

Article

Coronavirus and the social impacts on disabled people in Great Britain

Indicators from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey covering the period 27 March 2020 to 13 April 2020 on the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on disabled people in Great Britain.

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1 . Main points

- Almost half (45.1%) of disabled adults, compared with around a third (30.2%) of non-disabled adults, reported being very worried about the effect the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is having on their life. Nearly 9 in 10 disabled adults (86.3%) reported they are very worried or somewhat worried.
- Nearly two-thirds (64.8%) of disabled adults said COVID-19-related concerns were affecting their well-being.
- Disabled adults were significantly more likely than non-disabled adults to report spending too much time alone; around a third (35.0%) of disabled adults reported this compared to a fifth (19.9%) of non-disabled adults.
- Finding a way to stay in touch with friends and family remotely is the most popular action that is helping people cope while staying at home; however, spending time with members of their household was a less frequent form of coping for disabled (41.9%) than non-disabled adults (63.5%).
- Almost 8 in 10 (77.7%) disabled adults said they thought people were doing more to help others since the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Disabled adults are as active in supporting their communities as non-disabled adults; in the past seven days, a similar proportion of disabled (64.9%) and non-disabled adults (63.1%) said they had checked on neighbours who might need help at least once.

Statistician's comment

"It's vital to understand the needs of everyone in our society as people's experience in this pandemic will differ. Our analysis gives insight into the experience of disabled adults, and where there might be issues that arise for some that differ from those of non-disabled people. We recognise these findings summarise the perspective of disabled adults, covering a broad and complex range of conditions. Everyone's experience is different."

Iain Bell, Deputy National Statistician, Office for National Statistics

2 . Understanding the impact on disabled people

This article contains data and indicators from a new module being undertaken through the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) to understand the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on British society, which is reported on in the [Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain](#) series of bulletins.

It presents a summary of results, with further data contained in the [associated datasets](#), for disabled people. Many disabled people are in the "at-risk" groups who have been [advised to take additional precautions](#).

For the purposes of this analysis, a person is considered to be disabled if they have a self-reported long-standing illness, condition or impairment that reduces their ability to carry out day-to-day activities. There are an estimated 13.7 million disabled people in Great Britain according to the [latest available estimates](#). This definition of disability is consistent with the [Equality Act 2010](#) and the [Government Statistical Service \(GSS\) harmonised definition](#). For further information on disability definitions, please see the Glossary.

Further analysis, exploring the impact the COVID-19 pandemic is having on other "at-risk" groups, including young people and those who are more socially isolated, will be published in additional articles over the coming weeks as well as more in-depth analysis on the impacts on people's well-being and finances.

Any changes or differences mentioned in this bulletin are "statistically significant". The statistical significance of differences noted within the release are determined based on non-overlapping confidence intervals.

3 . Almost half of disabled adults report being very worried about the effect the coronavirus pandemic is having on their life

Nearly 9 in 10 disabled adults (86.3%) said they are very worried or somewhat worried about the effect that the coronavirus (COVID-19) is having on their life.

A higher proportion of disabled adults (45.1%) reported being very worried compared with non-disabled (30.2%) adults.

