

A Quarterly Review of Social Reports and Research on Social Indicators, Social Trends, and the Quality-of-Life.
News Included of Research Committee 55 on Social Indicators and Social Reporting of the International Sociological Association.

THE AUSTRALIAN UNITY WELLBEING INDEX: ONE DECADE ON

Robert A. Cummins, School of psychology, Deakin University

The Australian Unity Wellbeing Index monitors the subjective wellbeing of the Australian population. Our first survey was conducted in April 2001 and our latest report concerns the 25th survey, undertaken in April this year (Cummins et al., 2011).

Each survey involves a telephone interview with a new sample of 2,000 Australians, selected to represent the geographic distribution of the national population. These surveys comprise the Personal Wellbeing Index, which measures people's Subjective Wellbeing (SWB), and the National Wellbeing Index, which measures how satisfied people are with life in Australia. Other items include a standard set of demographic questions and some survey-specific questions.

The theoretical framework for the interpretation of data is the theory of Subjective Wellbeing Homeostasis (Cummins, 2010). This proposes that each person has an individual 'set-point' for personal wellbeing that is internally maintained and defended. Set-points are genetically determined and, on average, cause personal wellbeing to be held at 75 points on a 0-100 scale (from very dis-

satisfied to very satisfied). Each individual set-point lies within the range of 60-90 percentage points.

Homeostasis theory offers an explanation for the relationship between SWB and personal resources, such as money or relationships. The effect on SWB of increasing, or diminishing such resources, will depend on the degree to which the homeostatic system is already saturated with each type of resource. If people are reasonably wealthy and in an emotionally intimate relationship, then increasing the level of either resource will not normally increase SWB on a chronic basis due to the genetic ceiling imposed by their set-point. However, such additional resources can strengthen defences against negative experience. Moreover, for someone who is initially low on these resources and suffering homeostatic defeat, the provision of more income or an improved relationship may allow them to regain control of the wellbeing. In this case the provision of resources will cause SWB to rise until it approximates its set-point for each person.

All reported results have been standardized to a 0-100 range. Thus, the level of SWB and domains are referred to in terms

of percentage points. Reference is also made to normative ranges, calculated by using the survey mean scores (N=25) for each relevant variable as data.

Results

The results reported here are limited to the Personal Wellbeing Index (International Wellbeing Group, 2006), three of its constituent domains, and three domains of the National Wellbeing Index. The full results are found in Report 25.0 (Cummins et al., 2011).

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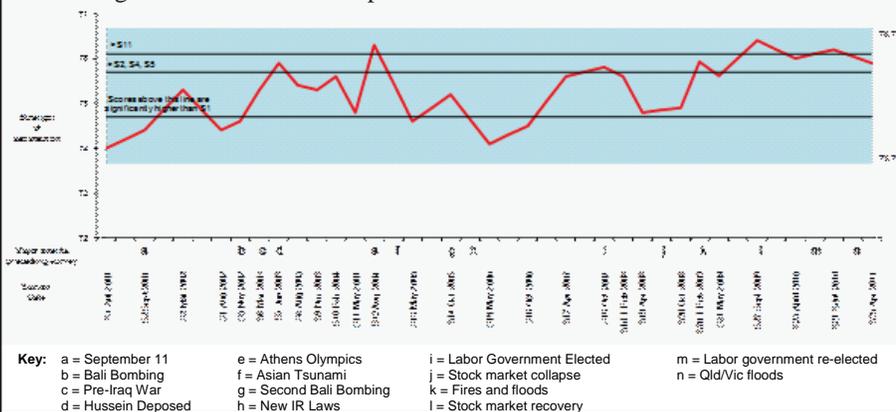
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Editor's Note:

This issue commences with an update on trends in the well-being of Australians by Bob Cummins. A review of Volume 41 (2011) of the United Kingdom's Social Trends follows. This is the first of what will be a continuing series of reviews of Web-Based social reports. These reviews are followed by a message from ISQOLS President Heinz-Herbert Noll, photos from a recent television interview of Wolfgang Glatzer, and announcements.

Figure 1: Personal Wellbeing Index:
The average of seven domains of personal satisfaction



SINET

Social Indicators Network News

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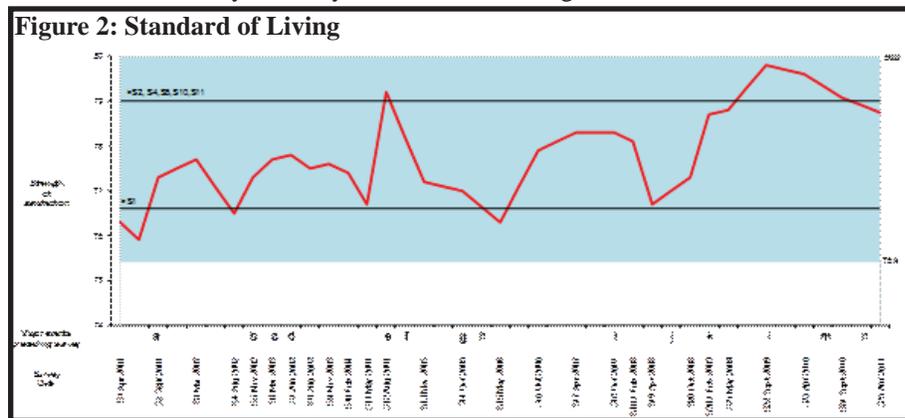
Over all the surveys, it is notable that the Personal Wellbeing Index is so stable. The survey means have varied by just 3.1 points. Moreover, the degree of change from one survey to the next has been 1 point or less except for 4 of the 24 adjacent surveys. These occasions have all been associated with major national events: S1-S2 (September 11), S11-S12/S12-S13 (Sydney Olympics), S14-S15 (Second Bali bombing), and S20-S20.1 (Victorian Bush Fires).

The base-line of Figure 1 is marked by letters which indicate potential causes for the rise and fall in SWB. These are variously probable. The first peak of the PWI coincided with the Athens Olympics in August 2004. This was an unusual survey since data were collected over the Olympic period, meaning that the national elation at Australian success likely added to the value of the Personal Wellbeing Index. The high levels of the most recent four surveys may reflect the sense of relief that Australia escaped the global recession and that people's savings and superannuation funds remain secure, with continued low unemployment, low levels of inflation, and the breaking of the drought. There may also be an element of positive downward comparison against countries that have not been so lucky.

The following three domains of the PWI have been selected because they each provide a different perspective onto the possible drivers of SWB.

Standard

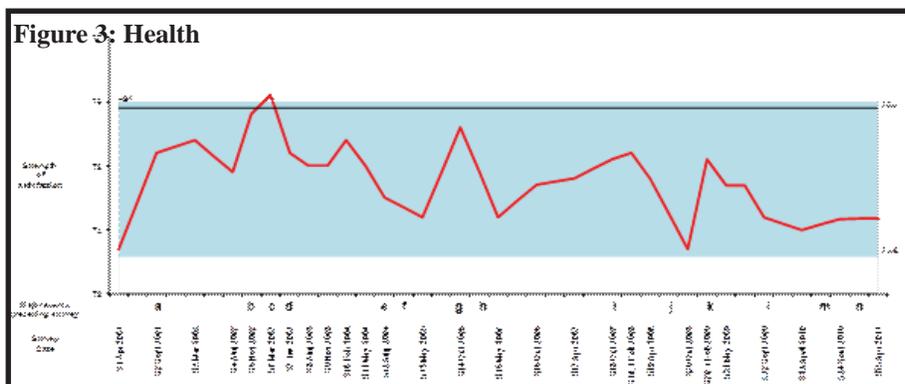
'How satisfied are you with your standard of living?'



