and have not been submitted for assessment to the UK Statistics Authority.
5. ONS published a working paper called 'Measuring Subjective Well-being in the UK' last September which reviewed the measurement of subjective well-being, why it is important to measure it, how it can be measured, what subjective well-being questions are currently asked on social surveys in the UK and abroad and what the potential uses of subsequent data might be. Full details can be found at <http://www.ons.gov.uk/well-being/wellbeing/understanding-wellbeing/index.html>
6. Follow us on www.twitter.com/statisticsONS
7. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available from the media relations office.

8. The Integrated Household Survey (IHS) is a composite household survey combining the answers from a number of Office for National Statistics (ONS) household surveys to produce an experimental dataset of core variables. Full details can be found at <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=15381>
9. National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference.
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