

Covid 19 Social and Economic Issue Analysis: Wellbeing¹

What does the Government say about this issue?

On 31 March 2020 the Government issued 'Guidance for the public on the mental health and wellbeing aspects of Coronavirus (Covid-19)'. The document acknowledged the fears that people are experiencing about the Covid-19 outbreak and explained how people can manage and promote positive mental health and wellbeing. The Government recommends strategies such as keeping in contact with friends and family and helping others where possible, keeping physically active and getting enough sleep, exercise and relaxation, and managing social media and information intake. More specific advice is provided for older people or those with existing conditions who may be at additional risk of experiencing negative mental health and wellbeing. NHS guidance promotes self-help techniques and offers additional self-assessment tools and signposting to mental health services.

What impact is Coronavirus having on people's wellbeing?

Although increased opportunities for volunteering and the development of innovative neighbourhood support schemes may have positive effects on some people's wellbeing, this analysis focuses on negative impacts which require support or intervention.

The World Health Organisation notes that in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and government strategies to control it, the "main psychological impact to date is elevated rates of stress or anxiety. But as new measures and impacts are introduced – especially quarantine and its effects on many people's usual activities, routines or livelihoods – levels of loneliness, depression, harmful alcohol and drug use, and self-harm or suicidal behaviour are also expected to rise".

Symptoms of poor wellbeing can be physical, mental or behavioural and include:

- headaches or dizziness, muscle tension or pain, stomach problems, chest pain or a faster heartbeat, and sexual problems (physical symptoms)
- difficulty concentrating, struggling to make decisions, feeling overwhelmed, constantly worrying, and being forgetful (mental symptoms)
- being irritable and snappy, sleeping too much or too little, eating too much or too little, avoiding certain places or people, and drinking or smoking more (changes in behaviour)

Current changes in behaviour such as self-isolation and social-distancing, and changes in personal circumstances such as loss of routine, financial instability and employment insecurity are known risk factors for mental health and wellbeing. Impact can be short term (stress while adapting to being furloughed for example); medium term (relationship

¹ Wellbeing definition: "Wellbeing encompasses the environmental factors that affect us, and the experiences we have throughout our lives. These can fall into traditional policy areas of economy, health, education and so on. But wellbeing also crucially recognises the aspects of our lives that we determine ourselves: through our own capabilities as individuals; how we feel about ourselves; the quality of the relationships that we have with other people; and our sense of purpose." <https://whatworkswellbeing.org/about-wellbeing/what-is-wellbeing/> The focus in this analysis is wellbeing, not mental health, although the two terms are often used interchangeably in the literature.

breakdown); or long term (post-traumatic stress). Concerns may be about self, family and friends, communities or wider societal issues. Timely support from statutory services or voluntary agencies may be reduced or unavailable, further adding to people's anxiety. Ongoing measures such as the additional three week period of lockdown rolled out by the Government on 16 April 2020 are likely to have further negative effects on people's wellbeing.

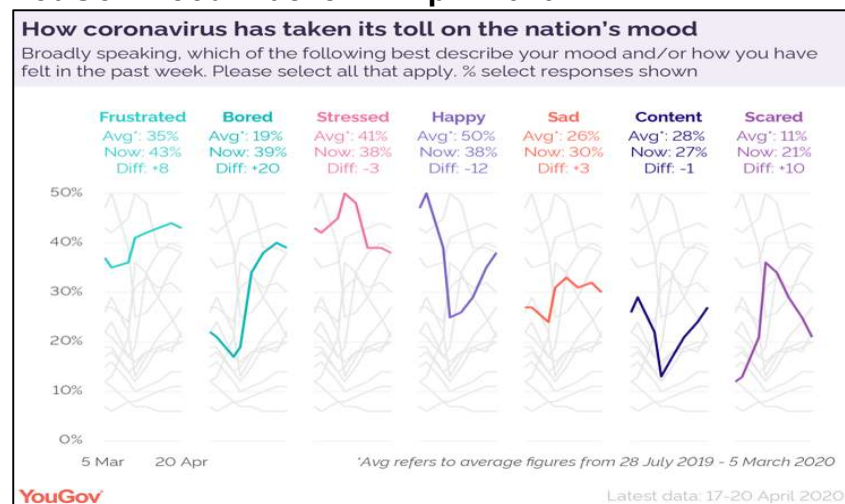
What do people say about their wellbeing?

