

# Opinions and Lifestyle Survey QMI

Quality and Methodology Information for the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN), including strengths and limitations, recent improvements and quality characteristics.

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# 1 . Output information

- Survey name: Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN)
- Frequency: Fortnightly
- How compiled: Cross-sectional sample survey
- Geographic coverage: Great Britain
- Sample size: Currently approximately 2,000 to 2,500 individuals per fortnightly period achieved
- Last revised: 29 April 2022

## 2 . About this Quality and Methodology Information report

This quality and methodology information report contains information on the quality characteristics of the data (including the European Statistical System's five dimensions of quality) as well as the methods used to create it.

The information in this report will help you to:

- understand the strengths and limitations of the data
- learn about existing uses and users of the data
- understand the methods used to create the data
- help you to decide suitable uses for the data
- reduce the risk of misusing data

## 3 . Important points

- From 20 March 2020 the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) became weekly, to understand how the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is affecting life in Great Britain; from 25 August 2021, as we moved to a period where COVID-19 restrictions had been lifted across Great Britain, the OPN covered roughly fortnightly periods with an issued sample size of around 5,000 adults in each period to help ensure the survey remained sustainable.
- The OPN currently covers topics relating to health, including how the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is affecting households and individuals in Great Britain; it also covers a range of other topics such as experiences regarding cost of living and shortages of goods; topics can be sponsored by other government departments.
- Around 5,000 adults are contacted in every period, with the achieved sample for the OPN currently approximately 2,000 to 2,500 individuals per week.
- Data collection is conducted by an online self-completion questionnaire; telephone interviews are available if requested by a respondent, however the predominant mode of collection is online.
- Estimates (including associated confidence intervals) from the OPN, are currently [published by the ONS on a fortnightly basis](#); this includes breakdowns by age and sex.
- OPN anonymised datasets are made available via the ONS' [Secure Research Service \(SRS\)](#); anonymised data are also made available to sponsors of survey questions on the OPN; the data are available, without charge, to registered accredited researchers.

## 4 . Quality summary

### Overview

This report relates to the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN), which collects data from individuals (aged 16 years or older) in Great Britain.

### Uses and users

From March 2020, the OPN was adapted to become a weekly survey used to collect data on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on day-to-day life in Great Britain. As we have moved to a period where restrictions have been lifted across Great Britain, the OPN moved to a fortnightly data collection from 25 August 2021 onwards. It covers a variety of additional topics such as people's experiences regarding cost of living and shortages of goods, alongside measuring the impact of the coronavirus (COVID 19) pandemic.

The questionnaire collects timely data for research and policy analysis. OPN anonymised datasets are made available via the Office for National Statistics' (ONS') [Secure Research Service \(SRS\)](#). The data are available, without charge, to registered accredited researchers.

Data and estimates are published on the ONS website, with estimates also shared with Government Departments.

Between March 2020 and March 2022, the ONS published a regular bulletin to monitor the social impacts of coronavirus throughout the pandemic. Since April 2022, the ONS have produced a fortnightly bulletin on Public Opinions and Social Trends using OPN data on a variety of topics including the continued impact of the coronavirus pandemic, cost of living and shortages of goods.

Data from the OPN also form part of other regularly updated publications from the ONS including:

- [Weekly coronavirus round up](#) - a collection of short summaries of the latest data related to the coronavirus pandemic
- [Coronavirus latest insights dashboard](#) -- an interactive tool that brings together data about the coronavirus pandemic

Data and estimates are also shared with the Cabinet Office (CO) as well as other government departments. This is to provide indicators to inform policy, and to evaluate existing policies and their effectiveness at driving social and behavioural change.

