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Comment on: **New statistics for old?—measuring the wellbeing of the UK**

By Paul Allin and David J. Hand, Volume 180, Issue 1, pp. 3-43.

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There has been a rapid deterioration in self-reported health in recent years with a doubling of the proportion of the population aged 16 years or over that were 'mostly dissatisfied' with their health between 2010–2011 and 2011–2012.

Self-reported health has continued to decline since the statistics used in Fig. [1](#) were released in March 2015. Only one aggregate figure was released in early 2016. It combined three of the categories. Just one mention of this was made in the most recent 2016 Office for National Statistics (ONS) 'measuring the quality of life' report.

As Table [1](#) shows, the latest (2013–2014) statistic is worse than any recorded since 2002 and lies well outside the range of confidence limits last published by the ONS in their 2015 release (58.8–59.8%). Self-reported health in the UK is deteriorating at an alarming rate with acceleration in that deterioration in the year 2011. In Dorling ([2016](#)) I used statistics collected by the British Household Panel Survey in the 1990s to show that health is overwhelmingly the most important short-term determinant of wellbeing. People can and do adapt to a deterioration in their health, but not when how they are having to live is making them, and especially those around them, ill.

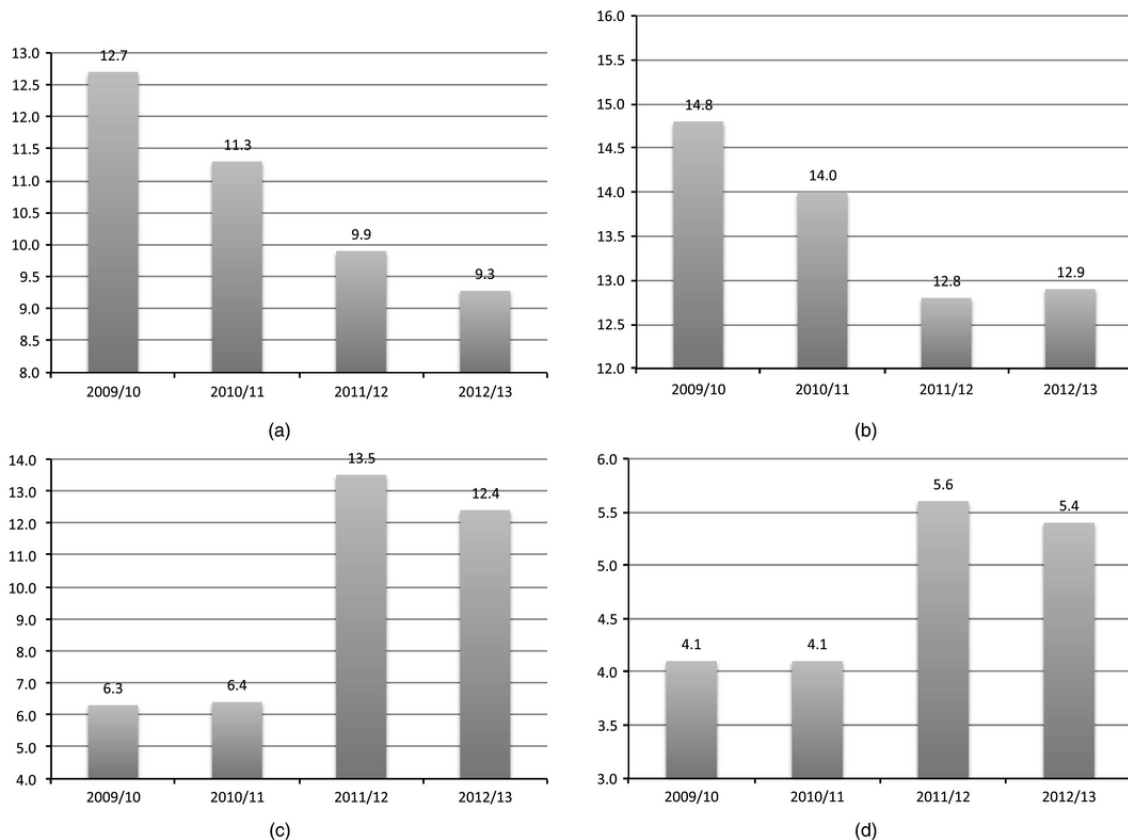


Figure 1.

Trends in self-reported health used by the ONS in wellbeing reporting (source: ONS, derived from the Understanding Society Survey (see Table 1 for details)): (a) people who are completely satisfied with their health (UK, %); (b) people who are somewhat satisfied with their health (UK, %); (c) people who are mostly dissatisfied with their health (UK, %); (d) people who are completely dissatisfied with their health (UK, %)

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Paul and David comment on John Sinclair, Jeremy Bentham, Herbert Spence, Lyndon Johnston, Robert Kennedy, Claus Moser, Joseph Stiglitz, Amartya Sen, Jean-Paul Fitoussi, Nicolas Sarkozy and David Cameron (in that order). I do wonder whether the particular approach to studying happiness that tends to be promoted by senior politicians, statisticians and economists tells us more about what may have been unusual about this select group of people than about happiness. In very recent surveys the population of the UK has told us that their wellbeing is deteriorating in relation to what matters most—their health.

Table 1. UK national wellbeing measures, March 2015 release with the single comparable statistic from the March 2016 release added^a

	<i>Results (%) for the following years:</i>											
	<i>2002</i>	<i>2003</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2007</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>2009–2010</i>	<i>2010–2011</i>	<i>2011–2012</i>	<i>2012–2013</i>	<i>2013–2014</i>
^a This measure has been assessed as showing no overall change between 2011–2012 and 2012–2013. It is assessed as having deteriorated between 2009–2010 and 2012–2013. Although these are longitudinal surveys, the data have been weighted for cross-sectional analysis. Comparisons can be made but caution needs to be taken.												
Source: Understanding Society, UK Office for National Statistics Household Longitudinal Study—as published by the ONS, but with some additional data. The 2013–2014 figure has been added from Office for National Statistics (2011). Note that the proportion has fallen further and that no breakdown is now published by the ONS. Although the questions on the surveys are similar the methodology has changed to such an extent that it is not possible to compare the new Understanding Society Survey figures with the earlier British Household Panel Survey figures.												
Completely satisfied	14.6	16.6	13.0	10.6	11.6	12.2	12.3	12.7	11.3	9.9	9.3	
Mostly satisfied	28.3	31.0	29.4	27.5	28.5	29.5	30.7	40.8	41.0	36.6	37.1	
Somewhat satisfied	23.9	23.2	24.7	25.5	25.8	25.6	27.3	14.8	14.0	12.8	12.9	

	<i>Results (%) for the following years:</i>											
	<i>2002</i>	<i>2003</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2007</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>2009–2010</i>	<i>2010–2011</i>	<i>2011–2012</i>	<i>2012–2013</i>	<i>2013–2014</i>
Upper confidence interval \pm 0.5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	68.8	66.7	59.8	59.8	
Lower confidence interval \pm 0.5	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	67.8	65.9	58.8	58.8	

The proportion of people aged 16 and over in the UK who were somewhat, mostly or completely satisfied with their health was lower in the financial year ending 2014 (57.8%) than in the previous year (59.3%). The way in which people view their health is crucial to well-being.'

(Office for National Statistics, [2016](#)).