Findings published by The Office of National Statistics from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey covering the period 27 March to 6 April 2020 show just over half of adults (53.1%) said Coronavirus was affecting their wellbeing. The most common issue was worry about the future, followed by feeling stressed or anxious.

Survey data from an Ipsos Mori poll published 16 April 2020 show that people's main concerns about the effect of Covid-19 on their wellbeing were problems arising from isolation (one in five) and risk of mental illness (also one in five). Other concerns include experiencing negative feelings (13%) and worries about practical aspects of life such as their financial situation and employment (10%).

Latest results from the YouGov Covid-19 mood tracker show that during the first three weeks of the lockdown period, stress was the nation's primary emotion but people are now less stressed which may indicate adjustment to life in lockdown. Feelings of frustration and boredom are, however, higher than average.

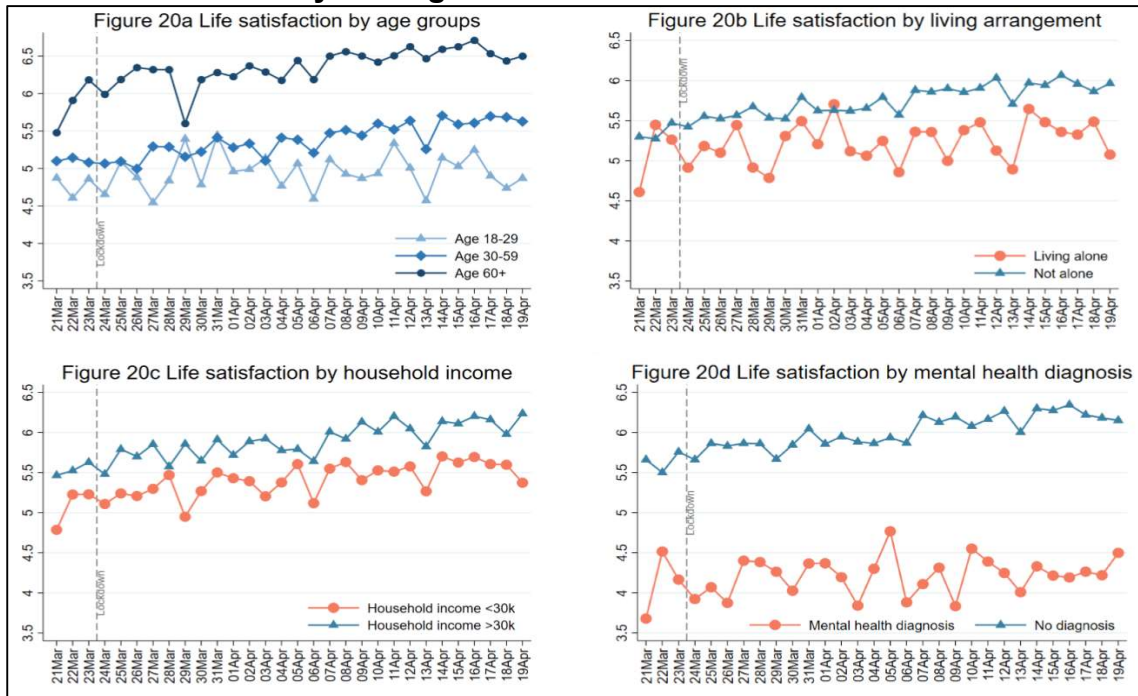
YouGov Mood Tracker 27 April 2020



<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/lifestyle/articles-reports/2020/04/27/britains-mood-slowly-starts-recover-covid-19>

The UK Covid-Mind Study (a panel study of over 75,000 respondents focusing on the psychological and social experiences of adults living in the UK during the Covid-19 pandemic) shows that wellbeing decreased just before lockdown but had risen slightly by 19 April 2020. Findings from the study show that although people's self-reported wellbeing changed between 21 March and 19 April 2020, there were differences between groups of people. Wellbeing remained more volatile amongst younger adults (those aged 18-29) and people living alone. There was less evidence of an improvement amongst adults aged 18-29 or amongst individuals with a diagnosed mental health condition (see graphs below).

