

Overview and recommendations

What are these guidelines?

These guidelines provide advice on the collection and use of measures of subjective well-being. They are intended to provide support for national statistical offices and other producers of subjective well-being data in designing, collecting, and publishing measures of subjective well-being. In addition, the guidelines are designed to be of value to users of information on subjective well-being.

The guidelines provide information on the validity of subjective well-being measures; discuss the main methodological issues in developing questions to collect information on subjective well-being; present best practice in the measurement of subjective well-being; and provide guidance on the analysis and reporting of subjective well-being measures. A number of prototype question modules relating to different aspects of subjective well-being are also included.

These guidelines should be viewed as providing advice on best practice rather than being a formal statistical standard. At present, countries differ in terms of how much interest they have in information on subjective well-being, and in terms of the ability of national statistical offices to collect such data. The role of the guidelines, therefore, is primarily to assist data producers in meeting the needs of users by bringing together what is currently known on how to produce high quality, comparable measures of subjective well-being. As an international governmental organisation, the OECD has a particular interest in encouraging international comparability of data, and this is one of the key objectives of this report.

These guidelines aim to contribute to greater consistency in measurement of subjective well-being in official statistics. In particular, the guidelines are intended to:

- Improve the quality of subjective well-being measures collected by national statistical offices, by providing best practice in terms of question wording and survey design.
- Improve the usefulness of the data collected by setting out guidelines on the appropriate frequency, survey vehicles, and co-variables when collecting subjective well-being data.
- Improve cross-country comparability of subjective well-being measures by establishing common concepts, classifications, and methods that national statistical agencies could use.
- Provide advice and assistance to data users when analysing subjective well-being data.

What is subjective well-being?

The measurement of subjective well-being is often assumed to be restricted to measuring “happiness”. In fact, subjective well-being covers a wider range of concepts than just happiness. For the purposes of these guidelines, a relatively broad definition of subjective well-being is used. In particular, subjective well-being is taken to be:¹

Good mental states, including all of the various evaluations, positive and negative, that people make of their lives and the affective reactions of people to their experiences.

This definition is intended to be inclusive, encompassing the full range of different aspects of subjective well-being commonly identified by research in this field. It includes first and foremost measures of how people experience and evaluate their life as a whole. However, the guidelines also provide advice on measuring people’s experience and evaluations of particular domains of life, such as satisfaction with their financial status or satisfaction with their health status, as well as measures of “meaningfulness” or “purpose” in life (often described as “eudaimonic” aspects of subjective well-being). This definition of subjective well-being hence encompasses three elements:

- *Life evaluation* – a reflective assessment on a person’s life or some specific aspect of it.
- *Affect* – a person’s feelings or emotional states, typically measured with reference to a particular point in time.
- *Eudaimonia* – a sense of meaning and purpose in life, or good psychological functioning.

The guidelines do not address subjective measures of objective concepts, such as self-rated health or perceived air quality. While the measurement tools for questions of this sort are “subjective”, the subject matter being investigated is not, i.e. it can be observed by a third party. Some advice is provided, however, on measuring people’s evaluations of specific domains of life, such as their *satisfaction with their financial status* or their *health status*. What is specific about the concept of subjective well-being as presented in this report, is that only the person under investigation can provide information on their evaluations, emotions and psychological functioning – it is people’s own views that are the subject of interest.

Why have these guidelines been produced?

Notions of subjective well-being or happiness have a long tradition as central elements of quality of life. However, until recently, these concepts were often deemed beyond the scope of quantitative measurement. In the past two decades, however, an increasing body of evidence has shown that subjective well-being can be measured in surveys, that such measures are valid and reliable, and that they can inform policy making. This evidence has been reflected in the exponential growth of research in this field.²

Reflecting the increasing interest in subjective well-being from both researchers and policy-makers, the *Report of the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress* (Stiglitz et al., 2009) recommended that national statistical agencies collect and publish measures of subjective well-being. In particular, the Commission noted that:

Recent research has shown that it is possible to collect meaningful and reliable data on subjective well-being. Subjective well-being encompasses three different aspects: cognitive evaluations of one’s life, positive emotions (joy, pride), and negative ones (pain, anger, worry). While these aspects of subjective well-being have different determinants, in all cases these determinants go well beyond people’s income and material conditions... All these aspects of subjective well-being should be measured separately to derive a more comprehensive measure of people’s quality of life and to allow

a better understanding of its determinants (including people's objective conditions). National statistical agencies should incorporate questions on subjective well-being in their standard surveys to capture people's life evaluations, hedonic experiences and life priorities (p. 216).