The rise in satisfaction with Standard of Living from April 2008 (Survey 19) commenced in the face of the continuing economic down-turn. There were probably two reasons for this. One was that various economic stimulus packages, released by the Government, provided households with additional discretionary income. The second was that the deteriorating economic situation had had a serious negative effect on only a minority of the population. Few people lost their job (unemployment never rose above 5-6%) and few were reliant on interest from shares or other investments for their income. While a majority of people had lost wealth with the downturn, for the most part their investments were intact and so they felt they could just wait for the economy to recover. In the meantime, if they still had a job and a mortgage, and if their wage has not diminished, then they were better off financially than maybe they had ever been due to the decrease in interest rates and, so, their mortgage payment.

Health

'How satisfied are you with your health?'



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Satisfaction with health really does not change significantly between surveys and so is a good benchmark to indicate that the data set as a whole is reliable

While the overall difference between surveys is marginally significant, this is the most stable domain, with a total range between surveys of just 2.4 points. It is evident that satisfaction with personal health is little influenced by either world or national events and this stability is confirmation that the changes recorded in the other domains since Survey 1 are valid and meaningful.

Community

‘How satisfied are you with feeling part of your community?’

It seems that almost any significant national event, either positive or negative, causes an increased satisfaction with community connectedness. These events seem to generate social cohesion and a heightened sense of belonging to the ‘Australian family’.

Apart from the Olympic period elevation (S12), rises are coherently related to times of major conflict or national distress. In the six months following September 11, satisfaction with community connectedness went up from its lowest level in April 2001. It then successively fell and rose again in the lead-up to the Iraq war (S6), the defeat of Hussein (S9), the second Bali bombing (S14) and following the Victorian bushfires in February 2009. This pattern is consistent with social psychological theory. A perceived source of threat will cause a group (or population) to become more socially cohesive.

In summary, while statistically significant changes in the personal domains have been demonstrated, the ranges of movement within each domain are small, ranging from 2.4 points (health) to 6.1 (safety). This is consistent with the management of personal satisfactions by homeostasis. Satisfactions with national domains, however, show much more variability.

National Wellbeing Index

The National Wellbeing Index is the average value derived from six national domains. These measures of satisfaction are ‘distal’ in that they do not directly concern the ‘proximal’ wellbeing of the individual (Cummins et al., 2003). Because of this, they are not as strongly held under homeostatic control as the PWI domains. They are, thus, more free to vary and the variation that they show is weakly linked to personal wellbeing. The three most interesting of these are as follows:

Economy

‘How satisfied are you with the Economic Situation in Australia?’

The national domain of Economic Situation is the most volatile, with a total variation of 16.3 points over the surveys. It showed an almost continuous rise over the six-year period from 2001 to 2007, with this run ending in October 2007 when it posted a significant fall. This may have been influenced by rising interest rates or by popular perceptions of the incoming Labor government as a poor economic manager.

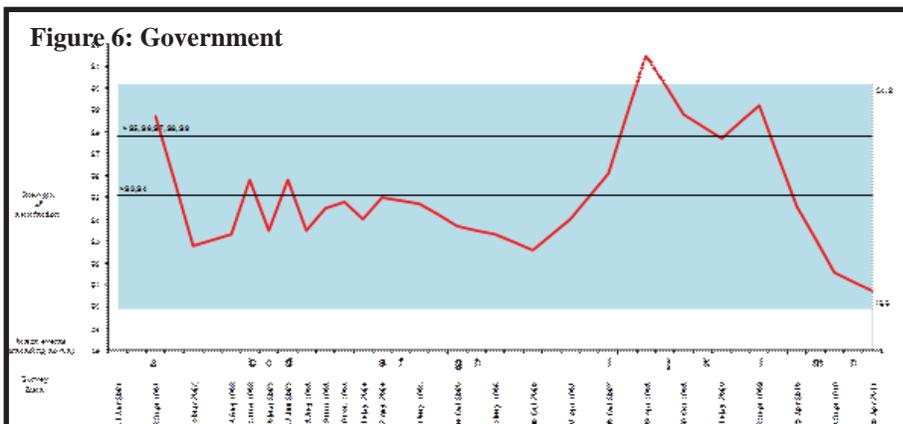
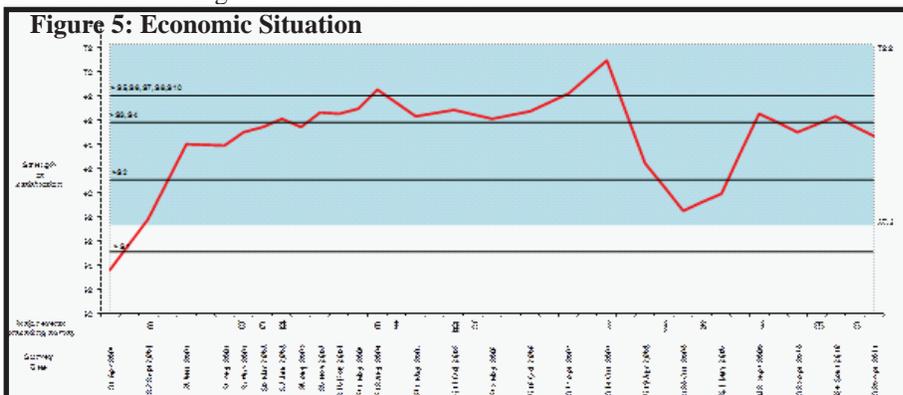
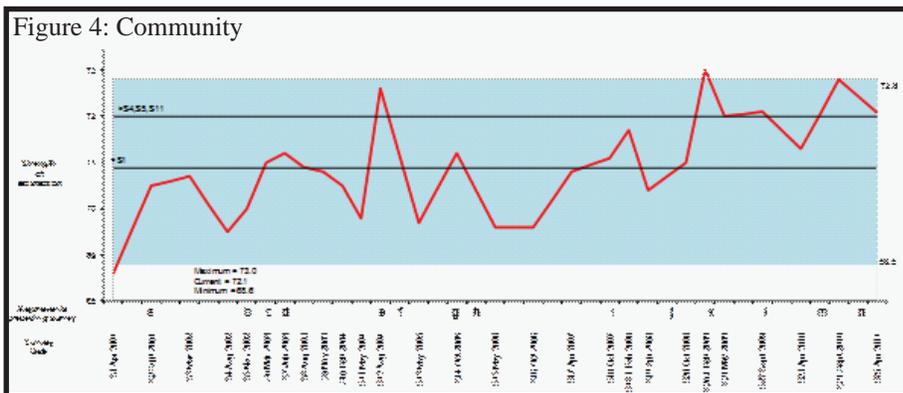
The stock-market collapse in 2008 further enhanced this loss of satisfaction. The turn-around between October 2008 (S20) and May 2009 (S21) may have been initiated by the Government’s various measures to stimulate the economy, most particularly the \$900 one-off cash payments to tax-payers and school-age children in March/April 2009. It has since been sustained by evident economic recovery in Australia.

Government

‘How satisfied are you with Government in Australia?’

Over Surveys 1-18, Prime Minister Howard led the Liberal Party to successful re-election in both November 2001 and October 2004. During this period, satisfaction with government recorded its highest level of 58.8 points immediately following September 11 (Survey 2, September 2001) and its lowest level at Survey 16 (52.6 points).

At the time of Survey 18 (October 2007) it was looking as though a change of Gov-



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ernment was likely at the November 2007 election, and indeed this transpired. Kevin Rudd became the new Labor Prime Minister. Satisfaction with Government rose in anticipation and was sustained over the next two years. Following this period of elevation, the levels of satisfaction crashed to their current record-low. The total range over the decade is 10.8 points.