## Strengths and limitations

The main strengths of the OPN include:

- it allows for a very quick turnaround of data: the OPN currently collects data fortnightly, over a twelve-day period, with estimates and reference tables published on the ONS website within five days of survey completion.
- it meets data needs: the questionnaire is developed with customer consultation and design expertise is applied in the development stages
- it is flexible and responsive, allowing new questions to be included at a fast pace
- it meets users' sampling needs: questions can be run for multiple weeks, with the data combined to increase the sample size for examining small sub-groups of the population
- its questions are straightforward and directed at the majority of the population, however it is also possible to include questions only relevant for sub-samples
- robust methods are adopted for the survey's sampling and weighting strategies to limit the impact of bias
- it is accurate and reliable; the questionnaire is rigorously tested and the data is quality assured

The main limitations of the OPN include:

- in-depth probing of topic modules is not possible due to the length of the questionnaire

## Recent updates

To understand how the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic was affecting life in Great Britain, the ONS adapted the monthly OPN survey to a weekly survey. The weekly survey was created to collect timely information on people's experiences and opinions related to the pandemic. Each week, some of the survey questions change to reflect changing circumstances and priorities during the pandemic.

From 25 August 2021 onwards, the OPN moved to a fortnightly period with a sample size of around 5,000 households in each period.

The survey covers residents of Great Britain who are aged 16 years and over.

Like the OPN prior and during the coronavirus pandemic, the OPN continues to be primarily collected through a self-completion online questionnaire. However, some responses (around 1% on average) have been collected with the help of telephone interviewers, for example when respondents indicate they are unable to complete the online survey themselves.

When weekly data collection started on 20 March 2020, the achieved sample was approximately 1,500 respondents per week. To allow for more granular analysis, the sample in England was boosted from 21 October 2020, achieving an overall response of approximately 4,000 to 4,500 per week.

From 25 August 2021 to 29 March 2022, the OPN covered roughly fortnightly periods with the sample size reduced to around 5,000 households in each period, achieving an overall response of approximately 3,000 to 3,500 per period.

From 30 March 2022 onwards, the OPN design was updated to reflect a more sustainable survey design. These changes included:

- shortening the survey - to reduce the burden on the respondent, the average length to the survey was cut to around 25 minutes
- removing incentives for respondents - this reflected ongoing funding for the survey

At present, the overall response is approximately 2,000 to 2,500 adults per period.

## The OPN before the coronavirus pandemic

Prior to the changes to the OPN survey during the coronavirus pandemic, there had been on-going improvements to the OPN. In recent years, work has been undertaken to change the design of the OPN from a face-to-face survey to a mixed mode design (online first with telephone follow-up). Mixed mode collection allows respondents to complete the survey more flexibly and provides a more cost-effective service for customers.

The first phase of transformation was completed in April 2018 when the OPN moved from "face to face" to "telephone" data collection. This phase of transformation included a questionnaire redesign. Specialist research, design and testing has been conducted to inform the transformation of the survey. Three pilot tests were conducted to understand the impact of changing mode and sample frame on data quality, sample representativeness and bias. Findings demonstrated minimal impact on most of the data. Where some differences were found, these were likely due to the redesigned question wording, which was optimised for telephone collection. For more information on the pilots and findings, please see the [Opinions and Lifestyle Survey: mixed mode pilot analysis](#) article.

The second phase of transformation was completed in November 2019 with the move from telephone only to mixed mode collection. OPN data are collected using an online self-completion questionnaire with telephone interview available if required.

## 5 . Quality characteristics of the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN)

This section provides a range of information that describes the quality and characteristics of the survey.

## Relevance

(The degree to which the survey meets users' needs.)

The survey is currently a fortnightly survey with a focus on collecting information on health, including the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on households and individuals in Great Britain, as well as a range of other topics such as people's experiences regarding cost of living and shortages of goods. The questions are primarily requested by government departments, as well as by universities and charities.

The Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) provides rapid answers to questions of immediate policy interest, helping to measure public awareness of new policies.

Topics that have been requested include:

- physical and mental health measures
- well-being
- loneliness
- experiences of crime
- attitudes to climate change
- public understanding of government publicity and information campaigns related to the coronavirus pandemic
- whether people are adhering to the latest guidance relating to the coronavirus pandemic
- attitudes to vaccines and mass testing
- how the pandemic has affected people's work and education

## Accuracy and reliability

(The degree of closeness between an estimate and the true value.)