UK Covid-Mind Study findings – Life satisfaction*



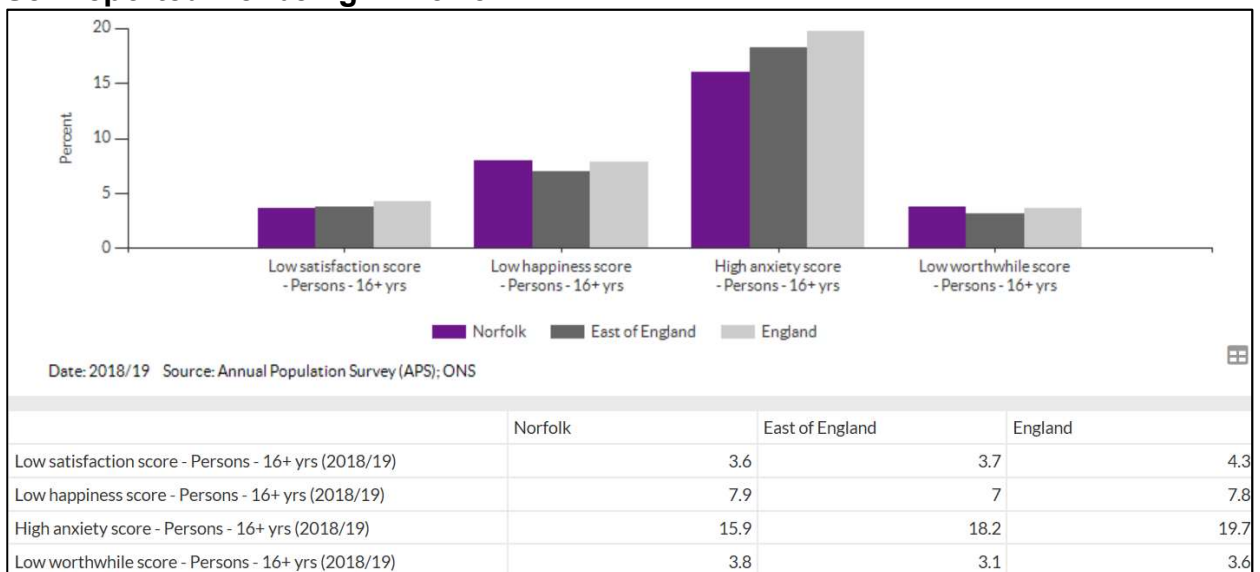
*ONS wellbeing scale, which asks respondents about how satisfied they are with their life, using a scale from 0 (not at all) to 10 (completely).

https://746a1e8d-7231-4b96-9bc2-88b2eb5c4964.filesusr.com/ugd/3d9db5_b1cc531ee989492ca5b27bca7181866d.pdf

Are things any different in Norfolk?

No reliable information about the wellbeing of people in Norfolk in response to the Covid-19 outbreak currently exists. In general, it is likely that changes in wellbeing in Norfolk are similar to changes in wellbeing experienced by people nationally. Negative issues (economic, health and social concerns) which affect people’s wellbeing are universal and the absence of usual protective factors (such as access to supportive networks) are likely to affect people’s wellbeing regardless of their location. Scores for self-reported wellbeing (prior to the Covid-19 outbreak) in Norfolk are shown below but there are no current self-reported wellbeing scores for comparison.

