

Personal Wellbeing in Northern Ireland

2019/20

Estimates of life satisfaction, feeling that things done in life are worthwhile, happiness and anxiety in Northern Ireland.

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[DETAILED EXCEL AND ODS TABLES](#) (External Link, opens in a new window)



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Key Statistics	Detail
Levels of anxiety in Northern Ireland (NI) have increased since 2018/19.	The mean anxiety score for people in Northern Ireland increased significantly from 2.83 in 18/19 to 3.00 in 19/20 (Table 1*).
People in NI report the highest levels of life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness in the UK.	As has been the case in previous years, people in Northern Ireland gave better average ratings for life satisfaction (7.86), feelings that things done in life are worthwhile (8.05) and happiness (7.68) than people in England, Scotland or Wales. (Table 1).
Females are more anxious than males...	Females reported a significantly higher anxiety score (3.28) than males (2.71), which is indicative of poorer wellbeing in this measure (Table 9, Figure 4).
... but report higher ratings for feeling that things they do in life are worthwhile.	The average personal wellbeing score for feeling that things that done in life are worthwhile was higher among females (8.15) than males (7.95) (Table 7, Figure 4).
People over 65 reported the highest levels of happiness and lowest levels of anxiety in NI	The average score for happiness for people aged 65+ (7.85) was significantly higher than that reported among those aged 45-54 (7.45) and 55-64 (7.50). In comparison, The average score for anxiety for people aged 65+ (2.68) was significantly lower than that reported by people aged 44-54 and 55-64 (3.21 and 3.16 respectively) (Table 8, Table 9, Figure 4).
People living in Mid Ulster reported the highest levels of happiness and life satisfaction in NI	People living in Mid Ulster reported the highest ratings of happiness (8.12) and life satisfaction (8.19). In contrast, people in Belfast reported the lowest ratings of happiness (7.38) and life satisfaction (7.57) (Table 6, Table 8).
People living in Derry and Strabane reported the highest levels of anxiety in NI	People living in Derry and Strabane reported the highest levels of anxiety (3.40). In contrast, those living in Mid Ulster reported the lowest levels of anxiety (2.41), which is indicative of better wellbeing in this measure (Table 9).
People living with a disability have lower levels of life satisfaction than those without a disability	People with a disability reported significantly lower levels of life satisfaction (6.99) than those without a disability (8.20) (Table 6).

*All tables referenced in the publication are available in [Excel](#) and [Open Data](#) format (opens in a new window).

2. INTRODUCTION

An individual's thoughts and feelings about their quality of life is an important aspect of their personal wellbeing. How satisfied people are with their lives, their levels of happiness and anxiety, and whether or not they think the things they do are worthwhile all have strong links with many elements of wellbeing, for example, people's health, employment and relationships¹.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) Measuring National Wellbeing Programme monitors and reports "how the UK as a whole is doing". The measures monitored through the Programme are organised into 10 domains, including one that focuses on personal (subjective) wellbeing.

NISRA has participated in the Measuring National Wellbeing Programme since it was established in 2010, and several of our household surveys incorporate the four personal wellbeing questions outlined below.

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

People are asked to respond to each question on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is "not at all" and 10 is "completely". This means that a higher score indicates better wellbeing in relation to life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness, and a lower score indicates better wellbeing for anxiety.

Personal wellbeing statistics are reported in two ways,

1. The average (mean) rating, and
2. The proportion scoring within each of the rating thresholds outlined in the table below.

Labelling of thresholds

Life satisfaction, worthwhile and happiness scores		Anxiety scores	
Response on an 11 point scale	Label	Response on an 11 point scale	Label
0 to 4	Low	0 to 1	Very low
5 to 6	Medium	2 to 3	Low
7 to 8	High	4 to 5	Medium
9 to 10	Very high	6 to 10	High

This release presents some key 2019/20 personal wellbeing data for Northern Ireland from the Labour Force Survey (LFS). These are the data which ONS uses when reporting National Statistics on personal wellbeing². Personal wellbeing estimates for the years 2011/12 to 2018/19 have been revised following the re-weighting of the LFS and estimates for these years presented here will differ from previous publications (See [Annex : Point 4](#)).

In this publication differences between groups are only reported on where they are found to be statistically significant, unless stated otherwise. Statistical significance was determined using 95% confidence intervals. A full breakdown of all significant differences can be found in the comparative tables located in the [Personal Wellbeing Estimates NI 2019/20 Tables](#) (opens in a new window).

***Statistically significant (using 95% confidence intervals)** means that we can be 95% confident that the differences seen in our sampled respondents reflect the population of Northern Ireland.

Further Background Information can be found in the [Annex](#).