The total error in a survey estimate is made up of two types: sampling error and non-sampling error.

### Sampling error

The OPN is a sample survey, so estimates are subject to sampling variability. Sampling variability is dependent on several factors, including:

- the size of the sample
- the effects of the sampling method
- the effects of weighting

### Non-sampling error

The main sources of non-sampling error are:

- frame under-coverage
- non-response
- response errors (such as misleading questions or interviewer bias)
- errors when imputing or processing data

To minimise the effects of non-sampling errors, the questionnaire is carefully designed and tested, several attempts are made to contact respondents and extensive quality control procedures are used throughout. Weighting is also used to compensate for non-response and frame under-coverage.

## Coherence and comparability

(Coherence is the degree to which data that are derived from different sources or methods, but refer to the same topic, are similar. Comparability is the degree to which data can be compared over time and domain, for example, geographic level.)

The demographic data collected and used on the OPN meet [harmonised standards](#) (across Government Statistical Service (GSS) surveys). The questions used on the survey follow the available [GSS harmonisation guidance for collecting data about the impact of the coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#).

In November 2019, the OPN moved to mixed mode collection. This means that OPN data are collected using an online self-completion questionnaire. Alternatively, if required, the interview is conducted by telephone. Three pilot tests were conducted to understand the impact of changing mode and sample frame on data quality, sample representativeness and bias. For more information on the pilots and findings, please see the [Opinions and Lifestyle Survey: mixed mode pilot analysis](#) article.

During the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the Office for National Statistics has published estimates of personal well-being using both the Annual Population Survey (APS) and the OPN. A [technical paper](#) considers the impact that the pandemic has had on data collection, to what extent this has influenced estimates of personal well-being and reviews the comparability of these estimates.

## Accessibility and clarity

(Accessibility is the ease with which users can access the data, also reflecting the format in which the data are available and the availability of supporting information. Clarity refers to the quality and sufficiency of the release details, illustrations and accompanying advice.)

Anonymised data are sent to ONS' [Secure Research Service \(SRS\)](#). Data are added on a fortnightly basis. The data are available, without charge, to registered accredited researchers.

## Timeliness and punctuality

(Timeliness refers to the lapse of time between data collection and data delivery. Punctuality refers to the gap between planned and actual data delivery dates.)

The OPN currently collects data fortnightly, excluding certain national holidays, such as Christmas. The on-line data collection period is twelve days, with questionnaire content agreed approximately one week before data collection commencing. After the data collection period, the data are cleaned, weighted, and analysed. Anonymised data is sent to government departments who have an agreement to access the survey data, usually approximately five days after the data collection period. Data is also currently published on the ONS website, in the form of [aggregated published tables](#).

For more details on related releases, the [GOV.UK release calendar](#) is available online and provides advance notice of release dates.

## Concepts and definitions (including list of changes to definitions)

(Concepts and definitions describe the legislation governing the output, and a description of the classifications used in the output.)

## Proxy response

The OPN is different from other ONS social surveys in that it does not, generally, collect proxy responses (responses from another adult on behalf of the selected adult). This is because a large proportion of questions asked on the survey are opinions questions. These are unsuitable for proxy collection due to their subjective nature, which if collected would reduce the accuracy and quality of the data through adding missing or inaccurate responses.

There are some exceptions to this where it is appropriate to collect a proxy response. These questions generally reflect the experiences of the household rather than the individual. For example, questions on household income.

## Why you can trust our data

The ONS is the UK's largest independent producer of statistics and its National Statistics Institute. The [Data Policies and Information Charter](#), available on the ONS website, details how data are collected, secured and used in the publication of statistics. We treat the data that we hold with respect, keeping it secure and confidential, and we use statistical methods that are professional, ethical and transparent. More information about our data policies is available.

