

Measuring National Well-being: Older people's leisure time and volunteering, 2013

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Abstract

This article analyses for those aged 50 and over two measures which are currently used for Measuring National Well-being. These are 'the percentage of people who say they are satisfied with the amount of their leisure time' and 'the percentage of people who have volunteered more than once in the last 12 months'. The data are from Understanding Society, The UK Household Longitudinal Study, 2010-11 (UKHLS).

Introduction

This is part of a series of analyses examining the well-being of older people aged 50 and over. The Office for National Statistics' measures of well-being are organised into ten domains with each domain having between three and five separate indicators. More information about all the measures can be found in the 'National Well-being wheel of measures' (ONS, 2012a). Throughout this analysis 'satisfied' includes those who responded that they were completely, mostly or somewhat satisfied.

Key points

- A higher percentage of people aged 50 and over (70%) were satisfied with the amount of their leisure time compared with all those aged 16 and over (61%).
- The percentage of respondents who were satisfied with the amount of their leisure time increased steadily between the ages of 50 to 54 (51%) and 65 to 69 (84%) and then stayed at a similar level for those aged 69 and over (just over 80%).
- A higher percentage of those who were satisfied with the amount of their leisure time were also satisfied with their life overall.
- About 1 in 5 people aged 50 and over had volunteered more than once in the last 12 months but this varied by age group.
- Volunteering was associated with greater overall life satisfaction.

Satisfaction with the amount of leisure time

“The amount and quality of leisure time is important for people’s well-being for the direct satisfaction it brings. Additionally leisure, taken in certain ways, is important for physical and mental health. Leisure also contributes to the well-being of people other than the person directly enjoying leisure. When a person engages in leisure, the benefits gained are shared with others in a multitude of ways, including improvements in personal relationships, family functioning, and in terms of creation of social capital networks.” (OECD, 2009)

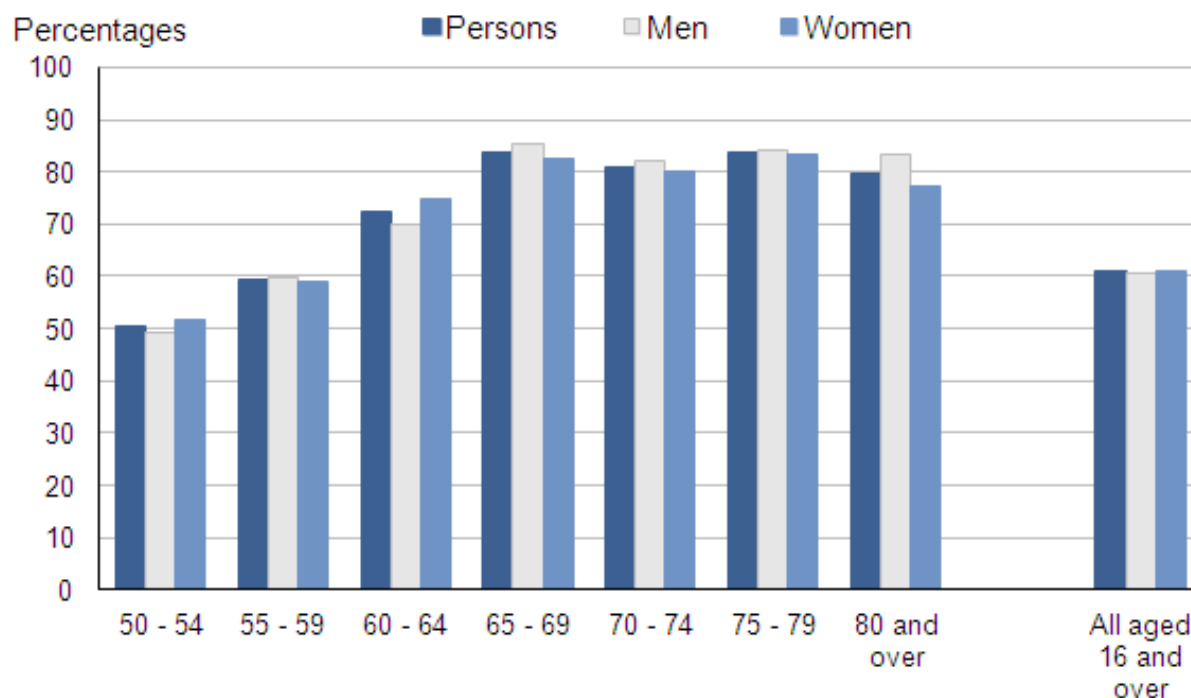
The measure ‘the proportion of people who are satisfied with the amount of leisure time’ has been used as one of the headline indicators of measuring national well-being in the area of ‘What we do’. This section focuses on how satisfied older people were with the amount of their leisure time.