***Please note: All tables referenced in the publication are available in [Excel](#) and [Open Data](#) format (opens in a new window).**

¹ [Measuring National Well-being - What matters most to Personal Well-being?](#) (opens in a new window)

² [ONS Wellbeing](#) (opens in a new window)

3. OVERALL WELLBEING RATINGS

The **average** (mean) wellbeing ratings across the four measures of personal wellbeing in 2019/20 (year to end March 2020) were:

- 7.86 out of 10 for **life satisfaction**
- 8.05 out of 10 for feeling that what you do in life is **worthwhile**
- 7.68 out of 10 for **happiness** yesterday
- 3.00 out of 10 for **anxiety** yesterday

As has been the case in previous years, people in Northern Ireland gave better average ratings for life satisfaction, feelings that things done in life are worthwhile and happiness than people in England, Scotland or Wales. The increase in average anxiety score seen in 2019/20 means Northern Ireland continues to stay in line with the rest of the UK for this measure (Table 1).

The **proportion** of people reporting 'Very high' (score of 9 or 10) levels of personal wellbeing in 2019/20 was:

- 36% for **life satisfaction**
- 41% for feeling that what you do in life is **worthwhile**
- 39% for **happiness** yesterday

In terms of **anxiety**, where a lower score indicates better personal wellbeing, 41% of people reported a 'Very low' score (0 or 1).

Draft Programme for Government & NICS Outcomes Delivery Plan – Wellbeing Framework

Outcomes: *We care for others and we help those in need*

We are a shared, welcoming and confident society that respects diversity

Indicator: *Average life satisfaction score of people with disabilities*

This report provides an updated figure for the average life satisfaction score of people with disabilities, which is a population indicator included in the wellbeing framework overarching the draft [Programme for Government](#) and [NICS Outcomes Delivery Plan](#) (open in new windows).

Latest position: In 2019/20, the average life satisfaction score of people with disabilities was 6.99, which is slightly lower (but not significantly so) than the value for baseline year (2014/15), which was 7.24. The average life satisfaction score of people with disabilities remains significantly lower than that of those without a disability (8.20).

The latest position in relation to all population indicators in the wellbeing framework is available via the [outcomes viewer](#) (opens in a new window).

4. DISTRIBUTION OF WELLBEING RATINGS – Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5

Figure 1: Distributions of the proportion of respondents scoring 0 to 10 on each of the 4 personal wellbeing scales 2019/20

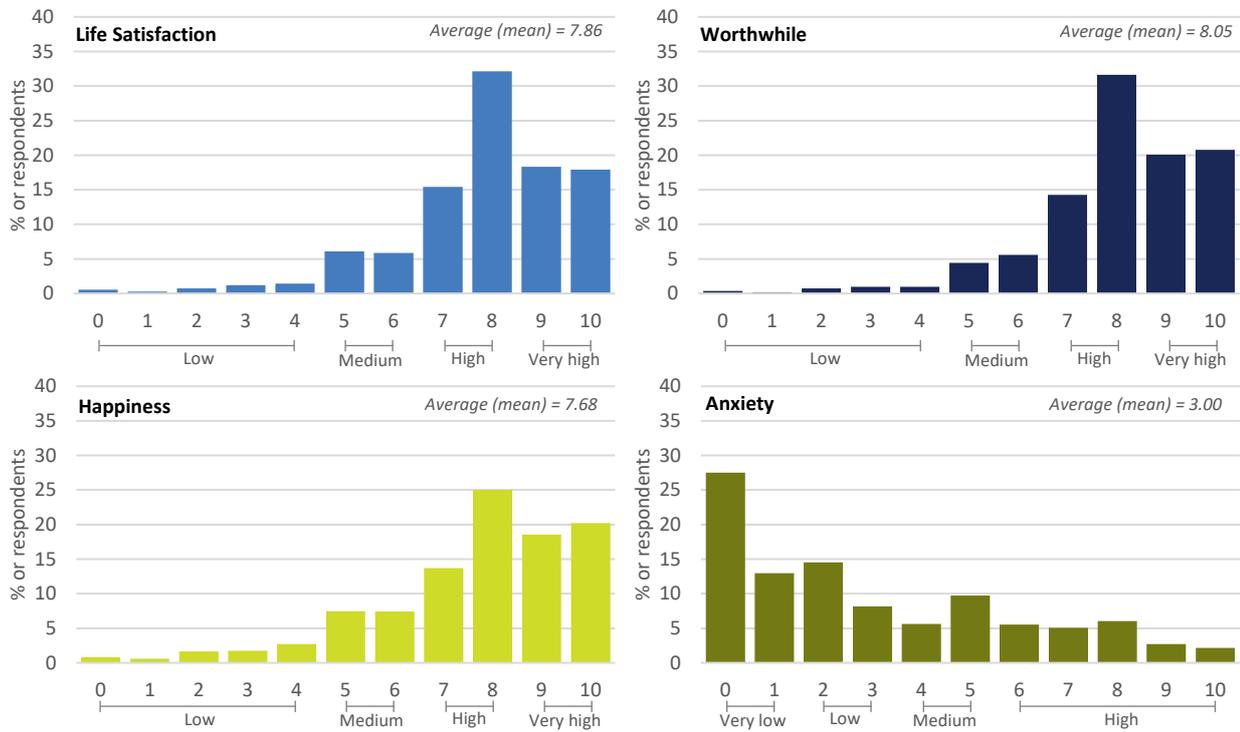


Figure 1 shows the distribution of scores for each personal wellbeing measure in 2019/20 in Northern Ireland. All four personal wellbeing measures are skewed towards the positive end of the scale (note that a lower score in the anxiety scale represents better personal wellbeing).