Possible causes of these changes are presented in Report 25.0 (Cummins et al., 2011). However, the most interesting aspect of these changes is that the very strong feelings for or against Government do not translate into personal wellbeing (compare Figure 1).

Environment

“How satisfied are you with the state of the Natural Environment in Australia?”

The objective environmental reality is that from Survey 1 in April 2001 to Survey 23 in April 2010, Australia experienced the worst drought in recorded history. This changed in the latter part of 2010 when Australia recorded its wettest September on record. Since then, except for a small portion of Western Australia, the drought has been declared over.

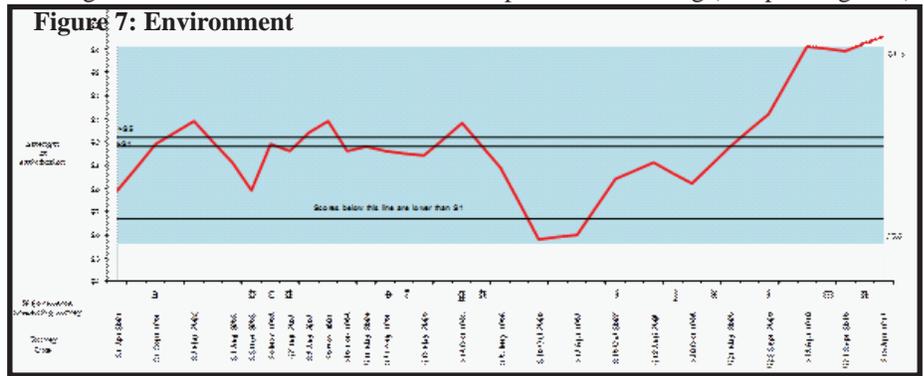
Interestingly, however, the record of satisfaction with the environment in Figure 7 shows little correspondence with this objective record. Prior to Survey 16 this domain was very stable, fluctuating by only 3.0 points over the time-series, even though the drought was steadily deepening during this period.

This pattern changed dramatically between May 2006 (Survey 15) and October 2006 (Survey 16) when satisfaction fell by 3.1 points, to a level below the normal range, as it was at that time. Satisfaction then remained significantly below its value at Survey 1 for at least the next six months, up to Survey 17. Then in October 2007 (Survey 18) it returned to be no different from Survey 1 once again. This is the only domain to have fallen significantly below the level of Survey 1 values in any survey.

The cause of this fall in satisfaction is both remarkable and attributable. In the period prior to Survey 16, Al Gore’s film ‘An Inconvenient Truth’ had been released and widely discussed in Australia. Moreover, in the few months prior to Survey 16 the media had repeatedly featured the topic of ‘global warming’ and various doomsday scenarios. This negative publicity, backgrounded by the continuing drought, caused people to feel less satisfied with the natural environment.

The decreased level of satisfaction with the environment during this period is interesting in reinforcing the separate performance of objective and subjective variables. The actual state of the natural environment had not changed discernibly between Survey 15 and Survey 16.

During 2008 the levels of satisfaction returned to their previous level, but during the following year, in 2009, the ‘Environment change sceptics’ gained media ascendancy. Their claims, that the evidence for human-induced climate change was false, was a



message many people wanted to hear. The following Survey 22, in September 2009, reflected renewed optimism in the form of a sudden increase in satisfaction with the natural environment.

The summer of 2009/2010 was mild over much of Australia; very different from the searing heat and bushfires experienced a year earlier. This seemed to reinforce the sceptics’ message. Then, as stated earlier, by Survey 24 in September 2010, the rains had come and most of Australia was mainly drought-free for the first time in a decade. Thus, satisfaction with the environment has remained at very high levels ever since.

In summary, these changes in satisfaction reflect two major influences. First is the degree of congruence between personal experience of the natural environment and the media messages they are receiving. People are more likely to believe global warming when they experience hot and dry conditions. Second, their attitudes also reflect the dominant media message, but the strength of this influence seems highly dependent on both the prevailing conditions and the passage of time. The latter effect is particularly interesting. If people are given a distal source of fear, such as global warming, they will adapt to this over time and perceive it as less threatening that they did initially. It is evident that public opinion concerning the state of the natural environment should not be used by policy-makers to plan environmental goals.

Conclusions

Such results as have been presented are notoriously fraught regarding attempted associations with putative causal agents. Such determinations are always post hoc and so more likely to be opportunistic than scientific. Just occasionally, however, changes in the average level of personal or national wellbeing coincide with events that make the association compelling and

attributable in a theoretical context. Two examples seem to be the general rise in population wellbeing in association with the Athens Olympics and the changes, both downward and upward, in satisfaction with the natural environment.

In other terms, the results generally conform to the predictions of SWB homeostasis theory, most particularly in relation to the relative degree of variation in proximal and distal sources of satisfaction. In terms of the former, health satisfaction appears almost impervious to the influence of national events, whereas the national domains show considerable variation. Theory holds that the latter are more strongly driven by perceptions of prevailing conditions than homeostatic control. It is to be hoped that the continuation of this data record will yield additional understanding of the external and internal forces that change human wellbeing within nations.

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http://www.deakin.edu.au/research/acqol/index_wellbeing/index.htm

REVIEWS OF WEB-BASED SOCIAL REPORTS

REVIEW 1:

THE UNITED KINGDOM'S SOCIAL STATISTICS

Editor's Note: One characteristic of the field of social indicators, social reporting, and well-being/quality-of-life studies is so evident today that it almost escapes explicit notice—the permeation of the field by the Internet and the World Wide Web. The concepts of social indicators and programs of social reporting commenced in the 1960s and 1970s—long before the innovation and diffusion of the Web in the 1990s and early 2000s. However, the Web and the associated availability of all types of information through computers and related high speed electronic devices now is an ever-present aspect of many lives throughout the world. Social indicators, social reports, and well-being/quality-of-life studies are no exception. Today, all periodic international and national social reports as well as local community social reports are published online on the Web and many are published exclusively on the Web. This is associated with a change in the nature of human access to information and storage of that information that is likely to continue indefinitely into the future.

In recognition of this technological change, this is the first of what will be a continuing series of reviews of Web-based social reports. Each review will describe what is available on the Webpage of the report and will ask questions such as: To what extent does the report address the long standing objectives of systematic reporting on social issues for the purpose of public enlightenment? What aspects/domains of social life are reported? What social indicators? What are the trends? Are composite indices reported? Is wellbeing/quality of life an organizing, or at least underlying, principle?

Introduction

This review series commences with the social report that is one of the oldest and longest-running series. Initiated in 1970 under the name Social Trends, it originally was published in printed form by the United Kingdom's Central Statistical Office, which now is the Office of National Statistics (ONS). From 2010, Social Trends moved exclusively to an online publication in order "... to reach a wider audience and bring many new opportunities to develop and enhance the presentation of statistics while retaining quality and value."

The website for Volume 41 (2011) of Social Trends: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/socialtrends/> was accessed on 01 August 2011. This webpage is linked to the ONS website, on which additional economic and population data can be accessed. On the Social Trends webpage, the following description appears:

Social Trends draws together social and economic data from a wide range of government departments and other organisations to provide a comprehensive guide to UK society today, and how it has been changing. Data is [are] presented clearly in a combination of tables, figures and text providing the ideal tool for researching life and lifestyles in the UK.

Social Trends is aimed at a wide audience: policy makers in the public and private sectors, service providers, people in local government, journalists and other commentators, academics and

students, schools and the general public.

Social Trends covers a range of subjects including:

- Health
- Education
- Population
- Lifestyles and social participation

These goals are quite in line with the original social reporting objectives of the social indicators movement of the 1960s.

