

COVID-19 Policy Responses & Subjective Wellbeing in Britain

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Study Aims & Methods

Study motivation

- There is a large literature on the health and wellbeing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic globally and in Britain (e.g. Foa et al 2022, ONS 2020a/b, 2021a/b).
 - But there is a major knowledge gap on the effects of the protective measures and institutional policies taken to stop the spread of the virus (cf. Brodeur et al 2021).
- Our study contributes to the literature from at least two perspectives:
- Assesses the impact of COVID-19 on subjective wellbeing in Britain, tracking wellbeing in the periods before, during, and after the pandemic.
 - Evaluates the differential impacts of major pandemic-induced policy responses on different dimensions of subjective wellbeing.

Study design

COVID-19 social impacts study design					
Institutional policy responses	Micro OPN/USoc*	COVID-19 policies (e.g. furlough, homeworking, Homeschooling)**	Social indicators (e.g. loneliness, financial situation, job security, satisfaction, worthwhile, happiness, depressed, anxious)	Individual-level	Wellbeing measures
	Macro OxCGRT/Ingest	COVID-19 policy indices (e.g. containment index, stringency index)***	Wellbeing indices (e.g. composite measures, SWB, General Health Questionnaire, GHQ)	Aggregate-level	

*Here we spotlight OPN work in 10 mins, exclude USoc.

**Working population – furlough vs not on furlough; homeworking vs not homeworking; wchool population – those homeschooling vs those not homeschooling.

***COVID-19 counterfactuals in this study are very challenging if not impossible to determine, “if it weren’t for the virus?”, or “what if Government hadn’t provided support?”

Methods: Data/Variables

Period	Dates	Waves	Sample*
Study	1 January 2018 to 22 January 2023	111	323,146
Pre	1 January 2018 to 26 January 2019	3	2,734
Covid**	20 March 2020 to 20 March 2022	87	272,025
Post	23 March 2023 to 22 January 2023	21	48,387

*Sample includes 5,976 respondent's on furlough; 54,978 respondent's working from home; 3,805 households with home-schooling activities due to Covid; 833 respondent's personally homeschooling.

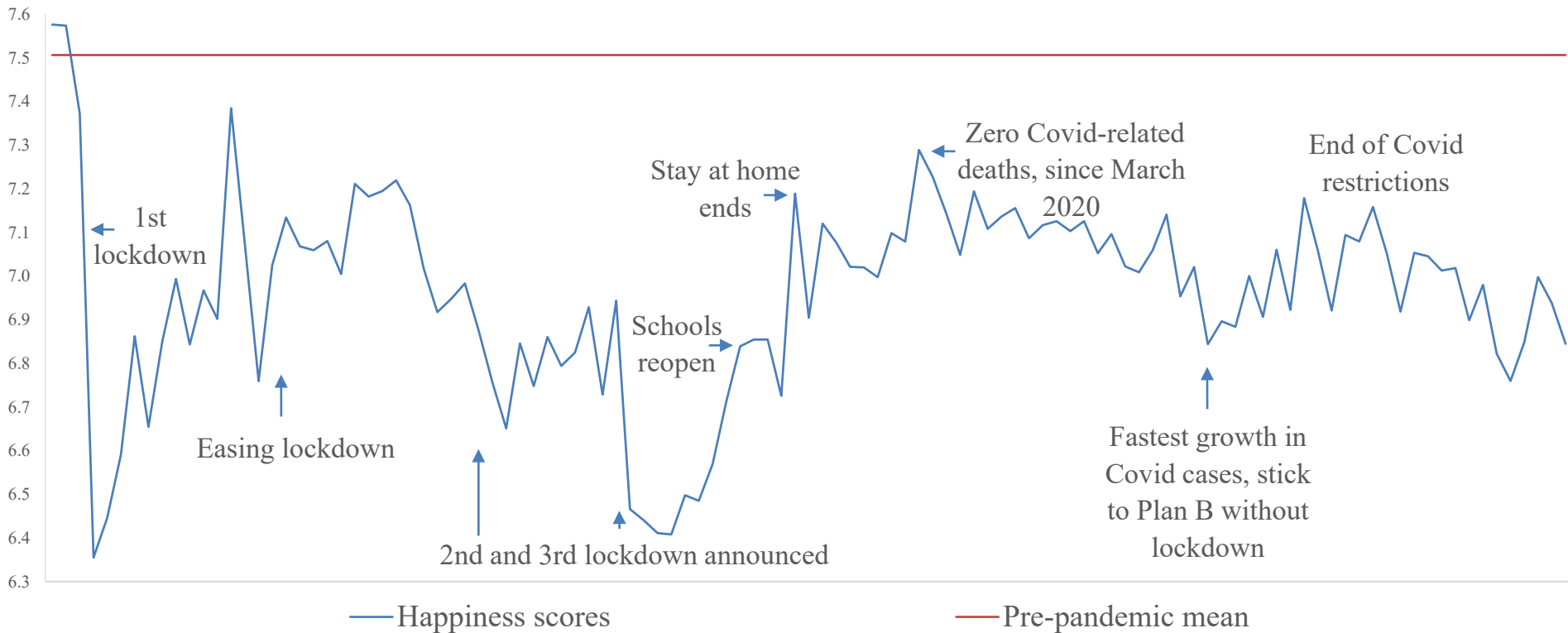
**The UK government had lifted all COVID-19 restrictions and regulations by the end of March 2022.