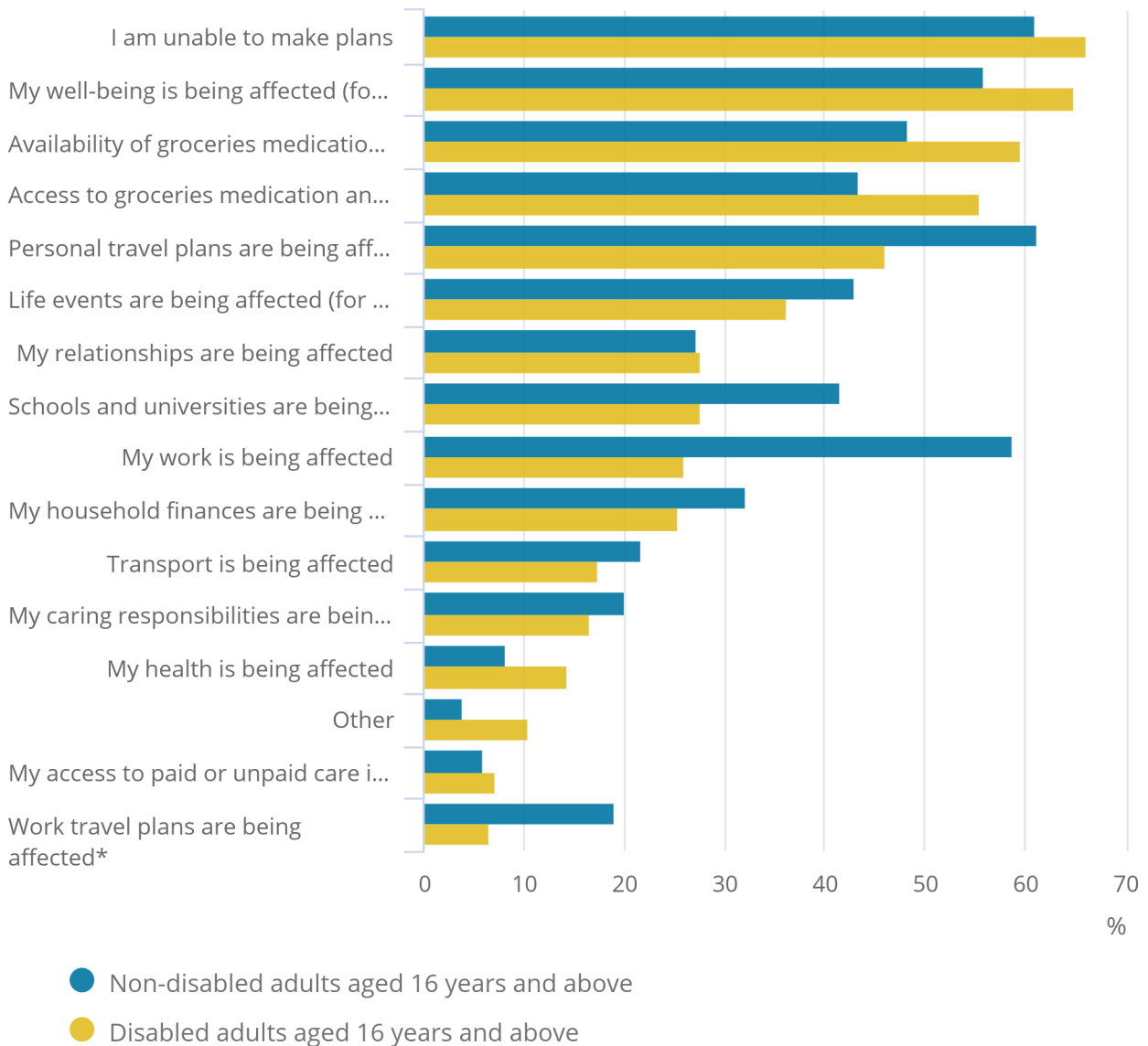
Figure 1 shows the specific aspects of their lives that disabled and non-disabled adults said they were most worried about. A lower proportion of disabled people than non-disabled people were worried about aspects of work, travel and education. This may be because disabled people are [less likely to be in employment](#), [less likely to travel under normal circumstances](#) and [tend to be older](#).

Figure 1: Disabled people are most worried about the effect of COVID-19 on their ability to make plans, their well-being, and the availability of and access to groceries

Great Britain, 3 April 2020 to 13 April 2020

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Great Britain, 3 April 2020 to 13 April 2020



Source: Office for National Statistics – Opinions and Lifestyle Survey

Notes:

1. The base population for these estimates is those who said they were very worried or worried about the impacts of the coronavirus (COVID-19).
2. Respondents asked to select all that apply.
3. *indicates a small sample size where estimates should be treated with caution.

4 . Two-thirds of disabled adults report coronavirus-related concerns affecting their well-being

Nearly two-thirds (64.8%) of disabled adults said coronavirus (COVID-19) related concerns were affecting their well-being.

Disabled adults tend to have, on average, poorer ratings than non-disabled adults on all four personal well-being measures and to more frequently report feeling lonely. Information on well-being and loneliness before the COVID-19 pandemic is included in the releases [Coronavirus and social relationships and support for vulnerable groups](#) and [Disability, well-being and loneliness, UK: 2019](#).

The main reasons cited by disabled adults for their well-being concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic were feeling worried about the future and being stressed, anxious or bored.