Current Releases

A Current Releases link on the Social Trends main webpage produces links to sections or chapters that have pdf files containing the most recent reports on the following topics:

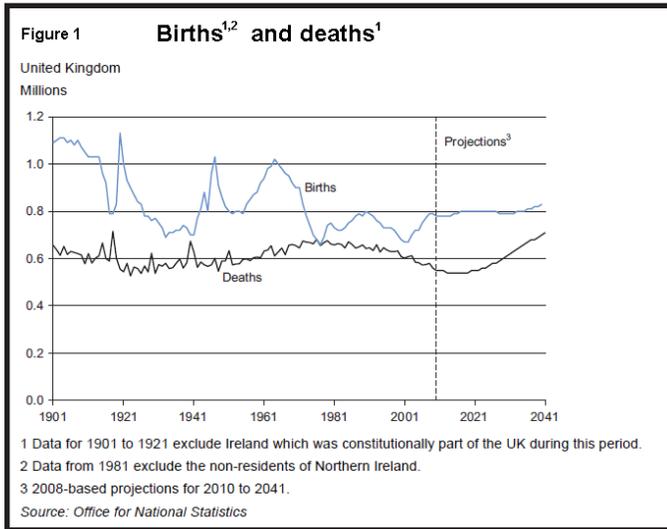
- Population,
- Households and families,
- Labour market,
- Housing,
- Transport,
- Lifestyles and social participation,
- Income and wealth,
- Expenditure,
- Education and Training,
- Health,
- Environment,
- Crime and justice,
- Social protection,
- International comparisons, and
- e-Society.

The pdfs contain narratives describing tables and charts containing statistics on sub-topics within each. For instance, the Health chapter contains materials and data on Expenditure on health and life expectancy, Self-reported health status, Use of services, Mortality, Cancer, Health lifestyle, and Mental health.

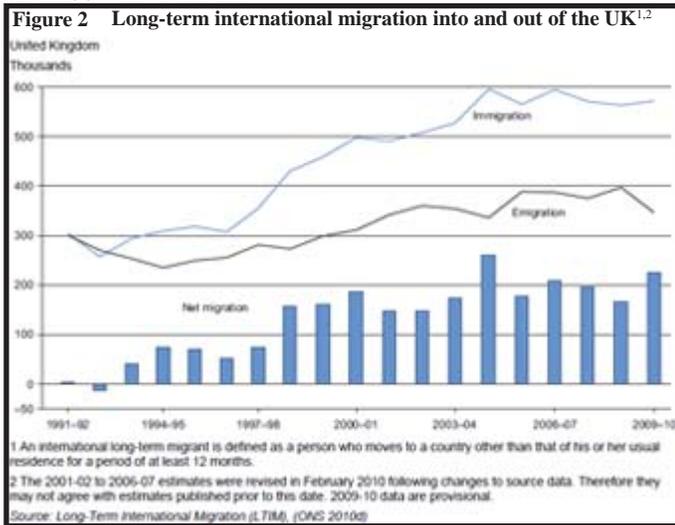
My overall impression of the contents of these chapters is good. They contain useful and interesting data that appear to meet contemporary statistical and demographic standards. And the choice of topics covered and the statistics chosen appear to be fairly well informed by contemporary social science studies. A few items from these chapters will be highlighted.

Population. The UK population in 2009 is given at 61.8 million, an increase of 2.7 million since 2001, an average annual increase of 0.6 percent per year. Figure 1 from the Population chapter reproduced nearby shows the trends since 1900 in counts of births and deaths with projections to the year 2041. The ups and downs of the UK's birth counts correspond to various baby booms and busts and the projections of the increasing numbers of deaths expected over the next three decades correspond to the aging of the UK population, with numbers of deaths projected to converge towards the numbers of births during this time period.

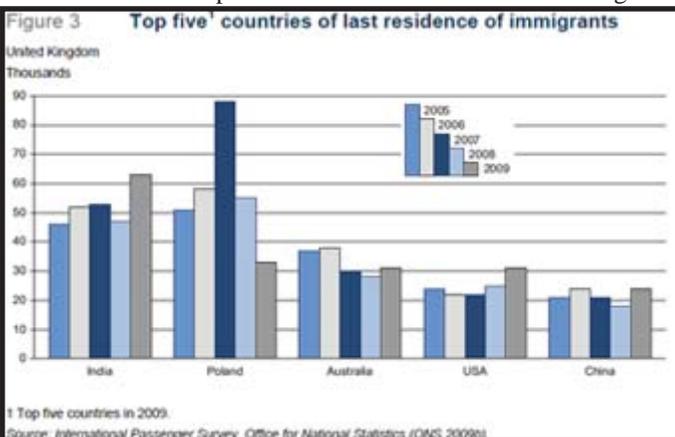
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With an aging population and as a concomitant of globalization of the world's economy in which the UK has been a major player has come increasing immigration. Figure 2 shows trends in immigration, emigration, and net migration to the UK during the 20-years 1991 to 2010. The substantial increases in net migration after 1997 are evident.

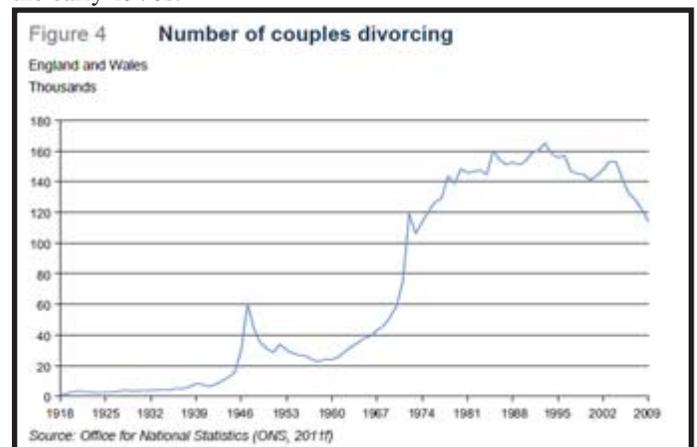


Different developed societies can peacefully absorb differing levels of immigration. As is evident from recent history in Denmark, Germany, France, the United States, Norway (most recently), and other countries, however, there are social and cultural limits to the absorption of migrants, especially if they originate from countries with greatly different racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural mixes from those of the receiving country. Relevant to this, Figure 3 shows data on the top five countries of last residence of long-term

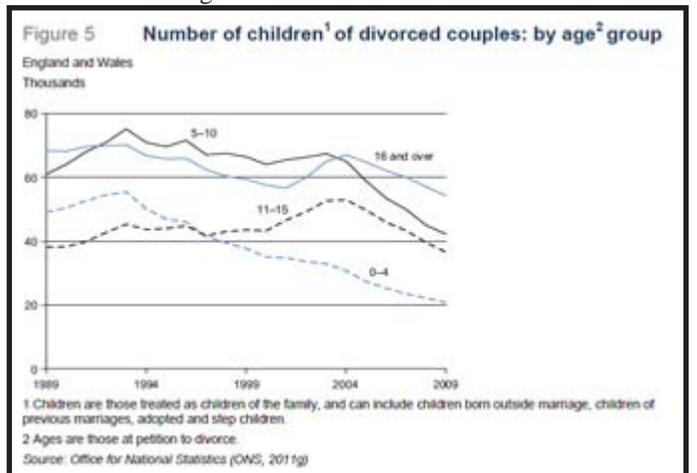


immigrants to the UK for the years 2005 to 2009. For the most recent year, 2009, India replaced Poland as the source country for the largest number of long-term immigrants. There also is a substantial present of immigrants from Australia, the USA, and China. Two of the five countries (Australia and the USA) are Anglophone, one (India) is substantially Anglophone, and all three have had considerable influences of British culture. A fourth (Poland) is linguistically different, but European. In short, most of these top five countries of last residence share substantial linguistic and/or cultural attributes with the UK.