	OPN
Dependent variables	
Satisfaction	✓
Worthwhile	✓
Happiness	✓
Anxious	✓
Composite wellbeing	✓
Impacts (indicators)	✓
Policy context	
Furlough (CJRS)	✓
Homeworking	✓
Homeschooling	✓
Stringency (Oxford CGRT)	✓
Controls	
Age	✓
Gender	✓
Ethnicity	✓
Income	✓
Education	✓
Marital status	✓
Number of dependent children	✓
Country	✓

1. Results

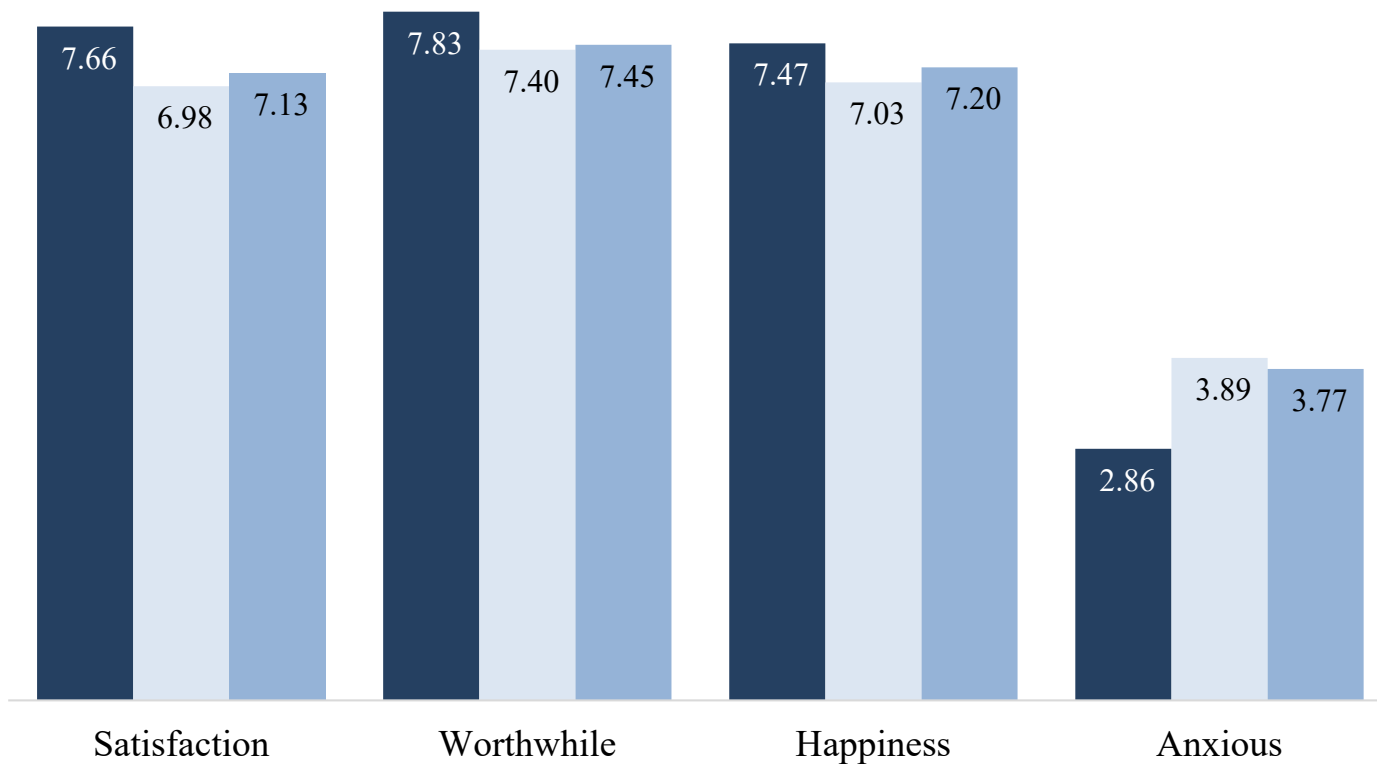
Wellbeing in Britain Before, During and After the Coronavirus Pandemic

Average happiness scores and key coronavirus events



Mean wellbeing scores before, during and after the coronavirus pandemic

■ Pre-pandemic [0.280] ■ Pandemic [-0.013] ■ Post-pandemic [0.059]



Note: figures in square brackets are the composite SWB means.