Roughly two in five people report 'Very high' levels of personal wellbeing (score of 9 or 10) for life satisfaction (36%), worthwhile (41%) and happiness (39%). Small proportions of respondents reported 'Low' levels (score of 0 to 4) of personal wellbeing in these areas (life satisfaction: 4%, worthwhile: 3%, happiness: 8%).

In terms of anxiety, 41% of respondents report a 'Very low' level (score of 0 or 1), while 21% report a 'High' level of anxiety (score of 6 to 10).

5. AVERAGE (MEAN) WELLBEING RATINGS TIME SERIES – Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5

Figure 2: Average (Mean) Wellbeing Ratings for Life Satisfaction, Worthwhile and Happiness ratings from 2011/12 to 2019/20

*The graphs below display 95% Confidence Intervals

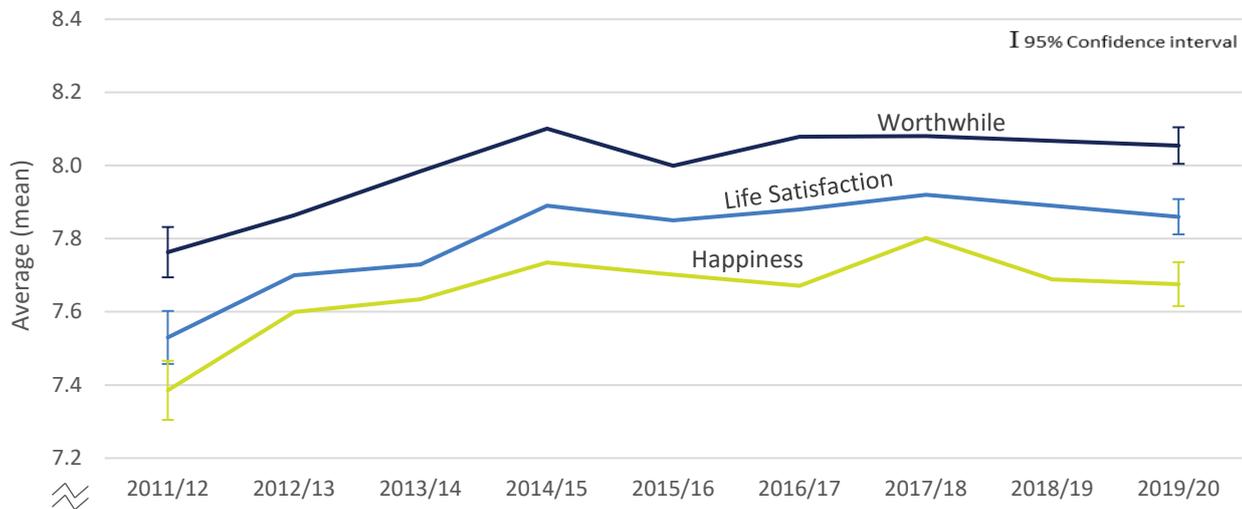


Figure 2 shows the average (mean) ratings for life satisfaction, feelings that things done in life are worthwhile and happiness over time. Average (mean) scores for life satisfaction (7.86), feeling that what you do in life is worthwhile (8.05) and happiness (7.68) were all significantly higher than that reported in 2011/12 (7.53, 7.76 and 7.39 respectively). However, these measures have not changed significantly since 2018/19 (7.89, 8.07 and 7.69 respectively).

***What is a confidence interval?** These show the ranges within which we are 95% confident that the true value for the population falls. For example, the Northern Ireland population reported an average (mean) life satisfaction rating of 7.86 in 2019/20; we can be 95% certain that the true (if we surveyed everyone and not just a sample) figure would fall between 7.81 and 7.91.