More about coronavirus

- Find the latest on [coronavirus \(COVID-19\) in the UK](#).
- All ONS analysis, summarised in our [coronavirus roundup](#).
- View [all coronavirus data](#).

Disabled adults were significantly more likely than non-disabled adults to report spending too much time alone. Around a third (35%) of disabled adults reported this compared with around a fifth (19.9%) of non-disabled adults.

Almost 1 in 10 (8.3%) adults with a disability reported often or always feeling lonely in the last seven days compared with less than 1 in 20 (3.6%) non-disabled adults.¹

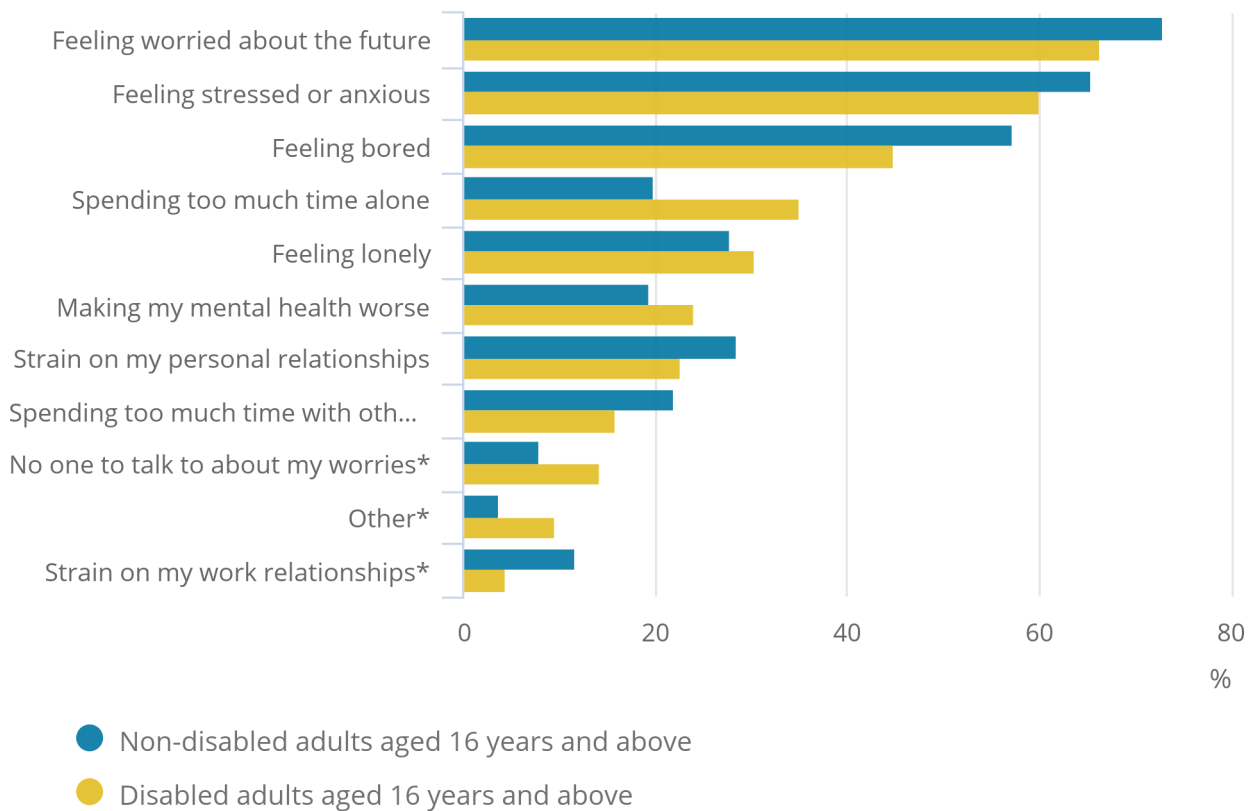
That disabled adults are more likely to report having self-isolated because of COVID-19 (52.7%), compared with non-disabled adults (32.3%), is likely to be contributing to these observed trends.