Following on from the *Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress*, an increasing number of statistical agencies have launched initiatives aimed at measuring subjective well-being.

While subjective well-being has been examined extensively in the academic literature, including some consideration of which subjective well-being measures to collect, and how to collect them, no consistent set of guidelines for national statistical agencies drawing on this research currently exist. For official measures of subjective well-being to be useful, these official measures should be collected in a consistent manner, which, in turn, requires a consensus on the best methodology to adopt. This is the main motivation for developing commonly accepted guidelines around the measurement of subjective well-being that draw on the best evidence available so far. These guidelines will need to be revised in the future as more information becomes available on subjective well-being.

How are the guidelines intended to be used?

The guidelines are intended to provide both a resource for data producers developing their own surveys, as well as a guide for ensuring that the data collected will be more internationally comparable. For users of the guidelines who are interested in developing their own questions, the guidelines could be used as a reference book. For users for whom international comparability is a priority, the guidelines also include more specific proposals on good practice, as it currently stands.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the concepts being measured and assesses what is known about the validity and reliability of different types of measure. This is aimed to inform decisions about what aspects of subjective well-being should be measured and the degree to which such measures should be treated as experimental. Chapter 2 focuses on methodological issues in question and survey design and implementation. This part of the guidelines is intended primarily to support survey designers in developing questions on subjective well-being and to identify strategies for minimising bias due to different measurement effects – including not just how questions are worded, but also how surveys are implemented. Chapter 3 describes good practice in the measurement of subjective well-being. In particular, it includes practical recommendations on the issues of sample and survey design, building on evidence from the methodological issues discussed earlier. Chapter 4 provides advice on how best to report measures of subjective well-being as well as guidance for analysing this type of data.

An important part of the guidelines are the prototype question modules, introduced in Chapter 3, and attached at the end of the document, in Annex B (A through to F). In recognition of the different user needs and resources available to statistical producers, the guidelines do not present a single approach to gathering information on subjective well-being. Instead, six question modules are provided. Each question module focuses on a distinct aspect of subjective well-being.

Question Module A contains the core measures for which international comparability is the highest priority. These are the measures for which there is the most evidence for their validity and relevance, where results are best understood, and where policy uses are the most developed. Module A covers both life evaluation and affect measures, and all

national statistical agencies are encouraged to implement it in its entirety. A single experimental eudaimonic measure is also included in this core module. When it is not possible to collect the full core module, the primary life evaluation measure outlined in the module should be used at the minimum.

Modules B through to E are focused on specific aspects of subjective well-being. These modules are not necessarily intended to be used in their entirety or unaltered, but provide a resource for national statistical agencies developing their own questionnaires.

The six modules are listed below. For those highlighted as *recommended*, national statistical offices are encouraged to implement them in their entirety; the other modules are intended as a *resource* for data producers developing more detailed questionnaires.

Recommended for household surveys:

- A. Core measures.

Resource for household surveys:

- B. Life evaluation.
- C. Affect.
- D. Eudaimonic well-being.
- E. Domain evaluation.

Recommended for time use surveys:

- F. Experienced well-being.

Conclusions and recommendations

The guidelines include many recommendations. A summary from each of the chapters is presented here. Where more detail is needed, or where there is interest in why the recommendations take the form that they do, readers can refer to the main report. The overview is organised in four sections, mirroring the structure of the main report. Each section provides a short summary of the contents of the corresponding part of the report followed by the relevant recommendations.

1. Concept and validity

There is a large body of evidence on the reliability and validity of measures of subjective well-being and on the methodological challenges involved in collecting and analysing such data. Indeed, given the academic interest in the topic and the challenging nature of the subject, the body of evidence on the strengths and weaknesses of measures of subjective well-being may even exceed that available for many measures regularly collected as part of official statistics (Smith, 2013). While measures of subjective well-being have some important limitations, there is no strong case for simply considering them as falling “beyond the scope” of official statistics. Although subject to some methodological limitations, it is clear that for many potential uses, measures of subjective well-being, when carefully collected, are able to meet the basic standard of “fitness for purpose”.