The OPN is carefully designed and tested, and extensive quality control procedures are used throughout.

## 6 . Methods used to produce the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) data

Data collection for the OPN is primarily collected through a self-completion online questionnaire. Alternatively, if required, the interview is conducted by telephone, with approximately 1% of responses being collected with the help of telephone interviewers. The population of interest is residents of Great Britain aged 16 years and older.

### Sampling frame

From March 2020, respondents who have taken part in previous ONS household surveys (such as the [Labour Force Survey](#) and [The Living Costs and Food Survey](#)) have been included in the sample frame for the OPN.

From September 2020 onwards, the OPN sample has been drawn from respondents to the Labour Market Survey (LMS).

The sampling frame used for the LMS is the Royal Mail's Postcode Address File (PAF) of small users. The PAF is the most comprehensive address database in the UK. It is updated daily and contains approximately 30 million addresses. The sample for the LMS covers the whole of Great Britain.



## Sampling

A two-stage approach is applied to sampling. In the first stage, a sample of households is drawn from the sample frame; in the second stage, one individual from each sampled household is selected. To overcome under-representation of younger age groups in the sample taken from the LMS, younger (aged under 25 years) and older (aged over 80 years) people are oversampled.

Each fortnight, a random selection of adults are asked to take part in the OPN. Since August 2021, a sample of approximately 5,000 adults have been sampled each fortnight to take part in the OPN. The selected respondent (aged 16 and older) is the only household member who is eligible to participate in the survey. Proxy interviews or responses are not permitted.

Using the LMS introduces a potential source of bias as it only includes those who have completed the LMS and not objected to re-contact. However, data collected in the previous LMS are used in the weighting process to reduce this potential bias. This is achieved by including population controls based on variables collected in the LMS. Previous data are also used to adjust for non-response bias before weighting the adjusted sampling weights to population estimates.

The use of this previous data in weighting also improves precision. This is because sampling from the LMS and the oversampling of younger age groups, makes the sampling weights in the new design more variable.

For more information please email the [ONS Omnibus Service](#).

## How we process the data

The data is validated and cleaned, variables are derived, and weights are applied. As the OPN collects information on a sample of the population, the data is weighted to enable us to make inferences from this sample to the entire population. Weighting the OPN includes calibrating by factors including region, qualification, tenure, employment, sex, and age. ONS produces and publishes estimates from the OPN together with confidence intervals for questions with sample base sizes greater than 10 cases. Where sample base for questions allows, published analysis also includes estimates broken down by various demographics (for example, age and sex).

## How we quality assure and validate the data

There are quality assurance processes from the drawing of the sample and development of the questionnaire to publication of the data and estimates. These processes include:

- the accuracy of contact information in the sample is validated
- the questionnaire is tested, both by the research team and telephone operations through test scenarios
- post collection, a series of checks are conducted on the data to identify inconsistencies and invalid responses
- inconsistent or invalid responses are individually reviewed by a researcher before a decision is made about how to deal with them
- estimates are dual run and checked at multiple stages between analysis and final reference tables and publication
- the application of statistical disclosure control - suppressing estimates to avoid any disclosure of personal information.

## How we disseminate the data

The ONS currently produce a [fortnightly bulletin on Public opinions and social trends using OPN data on a variety of topics, having previously published a fortnightly bulletin to monitor the social impacts of coronavirus](#) throughout the pandemic.

Data from the OPN have also been used in many other ONS publications examining the social impacts of coronavirus, including:

- [Diary of a Nation](#)
- [Coronavirus and depression in adults](#)
- [Coronavirus and home schooling](#)
- [Coronavirus and the impact on caring](#)
- [Coronavirus and the social impacts on disabled people in Great Britain](#)
- [Impact of increased cost of living on adults across Great Britain](#)
- [Homeworking and spending during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic](#)

Additionally, anonymised data are sent to ONS' [Secure Research Service \(SRS\)](#). Data are added on a fortnightly basis. The data are available, without charge, to registered accredited researchers.