Self-reported wellbeing in Norfolk



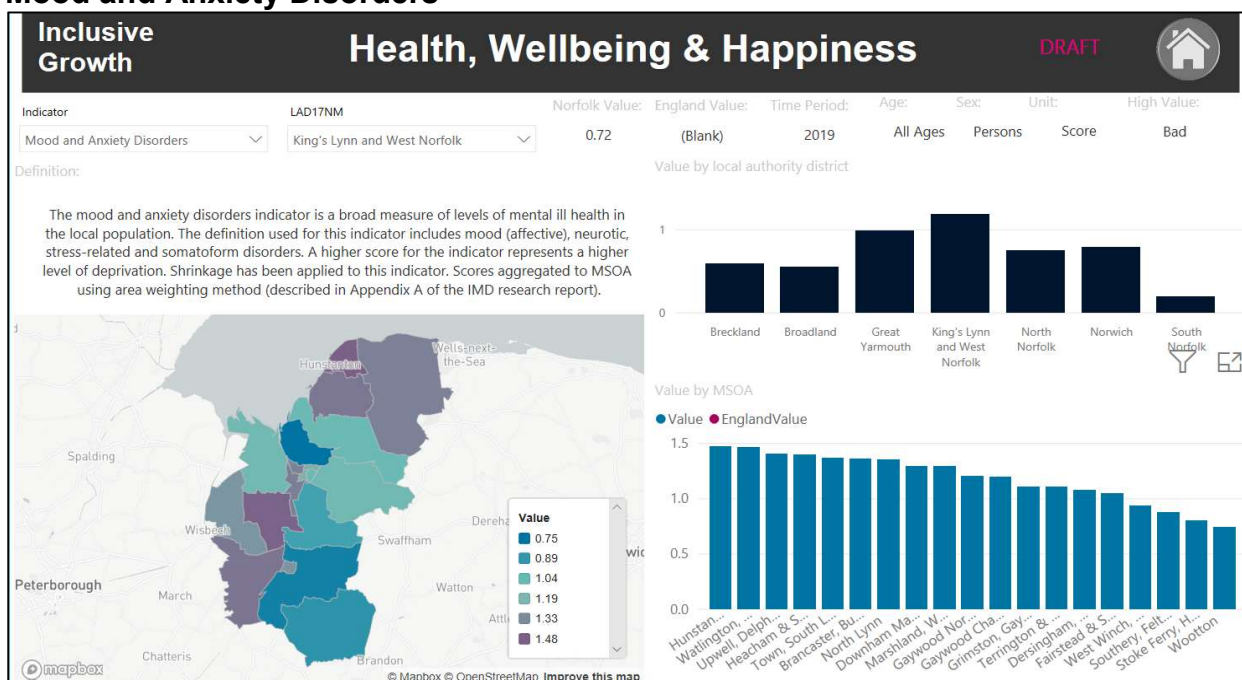
<https://www.norfolksight.org.uk/health-and-social-care/>

ONS data on personal and economic wellbeing in the UK to December 2019 will be released in April 2020 and subsequent releases will cover the Covid-19 outbreak period so comparisons of self-reported wellbeing pre/post outbreak will be possible in the future.

There are, however, likely to be differences *between* different groups of people in Norfolk. For example, the UK Covid-Mind study showed variation by factors such as age, income and household organisation and the concerns of male and female respondents to the Ipsos Mori poll showed some variation in issues which affected people’s wellbeing (women were more likely than men to have concerns about isolation, social distancing, mental health and illness). The Government recognises these differences and provides targeted advice about wellbeing during the Covid-19 outbreak for different groups including people with specific mental health needs, people with a learning disability, autistic people, and older people.

SAGE, the Government’s advisory body, notes that household isolation will financially impact more on poorer families and there is likely to be an added mental health burden of quarantine on poorer families with fewer resources. In Norfolk, levels of mood and anxiety disorders, a contributory factor to wellbeing, were highest in King’s Lynn and West Norfolk and Great Yarmouth and lowest in South Norfolk at last measure (see below). The link between people living in areas of high deprivation (such as King’s Lynn and Great Yarmouth) with existing poor wellbeing, and increased risk from negative impacts – including a higher mortality rate - of Covid-19 has been highlighted by national organisations.

Mood and Anxiety Disorders



<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoieYzVmZDc5OWItMDE2OC00NWUwLWFmODMtZWY5ZGY5Mzc5YTYzIiwidCI6IjE0MTkxNzdlLlU3ZTA0NGYwZi1hZmYwLWZkNjFINTQ5ZDEwZSIsImMiOiJh9>

Although there is some evidence of the health, social and psychological effects of living through pandemics based in part on studies of previous outbreaks of diseases such as Sars, the longer-term consequences of Covid-19 on people’s wellbeing is unknown.

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