Figure 3: Average (Mean) Wellbeing Ratings for Anxiety from 2011/12 to 2019/20

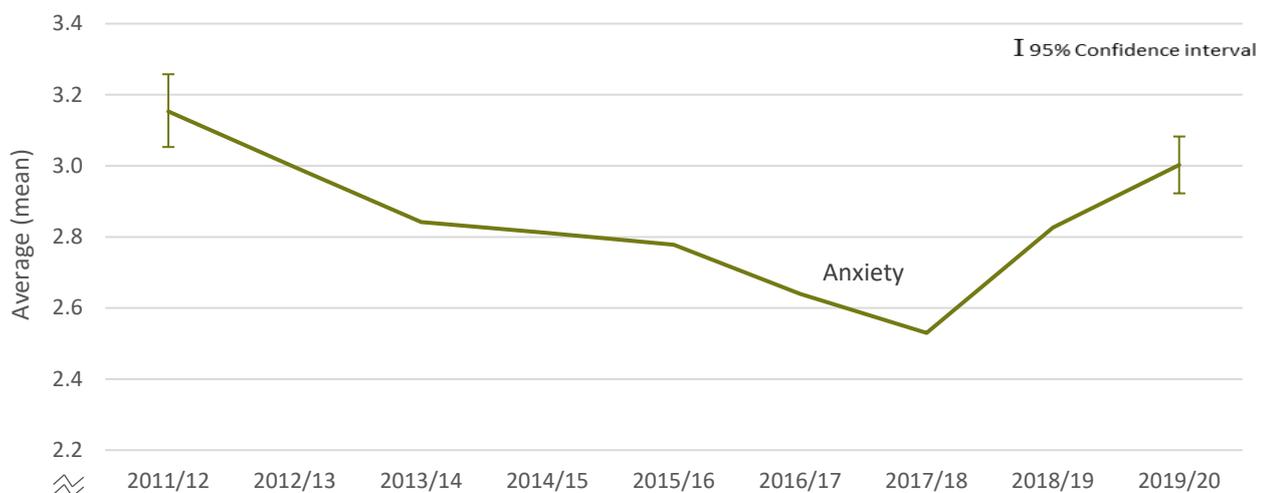


Figure 3 shows average (mean) ratings for anxiety over time. Anxiety scores showed a consistent improvement each year between 2011/12 and 2017/18, from 3.15 in 11/12 to 2.53 in 17/18. Scores then increased significantly in the last two years (2.83 in 18/19 and 3.00 in 19/20), which is indicative of poorer wellbeing in this measure.

Figure 4: Estimated Personal Wellbeing by Age and Gender

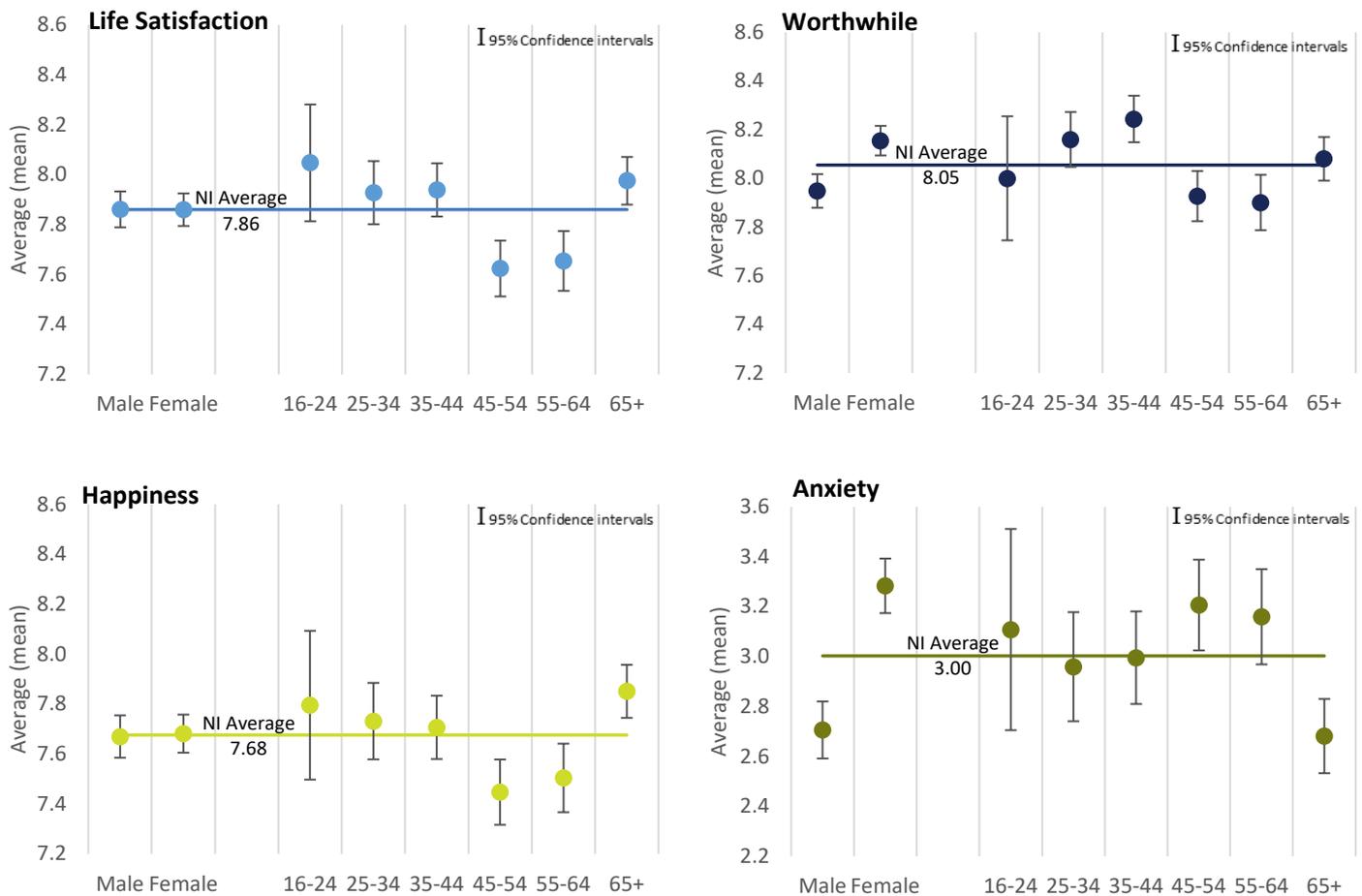


Figure 4 shows the average (mean) for life satisfaction, feelings that things done in life are worthwhile, happiness and anxiety for each of the gender and age categories. The overall NI average for each measure of wellbeing is displayed as a line on each graph.