Figure 2: Disabled adults were more likely to report spending too much time alone in the last seven days than non-disabled adults

Great Britain, 3 April 2020 to 13 April 2020

Figure 2: Disabled adults were more likely to report spending too much time alone in the last seven days than non-disabled adults

Great Britain, 3 April 2020 to 13 April 2020



Source: Office for National Statistics – Opinions and Lifestyle Survey

Notes:

1. The base population for these estimates is those who answered "My well-being is being affected" for the question "In which ways is coronavirus affecting your life?". For example, 35% of disabled adults who stated their well-being is being affected stated this was by spending too much time alone.
2. Respondents asked to select all that apply.
3. *indicates a small sample size where estimates should be treated with caution.

The lives of both disabled and non-disabled people have changed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic; this is likely reflected in the current well-being ratings people report.

Figure 3 shows that during the COVID-19 pandemic, average well-being ratings (anxiety yesterday, happiness yesterday, feeling that things done in life are worthwhile and life satisfaction) for disabled adults are poorer than for non-disabled adults.

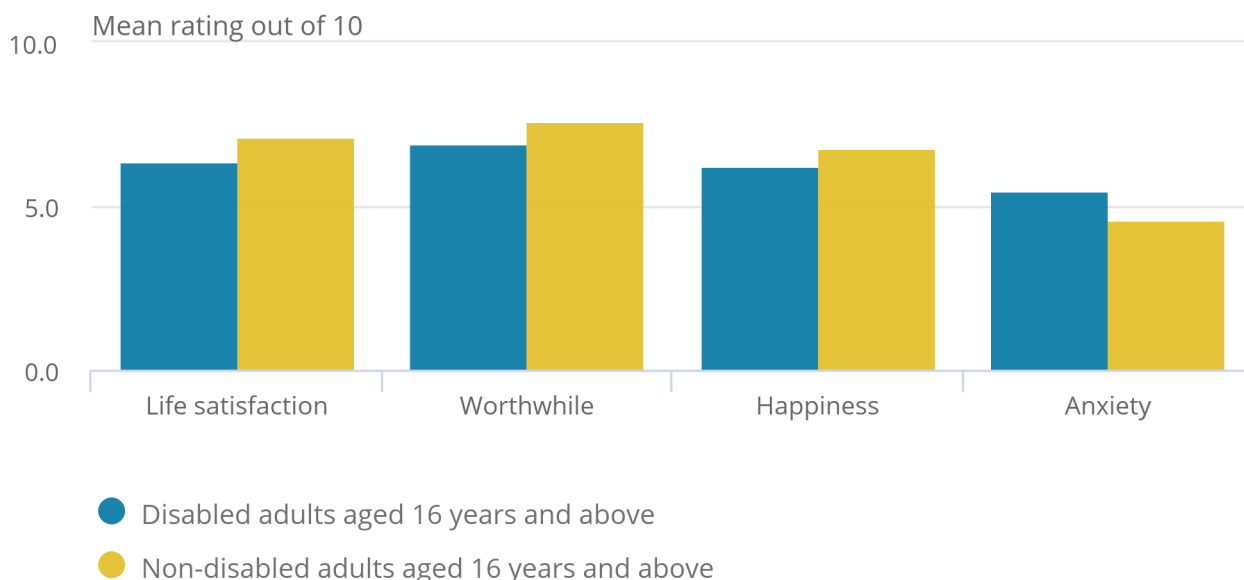
For anxiety yesterday, the average rating reported was 5.5 out of 10 for disabled people, compared with 4.6 for non-disabled people (higher numbers equate to poorer well-being in this measure). Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, in the year ending June 2019, the average rating for anxiety was 4.3 out of 10 for disabled people and 2.7 out of 10 for non-disabled people in the UK (for more information see [Disability, well-being and loneliness, UK: 2019](#)).

Figure 3: Disabled people report poorer well-being levels than non-disabled people during the coronavirus pandemic

Average well-being ratings for disabled and non-disabled people, Great Britain, 3 April 2020 to 13 April 2020

Figure 3: Disabled people report poorer well-being levels than non-disabled people during the coronavirus pandemic

Average well-being ratings for disabled and non-disabled people, Great Britain, 3 April 2020 to 13 April 2020



Source: Office for National Statistics – Opinions and Lifestyle Survey

Notes:

1. Higher numbers equate to poorer well-being when considering the anxiety measure.

Notes for: Two-thirds of disabled adults report coronavirus-related concerns affecting their well-being

1. This difference is not statistically significant and should be interpreted with caution.

5 . Disabled adults report different ways of coping while staying at home compared with non-disabled adults

[Government guidelines](#) to help stop the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) put strict restrictions on how often we can leave our homes. This means the way we socialise and spend our leisure time is changing.