Data from the second wave of UKHLS show that a higher proportion of older people aged 50 and over (70%) reported being satisfied with the amount of leisure time they had compared to all respondents aged 16 and over (61%). Among the older respondents there was little difference by sex, with about 70% of both men and women being satisfied with the amount of their leisure time.

There was a relationship between age and satisfaction with leisure time. There was a gradual increase in the percentage of those who were satisfied with the amount of their leisure time from 51% of those aged 50 to 54 to 84% of those aged 65 to 69. This is presumably because the time used caring for school age children and being in paid work reduces at this stage of individuals’ lives. After the age of 69 there was little change in the percentage of those satisfied with the amount of their leisure time. There is a slight reduction for those aged 80 and over (80%).

Figure 1: Satisfaction with the amount of leisure time by selected age group and sex (2010–2011)

United Kingdom



Notes:

1. Respondents were asked 'How dissatisfied or satisfied they were with the amount of their leisure time?' Responses were on a 7 point scale from 'completely dissatisfied to 'completely satisfied'.
2. Non-respondents not included
3. Source: Understanding Society, Wave 2, 2010–11

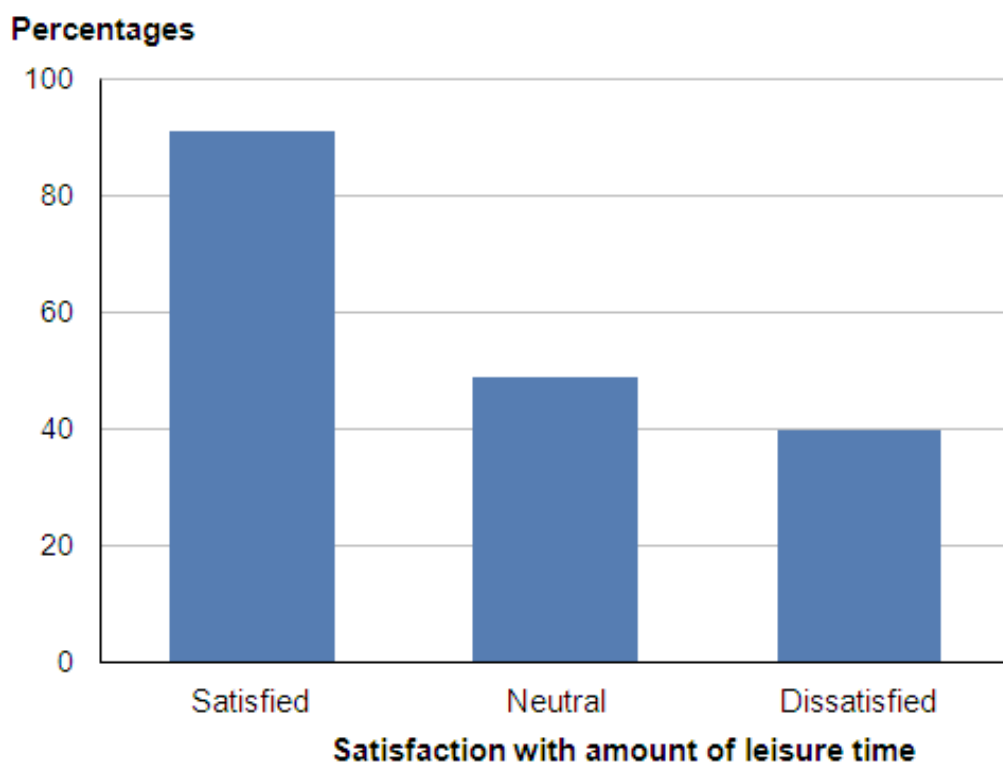
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There is a relationship between satisfaction with the amount of leisure time and satisfaction with life overall. **Figure 2** shows that 91% of older people who were satisfied with the amount of their leisure time were also satisfied with life overall. Only 40% of those who said they were dissatisfied with their amount of leisure said they were satisfied with their life overall.