However, there are also areas where measures of subjective well-being are more strongly affected by how the measure is collected and by potentially irrelevant characteristics of the respondent than is the case for other official statistics. This does not imply that measures of subjective well-being should be rejected outright, but highlights two important points. First, official measures of subjective well-being should be collected – possibly as experimental data

series – in order to provide the basis to resolve some of the outstanding methodological issues. Second, information on the nature of the most significant methodological issues should be available to producers of subjective well-being data, and a common approach to dealing with these issues should be developed.

The main points with respect to the quality of subjective well-being measures are summarised under the headings relevance, reliability, and validity.

Relevance. Measures of subjective well-being have a wide variety of potential uses and audiences. These can be classified under four main headings:

- Complement other outcome measures.
- Help better understand the drivers of subjective well-being.
- Support policy evaluation and cost-benefit analysis, particularly where non-market outcomes are involved.
- Help in identifying potential policy problems.

Reliability. Reliability concerns the extent to which a measure yields consistent results (i.e. whether it has a high signal-to-noise ratio):

- Test-retest scores for measures of subjective well-being are generally lower than is the case for commonly collected statistics such as education and income, but higher than those found for more cognitively challenging economic concepts (such as household expenditure).
- The more reliable multi-item measures of subjective well-being, such as the satisfaction with life scale, exhibit higher reliability, although still less than for demographic or educational statistics.
- Looking at country averages, the reliability of life satisfaction measures is generally well above the required threshold for acceptable reliability.
- Measures of affect have, as expected, lower reliability than is the case for evaluative measures because moods change more frequently.
- There is relatively little evidence on the reliability of eudaimonic measures.

Validity. Validity is the extent to which an indicator actually captures the underlying concept that it purports to measure:

- Evidence strongly suggests that measures of both life evaluation and affect capture valid information.
- The evidence base for eudaimonic measures is less clear. While some specific measures – such as those relating to “meaning” and “purpose” clearly capture unique and meaningful information, the picture with respect to eudaimonia as a whole is more ambiguous. This suggests that further work is needed before a definitive position can be taken on the validity of these measures.
- While a range of issues could place limits on the validity of subjective measures of well-being, many of these have either a marginal impact on fitness for purpose (i.e. they do not substantively affect the conclusions reached) or can be dealt with through appropriate survey design and carefully considered analysis and interpretation of the data.
- Despite evidence that cultural factors do not substantively bias multi-variate analysis, there are reasons to be cautious about cross-country comparisons of levels of subjective well-being.

2. Methodological considerations in the measurement of subjective well-being

Much like other survey-based measures, subjective well-being data can be affected by the measurement methods adopted. Maximising data quality by minimising the risk of bias is a priority for survey design. Comparability of data between different survey administrations is another essential consideration. In support of data comparability – whether comparisons are to be made over time or between groups of respondents, the guidelines argue in favour of adopting a consistent measurement approach across all survey instruments, study waves and countries wherever possible, to limit the additional variance potentially introduced by differing methodologies. Of course, the exception to this is where experimental statistics are being collected for the explicit purpose of examining methodological factors. In this case, it is important to vary single elements of survey design, one-by-one, in a systematic manner.

Recommendations: Question wording and response formats

- In terms of survey design, question wording obviously matters – and comparable measures require comparable wording. Effective translation procedures are therefore particularly important for international comparability.
- The length of the reference period is critical for affect measures. From the perspective of obtaining accurate reports of affect actually *experienced*, reports over a period of around 24 hours or less are recommended. While evaluative and eudaimonic measures are intended to capture constructs spanning a longer time period, there is less evidence regarding the ideal reference period to use.
- Variation in response formats can affect data quality and comparability – including between survey modes. In the case of evaluative measures, there is empirical support for using a 0-10 point numerical scale, anchored by verbal labels which represent conceptual absolutes (such as *completely satisfied/completely dissatisfied*). On balance, it is preferable to label scale interval-points (between the anchors) with numerical, rather than with verbal, labels.
- The order in which response categories are presented to respondents may be particularly important in telephone-based interviews, and where each response category is given a verbal label. For numerical scales, this is likely to be less important, although consistent presentation of options from the lowest (e.g. 0) to the highest (e.g. 10) may help reduce respondent burden.
- In the case of affect measures, unipolar scales (i.e. reflecting a continuous scale focused on only one dimension, such as those anchored from *never/not at all* through to *all the time/completely*) are desirable. This is because, for conceptual reasons, it is helpful measure positive and negative affect separately, rather than combining them in a single bipolar (*very sad/very happy*) question. For life evaluations and eudaimonia, there is less evidence on scale polarity. The available information suggests that bipolar and unipolar measure produce very similar results for life evaluation measures, although bipolar scales may be confusing for respondents when evaluative questions are negatively-framed.