Despite restrictions on physical contact with others, finding a way to stay in touch with friends and family remotely is the most popular action that is helping people cope while staying at home, for both disabled (83.5%) and non-disabled adults (81.4%).

As might be expected based on the finding that disabled adults were significantly more likely than non-disabled adults to report spending too much time alone, spending time with members of their household was a less frequent form of coping during this lockdown period for disabled (41.9%) compared with non-disabled adults (63.5%).

One of the permitted reasons for leaving your home is to take one form of exercise each day. Although over half of both disabled and non-disabled adults reported this is helping them to cope, fewer disabled (45%) than non-disabled adults (58.6%) reported this. This may be because some disabled people have reduced mobility and are unable to take regular exercise.

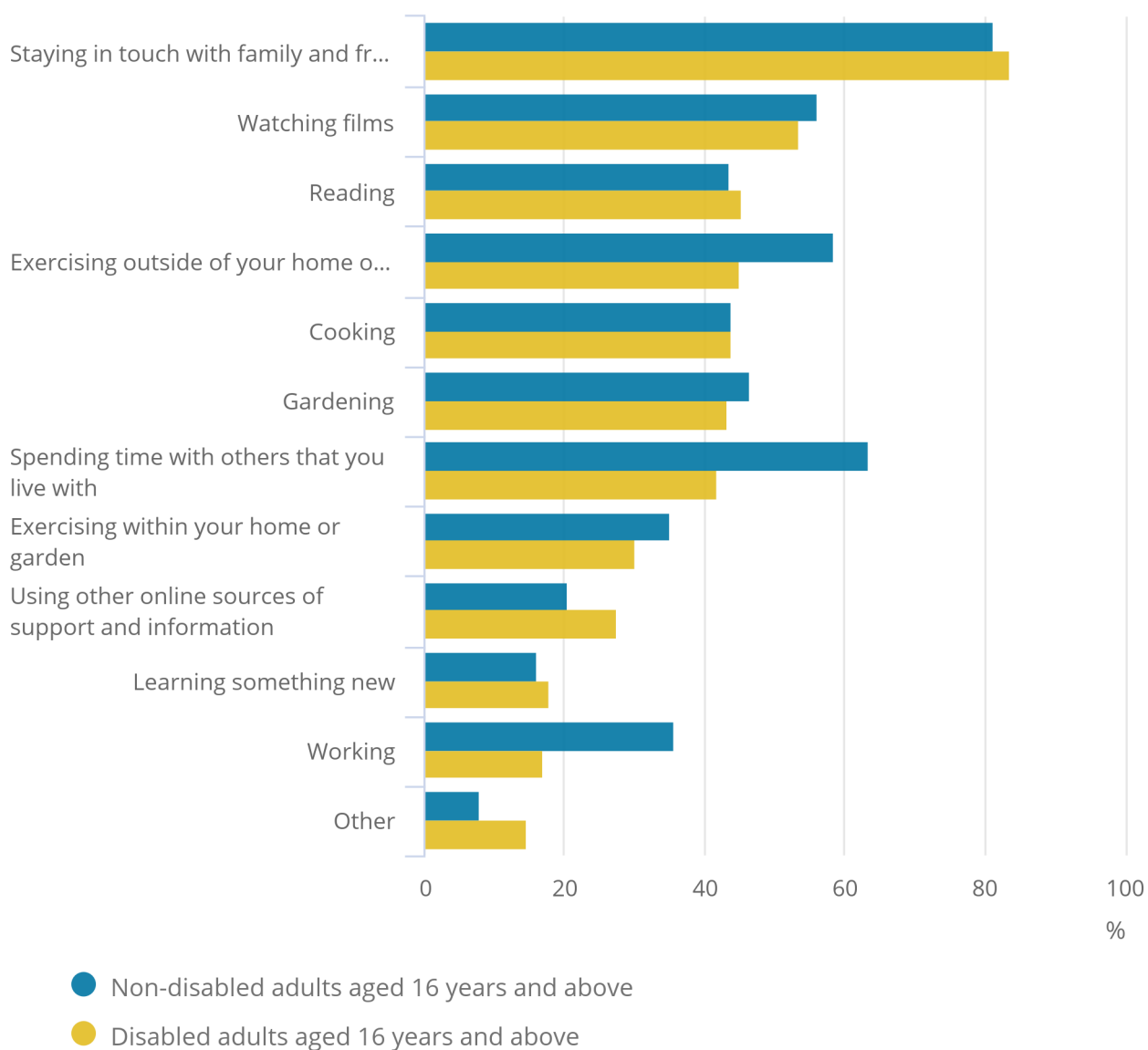
Leisure activities such as watching films, reading, gardening and cooking were popular among both disabled and non-disabled adults alike (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Disabled adults reported spending time with their household or exercising outside of their home as a way of helping them cope less often than non-disabled adults