Households and Families. Similar to many Western countries, the UK experienced a four-decade long boom in marital divorces that began in the 1970s with changes in its divorce laws. But, as Figure 4 from the Households and Families chapter reproduced nearby shows, this boom peaked in the early 1990s and appears to have run its course, with numbers of couples divorcing in the first decade of the 21st century declining to levels not seen since the early 1970s.



The decline in the numbers of couples divorcing shown in Figure 4 is corroborated by Figure 5 from the Households and Families chapter on the number of children of divorced couples by age at the time of petition to divorce. In particular, the numbers of children ages 0-4 in the figure peaks and begins a decline in the early 1990s. The numbers of children in the other age groups begin their declines around the year 2004, which coincides with the recent period of rapid decline in Figure 4. All in all, since much social science research shows that being reared in intake families with two parents maximizes the social capital of the children and provides other good well-being outcomes, these recent declines in the UK are indicative of improvements in child well-being.



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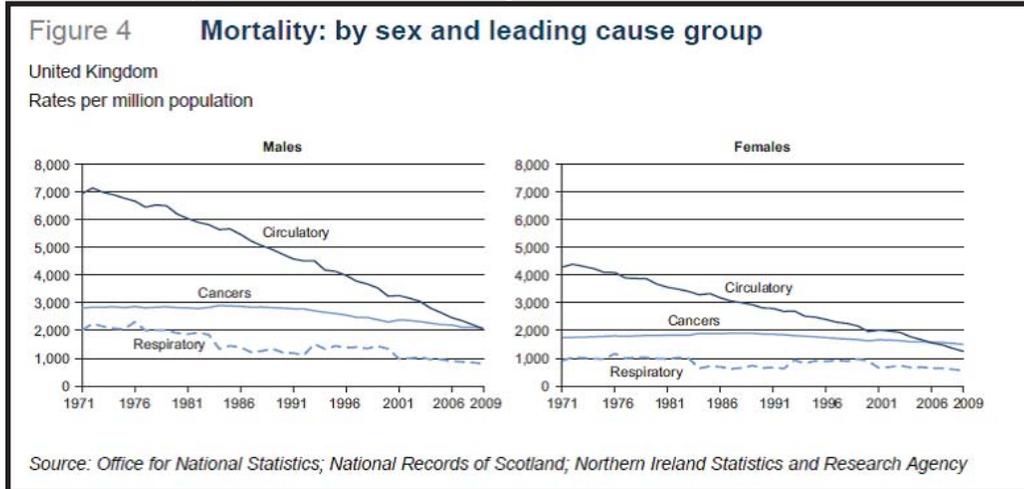
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Health. One impressive trend in the Health chapter is shown in Figure 4 reproduced nearby—the dramatic declines in the circulatory diseases mortality rate for both men and women. The declines are on the order of 70 percent from 1971 to 2009 and have been so substantial that, by 2009, the leading cause of death for both sexes was cancer. Figure 4 also shows substantial declines in respiratory mortality for both sexes and slight declines in cancer mortality rates. These declines show up in the increases

used, the negative correlation would exist. This health lifestyle factor is, of course, not unique to the UK. Rather, it is increasingly evident throughout the developed world as physical activity levels have declined, diets have changed, and portion sizes have grown larger and larger.

Income and Wealth. As researchers on social indicators and the quality of life know, there is no one-to-one association of money income with subjective well-being measures such as happiness or life satisfaction; but cross-section studies generally have found

a positive logarithmic relationship. Thus, a study of well-being should not ignore money. The Income and Wealth chapter contains a number of tables and graphs on recent trends in household income, earning, wealth, and taxes in the UK. Two charts reproduced nearby tell much of the story. Figure 2 shows that there was an increase in median real (adjusted for changes in prices) household disposable income over the 20-year period from 1988/89 to 2008/09. On the other hand, this growth largely ended



in life expectancy for both sexes reported elsewhere in the Health chapter. The narrative of the chapter ascribes the mortality rate declines to reductions in cigarette smoking, exposure to second hand smoke, restrictions on marketing of foods high in sugar, fat, and salt, and improvements in standards of health care.

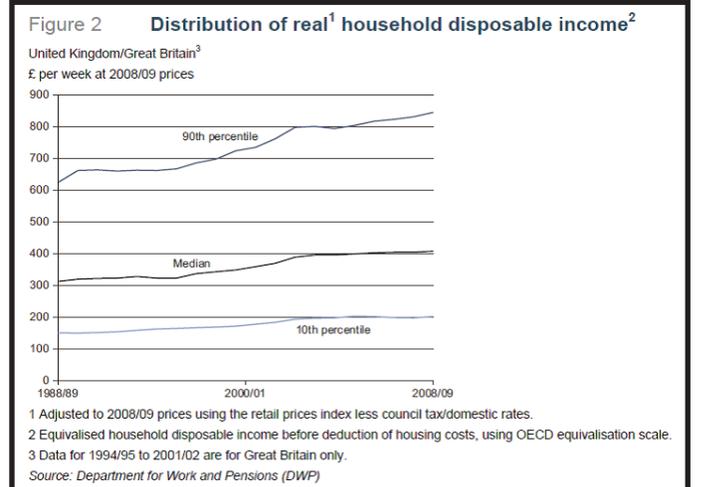
An indicator in the health lifestyle section of this chapter that is particularly notable—the prevalence of low physical activity and high Body Mass Index levels—is shown in Table 7. The inverse correlation of the two indices is evident, and the very high prevalence of “obese or overweight” BMIs with increasing ages of both males and females in the UK in 2008/09 is striking. For instance, in the middle ages 45 to 64, about 4 of 5 males are obese or overweight as are more than 3 of 5 females. Even if a more stringent criterion of high BMI, such as 35 and above, were

circa 2002/03 and since has been virtually flat. In addition, the figure shows that what growth has occurred in these most recent years has been concentrated at the upper income levels. As remarked in a previous review (Land 2011), these income trends appear to be characteristic of post-industrial societies, with their domination by globalized corporate structures and economies, service sector and high-technology-based employment, elongation of the period of transition from childhood to independent adulthood, economic rewards to higher education, and dual-earner household structures.

Table 7 Physical activity levels of adults and children and prevalence of BMI classed as ‘obese and overweight’^{1,2} by sex and age, 2008–09³

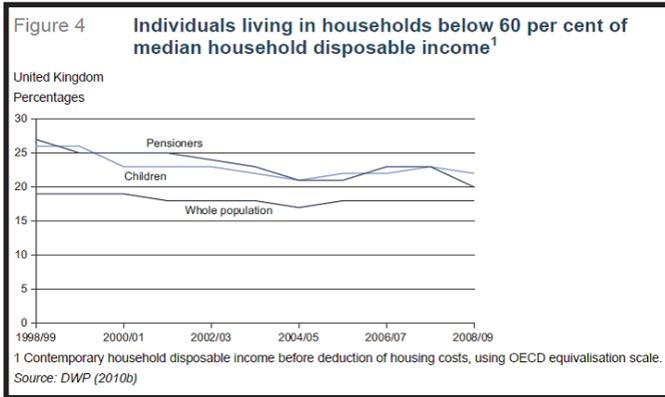
Great Britain	Males			Females		
	Meets physical activity recommendations ⁴	Low physical activity levels ⁵	Obese or overweight	Meets physical activity recommendations ⁴	Low physical activity levels ⁵	Obese or overweight
2–15 ²	68	21	31	57	28	28
16–24	53	16	35	35	31	39
25–34	50	19	52	36	24	44
35–44	45	23	71	34	27	54
45–54	41	25	79	32	32	63
55–64	33	37	81	28	37	68
65–74	20	47	81	17	52	74
75 and over	10	68	71	6	78	61
All ages	39	30	60	29	37	52