Figure 2: Satisfaction with life overall by satisfaction with amount of leisure time

United Kingdom

**Notes:**

1. 'Satisfaction with life overall' includes those who responded that they strongly agree, agree or slightly agree that they were satisfied with their life
2. Non-respondents not included
3. Source: Understanding Society, Wave 2, 2010–11

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Volunteering

Research on the influence of volunteering on well-being has considered older people. According to Plagnol and Huppert (2010), the research has often been guided by the observation that older people appear to benefit more from volunteering than younger people. These authors offer a possible explanation that volunteering gives older people a new sense of purpose, which may be more significant for this group because of evidence suggesting that older people tend to be more prone to feeling lonely (McCloughan et al, 2011).

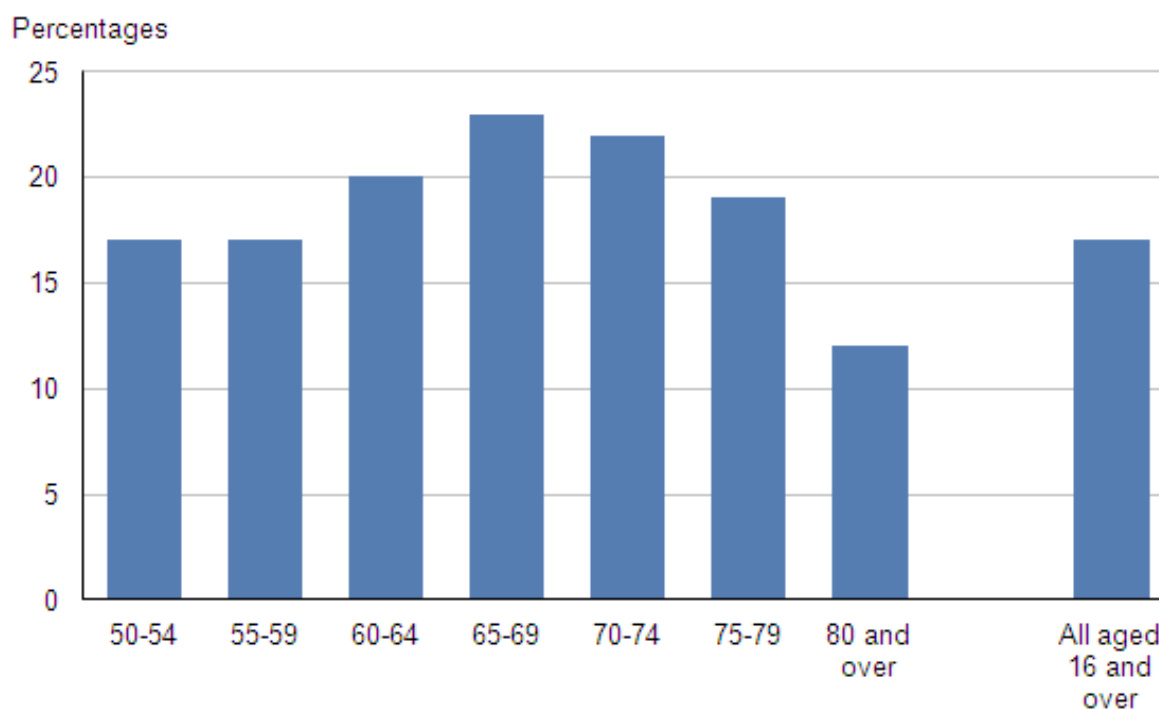
Analysis of the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing data from 2006 and 2008 showed that there are benefits to volunteering in later life. The higher the frequency of volunteering the better the

well-being measured by the life satisfaction, quality of life, social isolation and depression of the individuals involved. People who volunteered in both years had improvements in their well-being scores compared to those who did not. The study also found that there was a relationship between the frequency of volunteering and improvements in individual well-being. Those who volunteered frequently had higher levels of individual well-being compared to those who had not volunteered. The difference in individual well-being between those who had volunteered once and those who had not volunteered at all was minimal and not significant (Nazroo and Matthews, 2012).