Great Britain, 3 April 2020 to 13 April 2020

Figure 4: Disabled adults reported spending time with their household or exercising outside of their home as a way of helping them cope less often than non-disabled adults

Great Britain, 3 April 2020 to 13 April 2020



Source: Office for National Statistics – Opinions and Lifestyle Survey

Notes:

1. Respondents asked to select all that apply.

6 . Disabled adults report both giving and receiving community support

Around two-thirds of disabled adults (65.1%) said they felt if they needed help, other community members would support them during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This was similar to the view reported by non-disabled adults (66.1%).

In addition, almost 8 in 10 disabled adults (77.7%) said they thought people were doing more to help others since the COVID-19 pandemic. This was again similar to the view reported by non-disabled adults (78.2%).

Disabled adults report being as active in supporting their communities as non-disabled adults. In the past seven days, two-thirds of disabled (64.9%) and non-disabled (63.1%) adults said they had checked on neighbours who might need help at least once. Over one-third of disabled (38.5%) and non-disabled (38.9%) adults said they had gone shopping or done other tasks for neighbours.

7 . Glossary

Disability

To define disability in this publication, we refer to the [Government Statistical Service \(GSS\) harmonised "core" definition](#): this identifies as "disabled" a person who has a physical or mental health condition or illness that has lasted or is expected to last 12 months or more that reduces their ability to carry-out day-to-day activities.

The GSS definition is designed to reflect the definitions that appear in legal terms in the [Disability Discrimination Act 1995 \(DDA\)](#) and the subsequent [Equality Act 2010](#).

The GSS harmonised questions are asked of the respondent in the survey, meaning that disability status is self-reported.

Personal well-being

Personal well-being measures ask people to evaluate, on a scale of 0 to 10, how satisfied they are with their life overall, whether they feel the things they do in life are worthwhile, and happiness and anxiety yesterday.

Statistical significance

Any changes or differences mentioned in this bulletin are "[statistically significant](#)". The statistical significance of differences noted within the release are determined based on non-overlapping [confidence intervals](#).

8 . Measuring the data

The Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) is a monthly omnibus survey. In response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, we have adapted the OPN to become a weekly survey used to collect data on the impact of COVID-19 on day-to-day life in Great Britain.

The survey results are weighted to be a nationally representative sample for Great Britain, and data are collected using an online self-completion questionnaire.

The estimates provided in this article are based on data collected from this online survey with a sample of 1,203 adults (60% response rate) between 3 and 13 April 2020 (inclusive). Figures based on data collected from this online survey of 1,581 adults (79% response rate) between 27 March 2020 and 6 April 2020 (inclusive) are also provided in the [datasets](#) accompanying this article.

9 . Strengths and limitations

The main strengths of the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) include:

- it allows for timely production of data and statistics that can respond quickly to changing needs
- it meets data needs: the questionnaire is developed with customer consultation, and design expertise is applied in the development stages
- robust methods are adopted for the survey's sampling and weighting strategies to limit the impact of bias
- quality assurance procedures are undertaken throughout the analysis stages to minimise the risk of error

The main limitations of the OPN include:

- the sample size is relatively small: 2,010 individuals per week with fewer completed interviews, meaning that detailed analyses for subnational geographies and other sub-groups are not possible
- the mode is online only, so the sample may be subject to more bias than usual

More quality and methodology information on strengths, limitations, appropriate uses, and how the data were created is available in [Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain](#) and the [Opinions and Lifestyle Survey QMI](#).