¹ Body mass index (BMI) greater than or equal to 25.
² Data for Wales is based on self-reported weight and height and are not directly comparable with England and Scotland. For Wales, data are for children aged 2–15 with valid height and weight measurements, and based on the 85th (overweight) and 95th (obese) percentiles of the 1990 UK BMI reference curves. For Scotland, data for children whose BMI was more than 3 standard deviations above or below the norm for their age were excluded from the table. Physical activity data are for children aged 2–15 in England and Scotland; children aged 4–15 in Wales.
³ Based on 2009 mid-year population estimates.
⁴ Those classed as ‘meeting recommendations’ participated in 30 or more minutes of moderate or vigorous activity on at least 5 days a week.
⁵ ‘Low activity’ levels indicate less than 30 minutes of moderate or vigorous activity per week.
 Source: The NHS Information Centre for Health and Social Care (IC (2010)); Welsh Government (Wales (2010)); Scottish Government (Scot (2010))



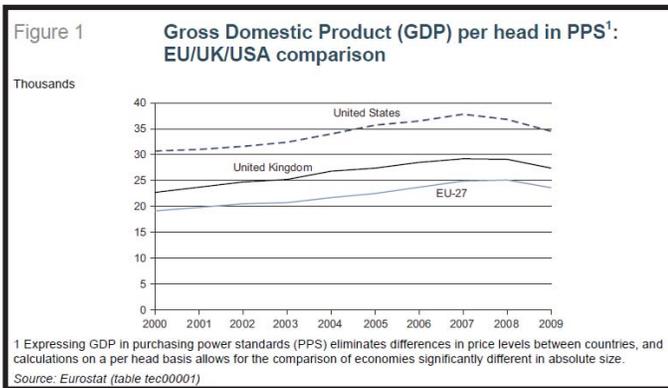
Since having a low income is associated with being disadvantaged and excluded from many opportunities available to the average citizen and thus affects societal well-being, what is happening to incomes at the lowest levels in the UK? Figure 4 shows the data. Using 60 percent of median household disposable income as the poverty line marker, it can be seen that there was some slight progress in reducing poverty overall over the decade from 1998/99 to 2008/09. The figure also shows that children and pensioners were at higher than average risk of living in a low

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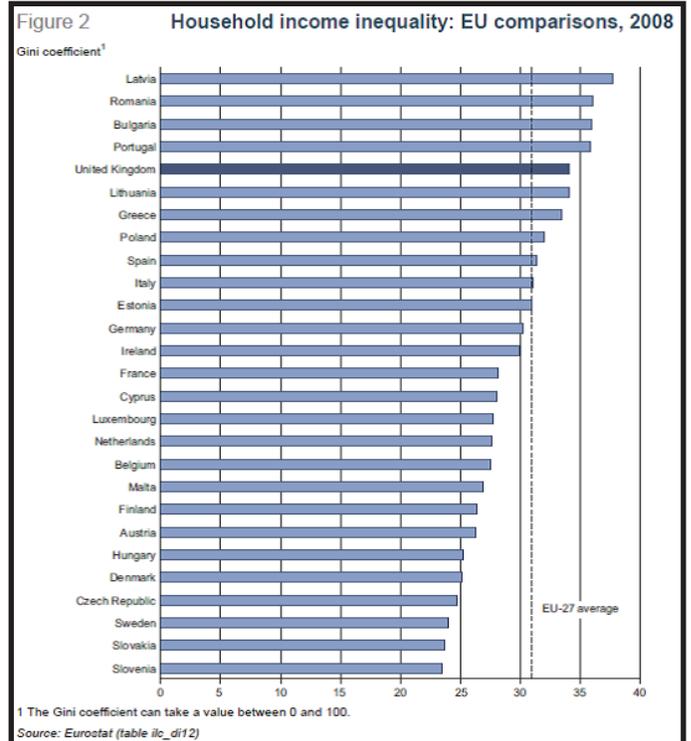
income household. But these groups also saw larger than average decreases in the percentages living at these levels—reductions from 26 to 22 percent for children and from 27 to 20 percent for pensioners.

International Comparisons. The International Comparisons chapter contains charts and tables that compare a number of indicators for the UK with those of other countries. Figure 1 reproduced nearby exhibits trends in Gross Domestic Product per household head in Purchasing Power Standards for the UK in comparison with those of the USA and the average across the 27 states in the European Union. The trends of increase in the early 2000s followed by declines with the 2008/09 recession are quite similar across the three units with the UK levels above those of the EU-27 and below those of the USA. Over the period 2000 to 2009, the average annual change in GDP per head was 2.1 percent compared to 2.4 percent for the EU-27 and 1.3 percent for the USA.



Income inequality historically has been higher in the UK and the USA than in other developed countries. Figure 2 illustrates this for the year 2008, showing Gini coefficients for the UK in comparisons with other EU countries. It can be seen that this measure of the level of income inequality placed the UK at fifth most unequal, and the four countries with higher levels of inequality are smaller and among the less developed of the EU. Using France and Germany, which both have larger populations and more developed economies places the UK at the top of the three.

Figure 5 shows an international comparison among the Group of Seven Industrial countries with respect to an indicator that has been found in child and youth well-being research to be of substantial importance—the percentages of youths aged 15 to 24 not enrolled in education and not in paid employment. This indicator is of importance because it is indicative of the extent to which youths in these ages are “detached” from mainstream social institutions and thus at greater risk of alienation from the society, behavioral problems, and crime. The chart places the



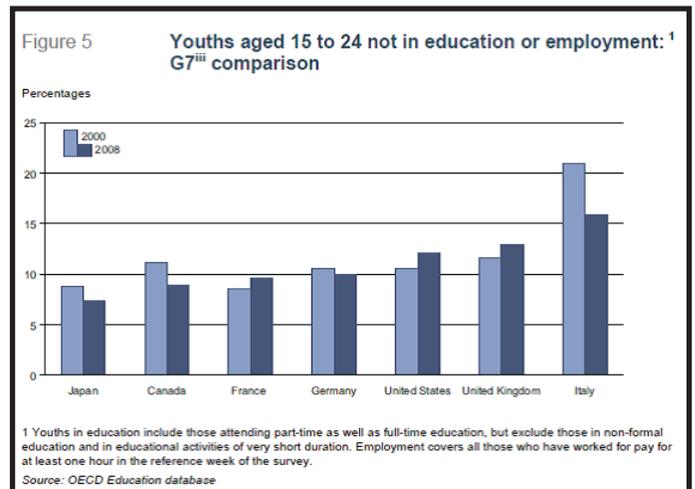
UK well-being performance on this indicator above that of Italy but behind Japan, Canada, France, Germany, and the USA.

Regional Trends

The Social Trends main webpage has link to a section on Regional Trends. Data on many of the topics and indicators contained in the reports cited above at the national level are given there for 11 geographical regions within the UK together with data on Population & Migration, Economy, and the Environment.

Subjective Well-Being

The Social Trends main webpage also has a “Spotlight on” link that leads to a news release and a pdf file on Subjective Well-Being. The news release states that the UK Integrated Household Survey, which is the source of many national and regional statistics, will include subjective well-being monitoring questions beginning in April 2011. This initiative is in response to a November 2010 request from the UK Prime Minister “to devise a new way of measuring well-being in Britain.” Four questions will be asked:



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- 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 first annual estimates from these questions are planned for summer 2012.