Gender

Average scores for feeling that things that what we do in life is worthwhile were significantly higher for females (8.15) than males (7.95). However, females (3.28) reported significantly higher anxiety scores on average than males (2.71), which is indicative of poorer wellbeing in this measure.

Age

People aged 45-54 (7.62) and 55-64 (7.65) reported significantly lower life satisfaction scores than all other age categories, which is indicative of poorer wellbeing for those in the 45-54 and 55-64 age categories.

People aged 25-34 (8.16) and 35-44 (8.24) reported significantly higher scores for feelings that things done in life are worthwhile than those aged 45-54 (7.93) and 55-64 (7.90).

People aged 65+ reported the highest scores for happiness (7.85). This was significantly higher than those aged 45-45 (7.45) and 55-64 (7.50). Similarly, people aged 65+ also reported the lowest scores for anxiety (2.68), significantly lower than those aged 45-54 (3.21) and 55-64 (3.16), which is indicative of better wellbeing for those aged 65 and over.

Figure 5: Average life satisfaction rating by Local Government District

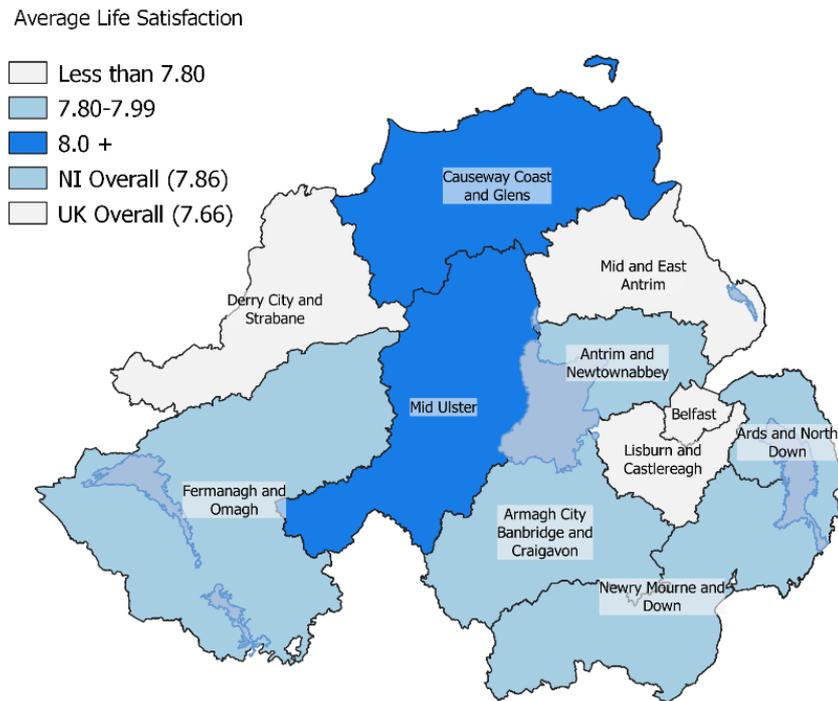


Figure 5 illustrates the variation in average life satisfaction ratings and shows a map of NI, displaying each LGD, colour coded by average life satisfaction. Lighter shaded areas have lower average life satisfaction while darker areas have higher life satisfaction. The overall UK and NI averages are also shown in the key (pale blue and medium blue respectively) for comparison.

Local Government District

Average personal wellbeing ratings in 2019/20 varied across local government districts (LGDs). Within NI, people living in Mid Ulster reported the highest average score for life satisfaction (8.19) and happiness (8.12), and the lowest average score for anxiety (2.41); which is an indication of better wellbeing. Those living in Causeway Coast and Glens reported the highest levels of feeling things done in life are worthwhile (8.48), another indication of better wellbeing.

In comparison, those living in Belfast reported the lowest average score for life satisfaction (7.57), happiness (7.38) and feelings that things done in life were worthwhile (7.68), which is an indication of poorer wellbeing. People living in Derry and Strabane reported the highest average score for anxiety (3.40), which is also indicative of poorer wellbeing.

Full comparisons and significant differences for all LGDs can be found in the comparative tables located in the [Personal Wellbeing Estimates NI 201920 Tables](#) (opens in a new window).

Data for all UK local authorities are available from the ONS [Personal wellbeing estimates by local authority](#) (opens in a new window).