Recommendations: Question order and context effects

- Question order effects can be a significant problem, but one that can be managed by asking subjective well-being questions before other sensitive survey items. Where this is not possible, the use of introductory text or of other questions can buffer the impact of context.

- Order effects also exist *within* sets of subjective well-being questions. Question modules should include only one primary evaluative measure, flow from the general to the specific, and use consistent ordering of positive and negative affect (to reduce the risk that asking negative questions first may bias subsequent responses to positive questions, and vice versa).

Recommendations: Survey mode and timing

- The use of different survey modes can produce differences in subjective well-being data – although the significance and magnitude of difference varies considerably across studies. Given the trade-offs to be considered when selecting between survey modes, there is no clear “winner” – although from a data quality perspective, face-to-face interviewing has a number of advantages.
- Where mixed-mode surveys are used, it is important for data comparability to select questions and response formats that do not require extensive modifications for presentation in different modalities. Details of the survey mode should be recorded alongside responses, and mode effects across the data should be systematically tested and reported. This is especially important where sample characteristics may influence the mode of survey response (e.g. regional or demographic variations).
- Aspects of the wider survey context, such as the day of the week in which the survey is conducted and day-to-day events occurring around the time of the survey, can influence affective measures, but this should not be regarded as error. There is also some evidence that rare and/or significant events can impact on life evaluations. It is critical, therefore, to ensure that a variety of days are sampled. Comparability of data can be supported through adoption of a consistent approach regarding the proportion of weekdays/weekends, holiday periods, and seasons of the year that are sampled.

Recommendations: Response styles and international comparability

- Response styles present particular challenges for data interpretation when they vary systematically between countries, or between population sub-groups within countries. However, this is relevant to all self-reported indicators, and there are not strong grounds for expecting subjective well-being measures to be uniquely affected.
- The best current approach for guarding against biases introduced by response styles is to adopt sound survey design principles that minimise the risk that respondents rely on characteristic response styles or heuristics to answer questions. This includes selecting questions that are easily translated and understood, and minimally burdensome on memory, as well as structuring and introducing the survey in a way that promotes respondent motivation.

Conclusion: Methodological considerations

Perhaps *because* of concerns about their use, quite a lot is known about how subjective well-being measures behave under different measurement conditions. The extensive manner in which subjective well-being questions have been tested offers a firm evidence base for those seeking to better understand their strengths and limitations. However, questions remain regarding the “optimal” way to measure subjective well-being. National statistical agencies are in a unique position to improve the evidence base, by providing the data that can answer those questions for which large and more nationally-representative samples are required.

3. Measuring subjective well-being

This section presents best practice in measuring subjective well-being. It covers both the range of concepts to be measured and the best approaches for measuring them. This includes considering issues of sample design, survey design, data processing and coding and questionnaire design.

Survey vehicles

Subjective well-being measures are relevant in a wide range of contexts. Of particular importance for monitoring progress is the inclusion of such measures in integrated household surveys and general social surveys. Time use surveys are the key vehicle for collecting detailed information on affect and its antecedents but it is possible to collect useful information on affect from other household surveys.

Measures of subjective well-being are also relevant to victimisation surveys, health surveys, and special topic surveys. In particular, special topic surveys are excellent vehicles for exploring aspects of subjective well-being in more depth, although they cannot be used to monitor changes in well-being over time due to their “one-off” nature.

Including measures of subjective well-being in panel surveys is important for research into causality and the drivers of subjective well-being.

What other information should be collected: Co-variates and analytical and variables

The precise range of co-variates to collect alongside measures of subjective well-being will vary with the specific aspect of subjective well-being that is of interest and with the research question being examined. Despite this, it is possible to present some general guidelines on the most important information that should be collected alongside measures of subjective well-being:

- *Demographics*: Age, gender, marital status (legal marital status and social marital status), family type, number of children, household size, and geographic information.
- *Material conditions*: Household income, consumption, deprivation, housing quality.
- *Quality of life*: Employment status, health status, work/life balance, education and skills, social connections, civic engagement and governance, environmental quality, personal security.
- *Psychological measures*: aspirations and expectations about the future, which form part of the frame of reference³ that individuals use when evaluating their lives or reporting their feelings.

