

# Measuring subjective wellbeing in a surveillance system: ¿who are these people who are positive?

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Conflictos de interés: Los autores declaran no tener conflictos de interés alguno.

## Abstract

**Background:** Promoting and improving the wellbeing (and happiness) of the general population is emerging as a public health priority globally and a key societal aspiration. Countries are including measures on wellbeing to supplement traditional measures of economic growth as an indicator of national prosperity. Including questions on subjective individual wellbeing can be useful to measure and can be included in a surveillance system. These questions can provide an overall assessment of how people are doing and take into account of what people decide for themselves is important beside health. It can capture the meaning and purpose in life which is not covered in current "negative" questions such as psychological distress. **Purpose:** To assess the performance and association of subjective wellbeing on a range of socio-economic status (SES) and inequality indicators.

**Study/Intervention Design:** Cross-sectional, Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI)

**Methods:** The South Australian Monitoring and Surveillance System (SAMSS) a monthly chronic disease and risk factor survey of randomly selected persons of all ages using CATI. Four wellbeing questions were asked of people aged 16 years and over: assessed life satisfaction, feeling of worthwhile, happy yesterday, and anxious yesterday were included in SAMSS in 2013 and 2014. **Results:** In 2014 South Australians had high proportions in having good wellbeing: 87.1% for life satisfaction, 89.6% of how worthwhile the things they do, 86.0% for being happy yesterday and 81.6% with low anxiety yesterday. Overall, 51.6% of the respondents scored well on all four wellbeing measures and 14.8% scored badly on at least one measure. Respondents scoring well on all four measures were more likely to be female, in the older age groups, living in the rural and remote areas of South Australia, and renting their house privately or from the state government. They are also living in a household where they are able to save money a bit every now and then or a lot. Students or unemployed respondents had a lower proportion having good

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wellbeing (on all four measures). When examined by household income, there is evidence of a gradient effect of income: the proportion of wellbeing increased as household income increases. Similarly, there is evidence of a gradient effect when examined by number of low socioeconomic status (SES), that is, the proportion of good wellbeing decreases with each additional low SES indicator. Conclusion: The results of including the four questions appear to be suitable to provide trend analysis and continual inclusion a surveillance system like SAMSS. Future analyses can monitor and determine if the policies to address positive wellbeing have been effective in particular for specific SES subgroups.