Multiple Deprivation Measure

Figure 6: Estimated Personal Wellbeing by MDM Quintile (Q) and Urban/Rural

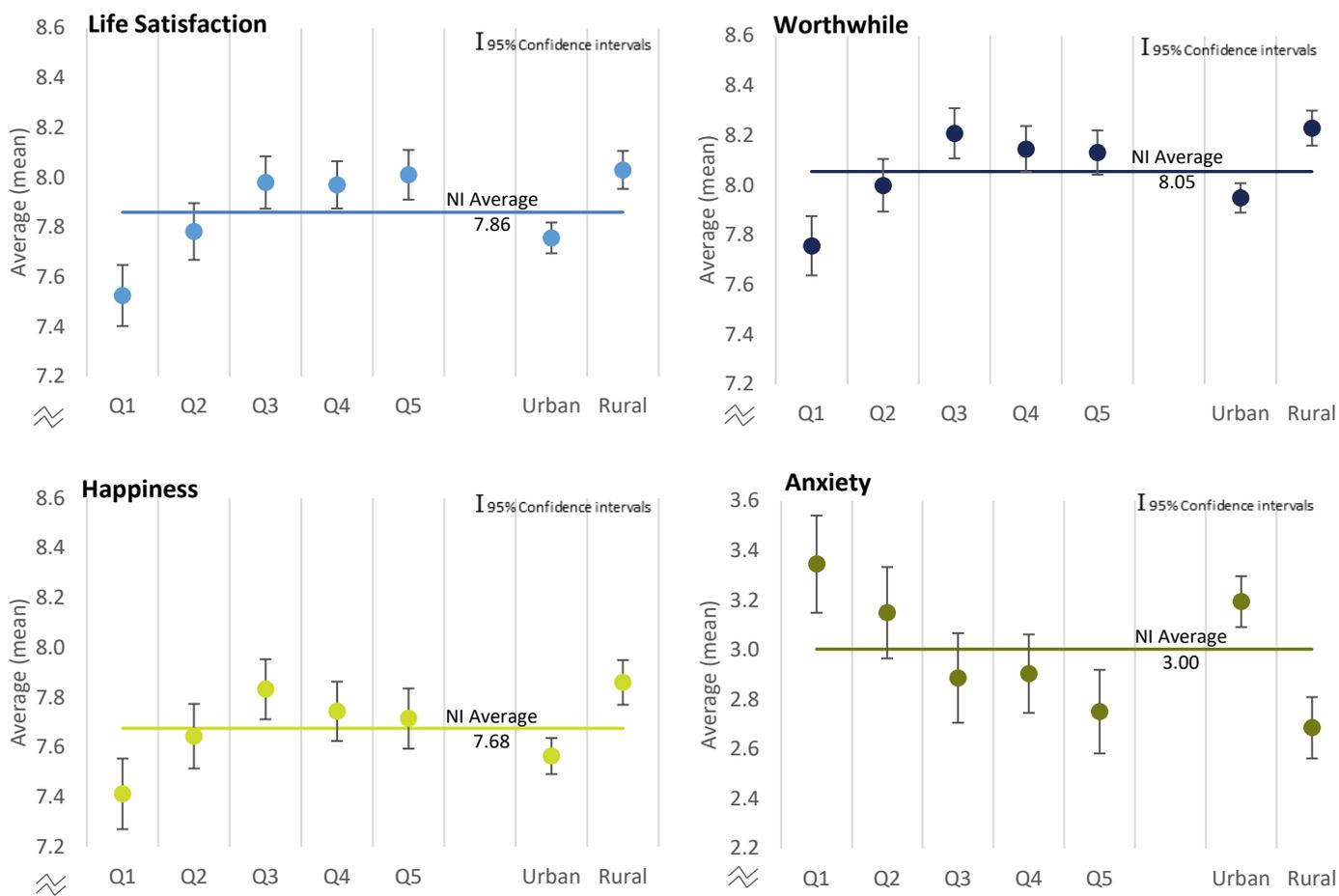


Figure 6 shows the average (mean) for life satisfaction, feelings that things done in life are worthwhile, happiness and anxiety for each MDM quintile and for urban and rural areas. The overall NI average for each measure of wellbeing is displayed as a line on each graph.

Deprivation Quintiles categorise an area of deprivation; Quintile 1 (Q1) represents the 20% most deprived areas and Quintile 5 (Q5) represents the 20% least deprived. See [Annex](#) for more information on the 2017 MDM.

Average (mean) life satisfaction for those living in the most deprived areas (quintile 1), 7.53, was significantly lower than all other areas. Those living in quintile 2, 7.78, also reported significantly lower levels of life satisfaction than those living in the least deprived areas (quintile 5), 8.01.

People living in quintile 1, had significantly lower feelings that things done in life were worthwhile (7.76) than all other areas. This is indicative of poorer wellbeing for those living in the most deprived areas.

Feelings of happiness were significantly lower for those in quintile 1 (7.41) than those in living in less deprived areas (quintiles 3, 4 and 5). Similarly, those living in quintile 1 reported the highest scores for anxiety (3.35), significantly higher than those living in quintiles 3, 4 and 5. This is indicative of poorer wellbeing in quintile 1.