The pdf file contains five sections:

- Measuring national well-being' introduces the concept of national well-being and explains the differences between objective well-being and subjective well-being
- Differences and changes in overall subjective well-being estimates' explores differences in overall subjective well-being between countries and trends in subjective well-being in the UK over time
- Factors associated with individual's subjective well-being' looks at how different factors are associated with subjective well-being at the individual level
- Domain specific subjective well-being' looks at how measures of subjective well-being can be specific to areas that impact on people's lives
- Measuring subjective well-being' examines how subjective well-being can be measured and sets out ONS' proposals for measuring subjective well-being

The report indicates that the narratives in these sections lead to the following Key Points:

- Subjective well-being is one approach to understanding the well-being of the nation. There are other ways of measuring National Well-being, but better measures of subjective well-being will help provide a fuller picture of the nation's well-being.
- Subjective well-being can be measured, but there are a variety of ways to do this and ONS' approach will be to capture these different methods in a way that is appropriate for our household surveys.
- There are a variety of factors that are associated with individual's subjective well-being but the relationship at the aggregate level between overall subjective well-being estimates and Gross Domestic Product is less clear.

The contents of this report reviews much of the research literature on subjective well-being with which social indicators and quality-of-life researchers will be familiar, including research by Richard Easterlin, Ed Diener, Daniel Kahneman, Bernard van Praag, and Justin Wolpers. Given these cited authors, one might surmise, and would be correct in doing so, that much of the discussion centers on empirical research on the question of how money income relates to subjective well-being measures of the quality of life. For instance, Figure 2 from the report shows graphical plots of two conventional measures of subjective well-being—responses to overall life satisfaction and happiness questions from the 2005-2008 World Values Survey arrayed by a measure of average national income—the logarithm of GDP per household head measured in US dollars of purchasing power parity.

The narrative of the report emphasizes that countries with similar national income levels such as Indonesia and Morocco (identified in the plot on the left) and Hong Kong and the UK have very different average levels of life satisfaction, and that countries such as Vietnam and Moldova with similar levels of income have very different average happiness levels. What is striking to me, however, is that the UK is so close to the regression lines for the graphs of both subjective well-being outcomes. This should be put in the context of the narrowing dispersions of the nations, such as the UK, near the top of the income scale, but it also may be indicative of the “middling” of UK citizens with respect to their subjective life assessments (life satisfaction) and affective feelings (happiness).

The report also contains the over time relationship in the UK, using 1973 levels as the base (= 100) for indices of change in a Eurobarometer life satisfaction question and the logarithm of GDP per household head.

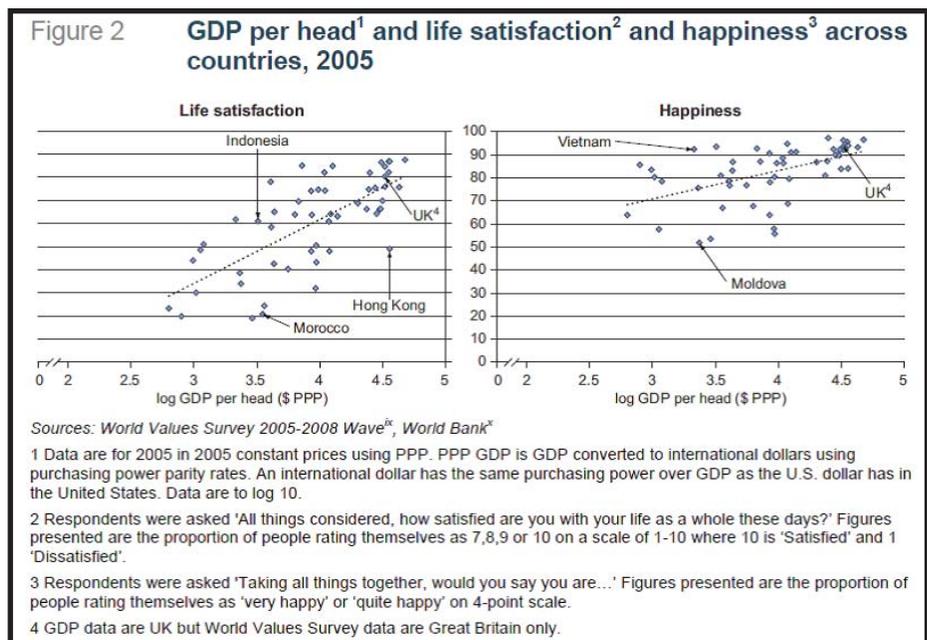
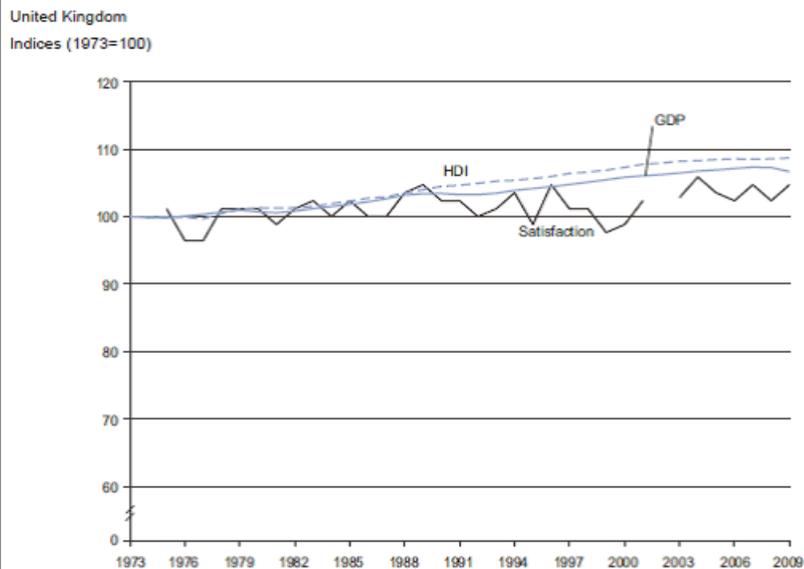


Figure 3 GDP per head, Household Disposable Income (HDI) per head,¹ and life satisfaction² over time



The report states:

Figure 3 shows that log GDP per head and log HDI per head both trended upwards between 1973 and 2009. While life satisfaction also seems to have increased but to a lesser extent and there has been more variability in reported life satisfaction, with no clear indication that the peaks and troughs in life satisfaction correspond with the movement in the measures of economic development. For example, the biggest increase in reported life satisfaction was between 1995 and 1996 with an increase of 5 percentage points in the proportion of people in the UK reporting themselves as 'Very satisfied' or 'Fairly satisfied' (from 84 per cent to 89 per cent). Between 1995 and 1996 both GDP per head and HDI per head also increased. However, between 1994 and 1995 both GDP and HDI per head increased yet the proportion of people in the UK reporting themselves as 'Very satisfied' or 'Fairly satisfied' fell by 4 percentage points (from 88 per cent to 84 per cent). It is not clear how this fits with cross-national findings that there is a relationship between GDP and life satisfaction and happiness.

Actually, based on the large body of research now available on subjective well-being averages across national populations and their changes over time, we know that change, even across three or four decades, are slow. In addition, some of the year-to-year variability in average life satisfaction measures is due to sampling fluctuations that are larger than average household income measures. To tease out the long-term associations of indices such as those in Figure 3, therefore, the subjective measures should be smoothed by taking moving averages or other local nonparametric statistical methods. Doing this for the life satisfaction averages in Figure 3 would show, for example, both the long-term association as well as the impacts of economic recessions on downturns in the life satisfaction average. Based on findings by Diener and Kahneman (2009) that economic growth might have only a small impact on people's average ongoing feelings of well-being (affect, experienced happiness) but may heighten people's life evaluations, modest improvements in the life satisfaction averages would be expected, and this is essentially what the data in Figure 3 show.