The UKHLS asked whether respondents had volunteered in the 12 months before their interview and if so how often. Nearly 20% of older people had volunteered in the last 12 months compared to about 17% of all those aged 16 and over.

Figure 3: Volunteering more than once by age

United Kingdom



Notes:

1. Respondents were asked whether they have volunteered at all in the last 12 months and if so how often.
2. Non-respondents are not included
3. Source: Understanding Society, Wave 2, 2010–11

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The data also showed that there was a relationship between age and how often people volunteer. The proportion of people who volunteered more than once increased with age. For those aged between 50 and 59 it was about 17%. The highest proportion of older people who volunteered more than once was in those aged 65 and 69 at 23% (Figure 3). This is the same group that also had the highest proportion of people saying they were satisfied with their amount of leisure time.

There was a relationship between volunteering at least once in the last 12 months and life satisfaction. For older people the proportion of those who volunteered and said they were satisfied with their lives overall was higher at 84%. For those who did not volunteer 75% said they were satisfied with their life overall.

Background notes

1. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available by visiting www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html or from the Media Relations Office email: media.relations@ons.gsi.gov.uk

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This document is also available on our website at www.ons.gov.uk.

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About the ONS Measuring National Well-being Programme

NWB logo 2



This article is published as part of the ONS Measuring National Well-being Programme.

The programme aims to produce accepted and trusted measures of the well-being of the nation - how the UK as a whole is doing. It is about looking at 'GDP and beyond' and includes:

- Greater analysis of the national economic accounts, especially to understand household income, expenditure and wealth.
- Further accounts linked to the national accounts, including the UK Environmental Accounts and valuing household production and 'human capital'.
- Quality of life measures, looking at different areas of national well-being such as health, relationships, job satisfaction, economic security, education environmental conditions.
- Working with others to include the measurement of the well-being of children and young people as part of national well-being.

- Measures of 'subjective well-being' - individuals' assessment of their own well-being.
- Headline indicators to summarise national well-being and the progress we are making as a society.

The programme is underpinned by a communication and engagement workstream, providing links with Cabinet Office and policy departments, international developments, the public and other stakeholders. The programme is working closely with Defra on the measurement of 'sustainable development' to provide a complete picture of national well-being, progress and sustainable development.

Find out more on the [Measuring National Well-being](#) website pages.

About Understanding Society

Understanding Society, the UK Household Longitudinal Study

Understanding Society is a unique and valuable academic study that captures important information every year about the social and economic circumstances and attitudes of people living in 40,000 UK households. It also collects additional health information from around 20,000 of the people who take part.

Information from the longitudinal survey is primarily used by academics, researchers and policy makers in their work, but the findings are of interest to a much wider group of people including those working in the third sector, health practitioners, business, the media and the general public.

Key facts

- 40,000 households – 2,640 postcode sectors in England, Scotland and Wales – 2,400 addresses from Northern Ireland.
- £48.9 million funding (until 2015).
- Approximately 3 billion data points of information.
- Innovation Panel of 1,500 respondents.
- Participants aged 10 and older.
- Building on 18 years of British Household Panel Survey.
- 35 to 60 minutes: the average time to complete each face to face interview.

How does it work?

Interviews began in 2009 with all eligible members of the selected households.

- Adults are interviewed every 12 months either face to face or over the phone using Computer Assisted Interviewing.
- 10 to 15 year olds fill in a paper self-completion questionnaire.

From 2010 some 20,000 participants aged over 16 also received nurse visits and provided a blood sample and some basic physical measurements (height, weight, blood pressure, grip strength).

Data used in this analysis

The data in this analysis is from the adult self completion questionnaire of Wave 1 of the Survey and has been weighted using the interview with self completion individual cross-sectional weight (a_indscus_xw).

Throughout this article 'agree' refers to those who strongly agree or agree and 'satisfied' refers to those who report being completely, mostly or somewhat satisfied.

For more information about the UKHLS see [Understanding Society](#)