Urban/Rural

People living in rural areas had significantly higher average (mean) life satisfaction, feelings that things done in life were worthwhile and happiness scores (8.03, 8.23 and 7.86 respectively) than those living in urban areas. Similarly, those living in rural areas, reported lower levels of anxiety (2.69) than those living in urban areas. This indicates overall better wellbeing across all four measures for those living in rural areas.

Figure 7: Average Life Satisfaction Score by Disability from 2013/14 to 2019/20

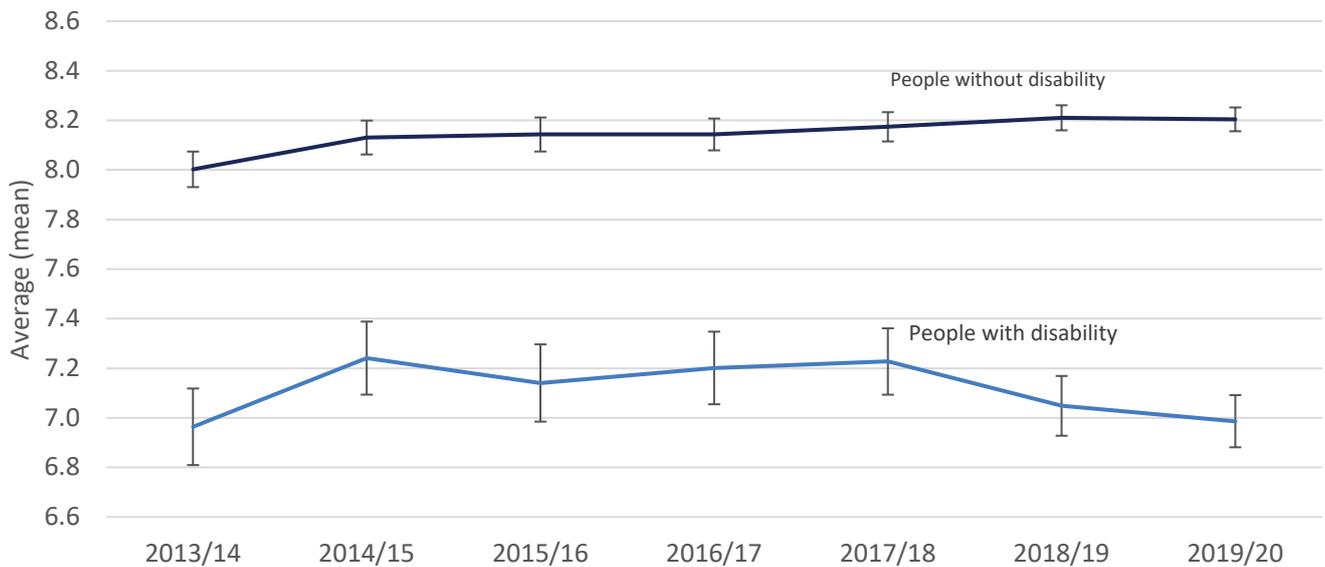


Figure 7 shows the average (mean) ratings for life satisfaction over time for people with a disability and people without a disability. The average (mean) life satisfaction rating has been significantly lower for people with a disability than those without since data were first collected in 2013/14.

The LFS used the Government Statistical Service (GSS) harmonised **definition of disability** which covers people who report:

- physical or mental health condition(s) or illness(es) lasting or expected to last 12 months or more; and
- the condition(s) or illness(es) reduce their ability to carry out day-to-day activities.

The average life satisfaction score of people with disabilities is a population indicator included in the wellbeing framework which overarches the draft Programme for Government³ and NICS Outcomes Delivery Plan⁴.

In 2019/20, more than 31% of LFS respondents (aged 16+) had a disability and their average life satisfaction score has been consistently lower than that of those without a disability (Figure 7).

In 2019/20, the average life satisfaction score of people with disabilities was 6.99 which was significantly lower than that of those without a disability (8.20).

On average, people with a disability also report significantly lower ratings for worthwhile (7.36 compared with 8.33) and happiness (6.81 compared with 8.01) than those without a disability. The average anxiety score is higher for those with a disability than those without (4.14 compared with 2.56).

³ [NI Programme for Government 2016-21](#) (opens in a new window)

⁴ [Outcomes Delivery Plan 2018/19](#) (opens in a new window)

1. Background to the development of the 4 Personal Wellbeing Questions

The ONS personal wellbeing questions were developed as part of the Measuring National Wellbeing Programme.

ONS sought advice from experts working in the field of subjective wellbeing and consulted with specialists on the National Statistician's Measuring National Wellbeing Advisory Forum and Technical Advisory Group. Based on this, as well as extensive question testing, four questions were designed. They provide a concise and balanced approach to the measurement of subjective wellbeing, drawing on three main theoretical approaches.