Comment

As noted in the Introduction, the UK's Social Trends is the longest running annual national social indicators/social report series produced by a government statistical agency in existence today. As such, it basically is the grandmother/granddaddy of all contemporary social reports. Perhaps due to this history and continuity, the contents of Social Trends, as sampled and described above, bear an imprint of the topics that

emerged in the social indicators movement of the 1960s and that formed the content of many national social reports initiated in the 1970s.

My overall impression of the topics covered and the statistics reported is that they are very competently done. The image of the well-being/quality of life in the contemporary UK that emerges from Trends is one of:

- 1) a slowly growing and aging population with substantial in and out migration
- 2) that has made considerable progress in improving its health and longevity over the past four decades but now faces overweight/obesity health challenges,
- 3) in which economic productivity and incomes improved over a two decade time frame but have stagnated except at the top levels in recent years, with considerable income inequality and a risk of youth alienation,
- 4) that has relatively high satisfaction with life as a whole in the adult population, but
- 5) that faces continuing challenges of inclusion and involvement of all members of the society, especially immigrants and youths, in its mainstream social institutions – witness the street violence and looting in London and other UK cities of early August 2011.

One thing absent from the Social Trends report series is an effort to produce a summary or composite index of trends in well-being/quality of life in the UK across the decades based on a selected set of the indicator series. This is very much in the tradition of the "just report the data on the individual indicators" approach to social reporting of the social indicators movement circa 1970 when Trends commenced. It misses the growth of approaches to composite index construction that we have seen since the 1990s (see, e.g., Hagerty et al. 2001; Hagerty and Land 2007; Sirgy 2011).

At the same time, the Spotlight on Subjective Well-Being report shows that the staff of the Office of National Statistics is reasonably well aware of the relevant research literature on subjective well-being measures and the quality of life. The Office of National Statistics staff should be given a plus for initiating this line of development.

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Participation in meetings of the International Society for Quality-of-Life Studies by ONS staff members would be most welcomed and might redound to more informed developments of this new initiative and to the exploration of new composite indices of quality of life for the UK. In other words, this could bring new life to this grand dame of social reporting.

~ Kenneth C. Land

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SINET HOMEPAGE

SINET has a homepage entry on the World Wide Web. It is located on the homepage of the Department of Sociology at Duke University and thus can be accessed by clicking on Department Publications on the address of that page, namely, <http://www.soc.duke.edu> or by typing in the full address <http://www.soc.duke.edu/resources/sinet/index.html>. The homepage for SINET contains a description of the Contents of the Current Issue as well as of Previous Issues. In addition, it has Subscription Information, Editorial Information, Issue-Related Links, and a link to the homepage of ISQOLS, the International Society for Quality-of-Life Studies. The Issue-Related Links button has links to World Wide Web locations of data for the construction, study, and analysis of social and quality-of-life indicators that have been identified in previous issues of SINET. When you are surfing the Web, surf on in to our homepage.

MESSAGE FROM ISQOLS PRESIDENT

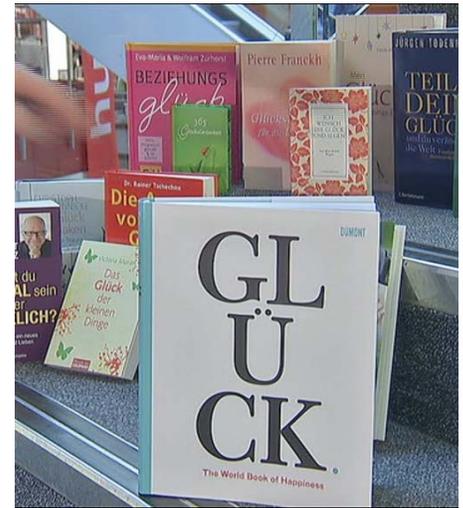
Heinz-Herbert Noll
11th ISQOLS Conference
"Discovering New Frontiers in
Quality of Life Research"
Lisbon, June 5 to 9, 2012

Dear Members of ISQOLS and readers of SINET,

It is my great pleasure to announce the 11th Conference of the International Society for Quality of Life Studies (ISQOLS) to take place in Lisbon, Portugal, from June 5 to 9, 2012. The conference shall have the general theme "Discovering New Frontiers in Quality of Life Research" and will be organized in collaboration with the Institute for Social and Political Sciences (ISCSP) of the Technical University of Lisbon. We are quite optimistic that this conference taking place in one of the most beautiful cities in Europe will attract many quality of life researchers from all around the globe and are much looking forward to meeting many of you in Lisbon next year. More information will be published soon at the ISQOLS website (www.isqols.org/) and a conference website to be established during the next couple of weeks. A call for papers will be published later this fall.

I would also like to take this opportunity to inform you that the ISQOLS' central office has been moved from Blacksburg (Virginia) to Berlin (Germany). Since – according to ISQOLS by-laws - "the principal office of the Society shall be located at the office of the Executive Director of the Society", the move of the office was prompted by the appointment of our new Executive Director and Treasurer Denis Huschka. Please use the following email addresses to contact the office or Executive Director: office@isqols.org; ED@isqols.org. In case that you may have any questions around ISQOLS or any suggestions to consider, don't hesitate to contact Denis Huschka or myself.

Yours sincerely,
Heinz-Herbert Noll
President of ISQOLS



The German version of The World Book of Happiness "Glueck" was just on the market, when "hr-television" asked Wolfgang Glatzer for an interview about the topic. In a twenty minute television contribution, the impressive book of our colleague Leo Bormanns was presented in the context of a discussion about happiness, in which other participants' views were mixed with Wolfgang's statements. The image of the book developed as a nice bridge between scientific statements and entertaining approaches.



Wolfgang was finally asked for his contribution to the book. His device to attain happiness is two-sided: first, find your "Quastenflosser" for the great happy moments. The Quastenflosser is a symbol of something that you tried to attain for a long time but were not successful in attaining. Sometimes abruptly your wish is fulfilled and you become happy. But, in the long run, happiness needs a foundation in your lifestyle. The second recommendation, therefore, is to keep a balance of "having", "loving", and "being", which should be arranged according to your basic needs.

Call For Papers
Applied Research in Quality of Life
The Official Journal of the International
Society for Quality-of-Life Studies

The aim of this journal is to publish conceptual, methodological and empirical papers dealing with quality-of-life studies in the applied areas of the natural and social sciences. As the official journal of ISQOLS, it is designed to attract papers that have some direct implications for or impact on practical applications of research on the quality-of-life. We welcome papers crafted from inter-disciplinary, inter-professional and international perspectives. This research should guide decision making in a variety of professions, industries, nonprofit, and government sectors such as healthcare, travel and tourism, marketing, corporate management, community planning, social work, public administration, human resource management, among others. The goal is to help decision makers apply performance measures and outcome assessment techniques based on concepts such as well-being, human satisfaction, human development, happiness, wellness and quality of life. The Editorial Review Board is divided into specific sections indicating the broad scope of practice covered by the journal, and the section editors are distinguished scholars from many countries across the globe.

Authors interested in submitting manuscripts for publication should consult the website <http://ariq.edmgr.com>. Manuscripts should be directed to the relevant Section Editor of the Editorial Review Board. If an appropriate Section Editor can not be identified, direct the manuscript to the current Editor in Chief, Alex Michalos.

SINET

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