Harmonised Concepts and Questions for Social Data Sources

GSS Harmonised Principle

Personal Well-being
About This Document and Update History

GSS Harmonised Principle

About this document
This document forms part of a series of GSS Harmonised Principles, designed to provide approved harmonised questions, definitions and outputs for a variety of social and business related topics. The use of harmonised questions, definitions and outputs will provide greater consistency for survey producers and comparability when using data.

For more information, please see the Introductory Document, available on the GSS website:


This is Version 2.0 published in June 2017
This document was updated to Version 2.0 to reflect the change in Harmonised Principle from ‘interim’ version to ‘fully approved’ version. Although there are no changes to the questions being used, there are minor changes to the information supporting the questions. A section covering ‘outputs’ has also now been included.

Previous versions:

Version 1.1 published in May 2015
This document was updated to Version 1.1 to correct minor formatting errors and to change the word ‘Standard’ to ‘Principle’

Please note this version is an interim principle created to reflect the current desire to collect and use information on personal well-being. A fully ratified set of questions will be available in the longer term.
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Introduction
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Introduction
The Office for National Statistics (ONS) introduced questions on personal well-being on the Annual Population Survey (APS) in April 2011. The questions have remained unchanged on the APS since they were first introduced. All question testing that has been carried out on personal well-being questions has been done using a separate survey – the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) – to preserve consistency of measures on the APS.

One of the main benefits of collecting information on personal well-being is that it is based on people’s views of their own individual well-being. In the past, assumptions were made about how objective conditions, such as people’s health and income, might influence their individual well-being. Personal well-being measures, on the other hand, take account of what matters to people by allowing them to decide what is important when they respond to questions.

Contact Information
If you would like further information on the personal well-being questions or have any questions, please contact:

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For more information about Harmonisation or to join our mailing list, please visit our website at: https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/statistics/methodology-2/harmonisation/

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**Personal Well-being**

**Inputs**

Personal well-being (PWB) questions as they currently appear on the ONS Annual Population Survey:

**PERSONAL WELL-BEING**

68. *Satis*  
Next I would like to ask you four questions about your feelings on aspects of your life. There are no right or wrong answers. For each of these questions I’d like you to give an answer on a scale of nought to 10, where nought is ‘not at all’ and 10 is ‘completely’.

Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?

*Interviewer instruction: where nought is ‘not at all satisfied’ and 10 is ‘completely satisfied’*

Scale from 0 to 10  
*Asked if: PersProx\(^1\) = IN PERSON, DVAge = 16\(^2\)*

69. *Worth*  
Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?

*Interviewer instruction: where nought is ‘not at all worthwhile’ and 10 is ‘completely worthwhile’*

Scale from 0 to 10  
*Asked if: PersProx = IN PERSON, DVAge = 16+*

70. *Happy*  
Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?

*Interviewer instruction: where nought is ‘not at all happy’ and 10 is ‘completely happy’*

Scale from 0 to 10  
*Asked if: PersProx = IN PERSON, DVAge = 16+*

71. *Anxious*  
On a scale where nought is ‘not at all anxious’ and 10 is ‘completely anxious’, overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?

Scale from 0 to 10  
*Asked if: PersProx = IN PERSON, DVAge = 16+*

1. PersProx = IN PERSON: responses should be answered in person by the respondent. Proxy responses (on behalf of someone else in the household) will not be accepted
2. DVAge = 16+ = Questions asked to those aged 16 and over only
No proposals for harmonised outputs for topics related to personal well-being are planned. The output categories generally derive straight from the questions or from the answer categories given on any showcards used. If any categories are combined, this should be made clear in published documentation.

For information, ONS within their annual publications do provide estimates of the mean ratings for all 4 personal well-being questions, as well as their distributions, using the thresholds that can be found in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Life satisfaction, Worthwhile and Happiness scores</th>
<th>Anxiety scores</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Response on a 11 point scale</td>
<td>Label</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 - 4</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 – 6</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 – 8</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 - 10</td>
<td>Very high</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Personal Well-being

Further Information

Question Placement
It is recommended that the four personal well-being questions are placed after the key demographic questions in line with the way the questions are administered on the APS. The positioning of the four questions was decided following ONS qualitative work and extensive discussions within ONS. Positioning the four questions after the key demographics allows rapport to be developed between the interviewer and the respondent, as well as ensuring the main survey questions do not impact on response to the personal well-being questions. For further details on question placement, please refer to the Personal Well-being Survey User Guide.

Survey Modes
To date, ONS have tested the four personal well-being questions using a range of modes of administration, including self-completion and interviewer-led face to face and telephone survey methods.

The APS is mixed mode and data are collected either by telephone interview or face-to-face in the respondent's home. Different collection modes can affect responses and personal well-being estimates are no exception. For example, in the APS it appears that on average people responding face-to-face with an interviewer in their home gave lower ratings to those responding via the telephone.

This issue is particularly important for the APS as all interviews in Scotland north of the Caledonian Canal are administered by telephone only, rather than through a combination of telephone and face-to-face interviews, as is the case in other areas of the UK. Please see the statistical bulletin 'Personal Well-being Across the UK, 2012/13' for the most recent data for different survey modes on the APS.

A regression analysis which looked at the variation in well-being outcomes by specific characteristics and circumstances of individuals whilst holding other characteristics equal was also carried out in spring 2013. The findings of this analysis show that people interviewed face-to-face give lower well-being ratings on average than people interviewed by telephone. However, the size effects are small. Further details on this regression analysis are available in the report 'Measuring National Well-being - What matters most to Personal Well-being?'

Previous research has also found that on average lower scores to well-being questions are received if the interview is carried out via self-completion rather than administered by an interviewer, particularly for female respondents (Pudney 2010). However, testing on the ONS Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) has shown that there was little difference in the mean ratings between the interviewer led and self-completion interviews. Further details on this testing are available in the report 'Initial Investigation into Subjective Well-being from the Opinions Survey'.


References:
   https://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/publications/working-papers/iser/2010-20
Personal Well-being
Further Information

Frequently Asked Questions
The Personal Well-being Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) which will be updated as required can be found in the link below:
https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/methodologies/personalwellbeingfrequentlyaskedquestions

Surveys Using the Four ONS Personal Well-being Questions
An overview of surveys in the UK that use the four ONS personal well-being questions as of September 2015 can be found in the link below:
https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/methodologies/surveysusingthe4officefonationalstatisticspersonalwellbeingquestions

Personal Well-being Survey User Guide
https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/methodologies/personalwellbeingsurveyuserguide

Personal Well-being Quality and Methodology Information (QMI)
https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/qmis/subjectivewellbeingannualpopulationsurveyapsqmi

For the latest personal well-being publications please visit the following link:
https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/