These include:

- the 'evaluative' approach which asks people to reflect on their life and assess how it is going overall in terms of their satisfaction with life;
- the 'eudemonic' approach which asks people to consider the extent to which they feel a sense of meaning and purpose in life;
- the 'experience' approach which ask about people's positive and negative experiences and emotions over a short period of time to assess these aspects of personal wellbeing on a day-to-day basis

ONS conducted focus groups with members of the public in 2013, and found that 'personal wellbeing' is clearer and simpler for people to understand than 'subjective wellbeing'. Since then, both the questions and estimates have been referred to as 'personal wellbeing'.

The following are the ONS personal wellbeing questions that have been included on the Annual Population Survey each year since 2011:

1. overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays? (evaluative approach)
2. overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile? (eudemonic approach)
3. overall, how happy did you feel yesterday? (experience approach)
4. overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday? (experience approach) All are answered using a 0 to 10 scale where 0 is 'not at all' and 10 is 'completely'.

Personal wellbeing statistics are reported in two ways,

1. The average (mean) rating, and
2. The proportion scoring within each of the rating thresholds outlined in [Labelling Thresholds table, section 2](#).

Research⁵ commissioned by ONS and undertaken by the New Economics Foundation (NEF) in collaboration with the What Works Centre for Wellbeing reinforced the importance of reporting 'threshold' statistics to aid understanding of wellbeing inequalities. The appropriateness of the threshold ranges was tested by ONS who concluded that the thresholds should be kept as they currently are until further work takes place (details of this testing are available in Section 7 of Personal well-being in the UK: January to December 2017⁶).

Further information on the ONS approach to measuring personal wellbeing can be found in '[Personal well-being user guidance](#)' (opens in a new window).

⁵ [Measuring Wellbeing Inequality](#)

⁶ [Personal well-being in the UK](#)

2. The Labour Force Survey (LFS)

The personal wellbeing estimates contained within these reference tables are produced using the Labour Force Survey (LFS). The LFS is based on a systematic random sample of addresses drawn each year from the Pointer list of domestic addresses.

Further detail on the methodology and questionnaire can be found on the [Labour Force Survey page](#) (opens in a new window) on the NISRA website.

Further information on the quality of this report can be found in the [Personal Wellbeing in Northern Ireland Quality Report 2019/20](#) (opens in a new window).

3. Sample Size

The sample size for the UK as a whole was approximately 320,000. The sample for Northern Ireland was 5,150. When considering statistics by LGD it is important to note the relatively small sample sizes upon which such figures are based. For example, in 2019/20, the number of respondents providing personal wellbeing ratings ranged from around 335 in Fermanagh and Omagh to 930 in Belfast.

4. Weighting

As the LFS is a sample survey, there is a certain level of sampling error, i.e. the characteristics of the group sampled may differ slightly from the population as a whole. To account for this sampling error, the data has been weighted in order to produce estimates that better represent the population.

Based on new population estimates, new wellbeing weights have been available for the LFS data since March 2020. This has resulted in Personal wellbeing estimates for the years 2011/12 to 2018/19 being revised and estimates for these years presented in this report will differ from previous publications.

5. Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2017 (NIMDM 2017)

The analysis presented in section 7 utilises five groups (quintiles) of Super Output Areas (SOAs) across NI. These five groups are determined based on level of deprivation using the NIMDM 2017.

Following consultation, NIMDM 2017 replaced NIMDM 2010 as the official measure of deprivation in NI.

SOAs ranked 1 to 178 are the most deprived quintiles relative to all other SOAs. Those ranked 713 to 890 are the most affluent relative to all other SOAs.

NIMDM 2017 is a weighted combination of the seven domains of deprivation. The Income and Employment Deprivation domains account for nearly 50% of the multiple deprivation measure. The Health Deprivation and Disability Domain and Education, Skills and Training Deprivation Domain account for a further 30%, and the remainder is made up of the Access to Services, Living Environment and Crime and Disorder Domains.

Further Information on the deprivation measures can be found on the [Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure 2017 \(NIMDM2017\)](#) homepage.

6. Personal Wellbeing data collected in NISRA's Coronavirus (COVID-19) Opinion Survey

On 20 April 2020, NISRA launched the NISRA Coronavirus (COVID-19) Opinion Survey, designed to measure how the COVID-19 pandemic was affecting peoples' lives and behaviour in Northern Ireland. The NISRA coronavirus (COVID—19) Opinion Survey questionnaire was based on a similar survey that was being conducted by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in Great Britain. This survey includes the 4 Personal Wellbeing questions. Personal Wellbeing figures in this survey are available at NI level as well as further analysis on age groups, gender and those with or without a limiting longstanding illness. The analysis also includes a comparison with previously published NI Personal Wellbeing data. The most recent publication, as well as a copy of the questionnaire, can be found at [NISRA Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Opinion Survey](#).

7. Future Development

It is our intention to explore the addition of extra breakdowns and variables to ensure we continue to meet user need. If there are any characteristics you would like to see included in future publications, please let us know by contacting the lead statistician (contact details listed below).

8. Contact Information

As we want to engage with users of our statistics, we invite you to feedback your comments on this publication to the Statistical contacts listed below.

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