

Wellbeing in rural Scotland

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This research is funded by Scottish Government's Rural and Environment Science and Analytical Services Division (RESAS) under Theme 8 'Vibrant Rural Communities' of the Food, Land and People Programme (2011-2016).

Introduction

What is wellbeing?

Human wellbeing is about how well the needs of people in a society are met by various aspects of life (e.g. physical, economic, social, environmental, emotional, religious) and the extent to which people are satisfied with what they deliver to them (Levy and Guttman, 1975; Levy and Sabbagh, 2008; Costanza et al, 2007).

Types of wellbeing

There are two types of wellbeing, objective wellbeing and subjective wellbeing.

Indicators from social, economic, physical and other easily quantifiable domains can be used to gauge what people possess and are generally referred to as objective measures of wellbeing. The use of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to measure economic wellbeing of nations is a typical example. The wealthier a nation, the more easily it can provide such services as education and welfare benefits for its poorer members (Jowell and Eva, 2009).

Subjective wellbeing is frequently measured as happiness or life satisfaction, encompassing pleasure, engagement and meaning (Eckersley, 2009; Vella-Brodrick, 2009). These measures are subjective in the sense that they measure the attitudes, values and perceptions derived from people's own experience (Jowell and Eva, 2009). **It is subjective wellbeing which is examined here.**

Why look at wellbeing?

A country with a high level of subjective wellbeing is likely to be at an advantage as happier people work harder, produce more, are healthier and are more self-reliant. It is therefore within a government's interests to improve the nation's wellbeing (Cummins et al, 2009).

Methods

We used descriptive analysis and statistical models to look at what influenced wellbeing, and see if there were significant differences in wellbeing levels across rural and non-rural parts of Scotland.

The dataset used was the Scottish component of the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS), plus an extension sample of 1,500 households in Scotland. The total number of individuals analysed was 2,148.

Two measures of wellbeing were examined. The first was a general measure of wellbeing, based on a derived variable which took into account questions covering, for example, enjoying day-to-day activities, belief in self-worth, loss of sleep, ability to face problems. The second was a variable which asked respondents how dissatisfied or satisfied they were with their life overall.

The definition of rural employed was the Scottish Government 3 fold Urban Rural Classification.

Results

	Wellbeing		Life satisfaction	
	Mean	SE	Mean	SE
Remote rural	25.40	0.51	5.55	0.11
Accessible rural	25.30	0.30	5.34	0.08
Non-rural	24.84	0.15	5.18	0.04

Figure 1 shows the average values for wellbeing and life satisfaction in each of the three area categories. It appears that both measures are highest in remote rural areas, and lowest in non-rural areas. The differences, however, are only statistically significant between remote rural areas and non-rural areas for life satisfaction.

Figure 1: Average wellbeing score

Figure 2 contains results from the statistical (ordered logit) model. **Living in a remote rural area is associated with higher levels of wellbeing and life satisfaction.** There is a U-shaped relationship between age and wellbeing/life satisfaction, initially decreasing with age then increasing. Being married or cohabiting, having excellent health over the last 12 months, talking to neighbours at least once a week and playing sport at least once a month are linked to higher wellbeing and life satisfaction. Being in a worse financial situation than last year is associated with a lower level of wellbeing and life satisfaction.

	Wellbeing			Life satisfaction		
	Coeff.	SE	Sig.	Coeff.	SE	Sig.
Remote rural	0.294	0.18	*	0.675	0.20	**
Accessible rural	0.083	0.11		0.178	0.13	
Age	-0.055	0.02	**	-0.074	0.02	**
Age squared	0.001	0.00	**	0.001	0.00	**
Male	0.449	0.09	**	0.068	0.09	
Retired	-0.003	0.18		0.444	0.18	**
Married, cohabiting, civil partnership	0.282	0.17	*	0.875	0.16	**
Health in the last 12 months excellent/good	1.219	0.11	**	1.454	0.12	**
Financial position worse than last year	-0.592	0.10	**	-0.650	0.10	**
Meet friends & family once/twice a week	-0.127	0.14		0.317	0.12	**
Talk to neighbours once/twice a week	0.183	0.11	*	0.284	0.11	**
Play sport/exercise once a month	0.565	0.15	**	0.276	0.13	**
Religious service/meetings once a month	-0.035	0.12		0.310	0.12	**

Figure 2: Ordered logit results (selected variables)

Conclusions

Average wellbeing and life satisfaction appear to be greatest in remote rural areas, and least in the non-rural areas, however most differences are not statistically significant.

Ordered logit models were used to examine this further. Once individual characteristics are controlled for, living in a remote rural area is (significantly) associated with higher levels of wellbeing and life satisfaction. Living in an accessible rural area, however, is not associated with higher levels of wellbeing or life satisfaction than living in non-rural areas.