Time use diaries. Although all of the measures identified as relevant to household surveys are equally relevant to time use surveys, the use of time diaries allows the collection of information on additional co-variates in a way that is not possible in standard household surveys (e.g. activity classification, with whom an activity was performed, location where the activity took place). This is particularly useful to have where information on aspects of subjective well-being, such as affect, are collected in the diary itself.

Target population

The target age group for measures of subjective well-being will vary with respect to the goals of the research programme. For example, in the context of research on retirement income policies, it may be appropriate to limit the target population to persons aged 65 or

older. In general, however, measures of subjective well-being would usually be collected for all the adult population (aged 15 years and older):

- In all cases, the sampling frame must produce a representative sample of individuals or households as if all individuals are personally interviewed.
- Evidence suggests that children are capable of answering questions from age 11 with respect to both measures of life evaluation and affective state.
- Proxy responses, which might be appropriate for some types of data (income, marital status, age) are not valid with respect to subjective well-being.

Frequency and duration of enumeration

For the most important core measures used to monitor well-being, an annual time series should be regarded as the essential minimum in terms of frequency of enumeration:

- Ideally, enumeration would take place over a full year, and would include all days of the week including holidays.
- Where a year-long enumeration period is not possible, enumeration should, as far as possible, be spread proportionately over all the days of the week.

Sample size

Large samples are desirable for subjective well-being as for any topics, as they reduce the standard error of estimates and allow a more precise estimate and a greater degree of freedom with respect to producing cross-tabulations and analysis for population sub-groups.

Mode

In terms of data quality, computer assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) with show cards is currently considered the ideal choice for collecting subjective well-being data:

- Where other modes of interviewing – such as computer assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) or computer assisted self interview (CASI) – are used, it is important that data producers collect information to enable the impact of mode effects to be estimated.
- National statistical agencies, in particular, should test experimentally the impact of different survey modes on responses to the core measures of subjective well-being, and publish the results along with any results from CATI or CASI surveys.

Question placement

Question placement within a survey can have a considerable impact on responses. A number of actions can minimise this effect:

- *Place important subjective well-being questions near the start of the survey.* Although placing questions early in a survey does not eliminate all of the problems associated with context effects, it is the best strategy available and should be pursued where possible. In particular, for the core measures of subjective well-being, for which international or time series comparisons are critical, these questions should be placed directly after the initial screening questions that lead to a respondent's inclusion in the survey. The core measures module included in Annex B is intended to be placed at the start of a survey.
- *Avoid placing the subjective well-being questions immediately after questions likely to elicit a strong emotional response or that respondents might use as a heuristic for determining their response to the subjective well-being question.* This would include questions on income,

social contact, labour force status, victimisation, political beliefs, or any questions suggesting social ranking. The best questions to precede subjective questions are relatively neutral factual demographic questions.

- *Make use of transition questions to refocus respondent attention.* One technique that has been used to address contextual effects resulting from a preceding question is using a transition question designed to focus the respondent's attention on their personal life. However, transition questions can also introduce their own context effects. For example, drawing attention to a respondent's personal life may lead them to focus on personal relationships or family when answering subsequent questions about life overall. Development of effective transition questions is a priority for future work.
- *Use of introductory text to distinguish between question topics.* Well worded text preceding each question or topic can serve as a buffer between measures of subjective well-being and sensitive questions. However, there is little evidence on the effectiveness or optimal phrasing of such introductory text. A standard introductory text has been included in each of the prototype question modules included in Annex B to this document. Further cognitive testing or experimental analysis of the impact of different types of introductory text would be highly valuable.

Choice of questions

It is recommended that any changes to existing questions are phased-in using parallel samples, so that the impact of the change can be fully documented and examined. This will provide insights into the impact of changes in methodology, and provide agencies with information for adjusting previous data sets.

Translation

Because question wording matters to how people respond to questions on subjective well-being, the translation of questions is of high importance. Potential issues arising from translation cannot be entirely eliminated, but they can be managed through an effective translation process. A robust translation process, including back translation, is therefore essential.

Interviewer training

To manage risks around respondent attitudes to questions on subjective well-being, it is imperative that interviewers are well-briefed, not just on what concepts the questions are trying to measure, but also on how the information collected will be used. This is essential for interviewers to build a good relation with respondents, and can improve respondents' compliance and data quality.

Measures of subjective well-being are relatively non-problematic for respondents to answer. Rates of refusal to respond are low, both for life evaluations and for measures of affect. However, statistical providers should consider how best to manage the risks associated with questions that are distressing to respondents. Although these risks should not be overstated – they apply mainly to eudaimonic questions and to a small proportion of respondents – such issues should be dealt with effectively.

4. Output and analysis of subjective well-being measures

It is difficult to provide a succinct list of recommendations relating to the analysis of subjective well-being data, as much of the advice is contingent on the goals of the analysis. Nonetheless, several recommendations that can be made with respect to publishing measures of subjective well-being:

- Using subjective well-being data to complement other measures of well-being requires producers of statistical information to regularly collect and release high quality nationwide data from large and representative samples.
- It will be important, especially when reporting the results of national surveys, to provide a full description of the indicators used – including the underlying constructs of interest, and what they might reflect in addition to “happiness”.
- Data releases should include information on both the level and distribution of measures of subjective well-being.

Reporting central tendency and level of subjective well-being measures

Summary statistics of central tendency such as mean, median, and mode provide a useful way of presenting and comparing the level of subjective well-being in a population in a single number. Information on levels may also be presented as the proportion of the relevant population above or below a particular threshold. Threshold based measures can be a useful way to summarise findings in a simple manner for non-expert audiences. However, the choice of threshold is a critical consideration, as threshold-based reporting can produce distortions and mask important changes in the data:

- The mean is useful as a summary statistic of the level of subjective well-being.
- Where possible, both the mean score and the proportion of the population above or below specific thresholds should be reported in data releases.
- When publishing data based on a threshold, it is important to check that the change in the proportion of the population above or below the threshold is consistent with the picture that emerges from a look at changes in the distribution as a whole. The choice of threshold should also be explained.

Reporting the distribution of subjective well-being measures

Given the limited number of response options associated with measures of subjective well-being (typically 0 to 10 for most of the questions proposed in the guidelines), it may be possible to publish data showing the entire distribution of responses:

- Where summary measures of dispersion are required, the inter-quartile range (i.e. the difference between individuals at the 25th percentile and individuals at the 75th percentile of the distribution), or the point difference between quantiles (e.g. the 90th and the 10th percentile) may be preferred.

Analysis of subjective well-being data

It is difficult to provide a succinct list of recommendations relating to the analysis of subjective well-being data, as much of the advice is contingent on the goals of the analysis. However, this section of the guidelines covers topics such as:

- Issues in the analysis and interpretation of descriptive statistics on subjective well-being. This includes the interpretation of change over time, differences between groups, and the risk of cultural “bias” in cross-country comparisons.
- Analyses of the drivers of well-being, including managing issues such as shared method variance, omitted variables, reverse and two-way causality, frame of reference effects and hedonic adaptation.
- How subjective well-being data might be used to inform the appraisal, design and evaluation of policy options, including the potential use of subjective well-being data in cost-benefit analysis.

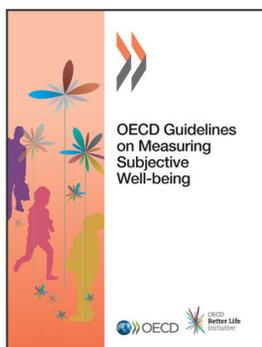
What is next?

These guidelines do not aim to provide the “final word” on the measurement of subjective well-being. Although some aspects of the measurement of subjective well-being – such as questions on overall satisfaction with life – are well understood, other potentially important measures currently draw on much weaker evidence bases. It is expected that the evidence base on subjective well-being will develop rapidly over the next few years. In particular, to the extent that national statistical offices start regularly collecting and publishing data on subjective well-being, many methodological questions are likely to be resolved as better data becomes available, and an increasing body of knowledge will accumulate on the policy uses of subjective well-being data.

It is envisaged that these guidelines will be followed up by a review of progress on the measurement of subjective well-being over the next few years, with a view to deciding whether the guidelines need revising and whether it is possible and desirable to move towards a greater degree of international standardisation. The intent is that this review will build on information collected by national statistical agencies, and will consider the feasibility of moving towards a more formal international standard for the measurement of subjective well-being.

Notes

1. The definition used here draws largely on Diener et al. (2006).
2. During the 1990s there was an average of less than five articles on happiness or related subjects each year in the journals covered by the *Econlit* database. By 2008 this had risen to over fifty each year.
3. “Frame of reference” refers to the situation or group on which respondent’s base comparisons when formulating a judgement about their lives or feelings. The respondent’s knowledge of how others live and their own prior experiences can influence the basis on which judgements are reached about the respondent’s current status.



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