Source: OPN

Differences in means before, during and after the pandemic

	Before/During	During/After	Before/After
Satisfaction	-0.68*** (0.0339)	0.15*** (0.0097)	-0.53*** (0.0348)
Worthwhile	-0.44*** (0.0346)	0.06*** (0.0101)	-0.38*** (0.0356)
Happiness	-0.45*** (0.0410)	0.17*** (0.0109)	-0.28*** (0.0420)
Anxious	1.03*** (0.0558)	-0.12*** (0.0151)	0.91*** (0.0573)
SWB	-0.293*** (0.0160)	0.072*** (0.0049)	-0.221*** (0.0165)

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses; Significance levels: *=10%; **=5%; ***=1%.

Source: OPN

2. Micro Results

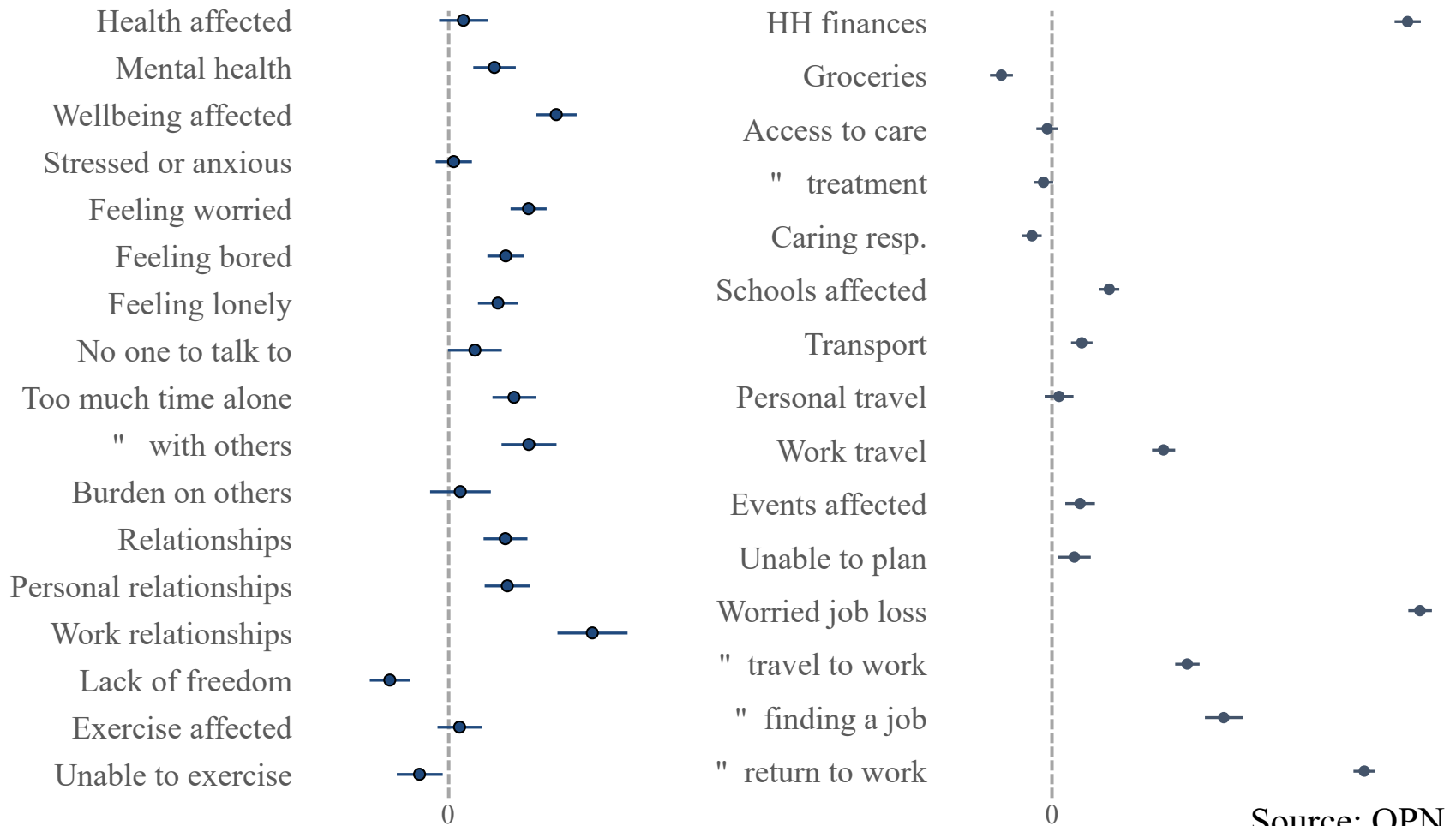
COVID-19 Policy Responses & Wellbeing

COVID-19 policy responses and wellbeing outcomes

	Satisfaction	Worthwhile	Happiness	Anxious	SWB
Furlough	-0.314*** (0.053)	-0.282*** (0.062)	-0.147*** (0.051)	0.053 (0.051)	-0.100*** (0.022)
Homeworking	-0.194*** (0.020)	-0.259*** (0.023)	-0.244*** (0.020)	0.133*** (0.019)	-0.085*** (0.008)
Homeschooling	-0.249* (0.140)	0.056 (0.142)	-0.225* (0.133)	0.236* (0.130)	0.009 (0.088)

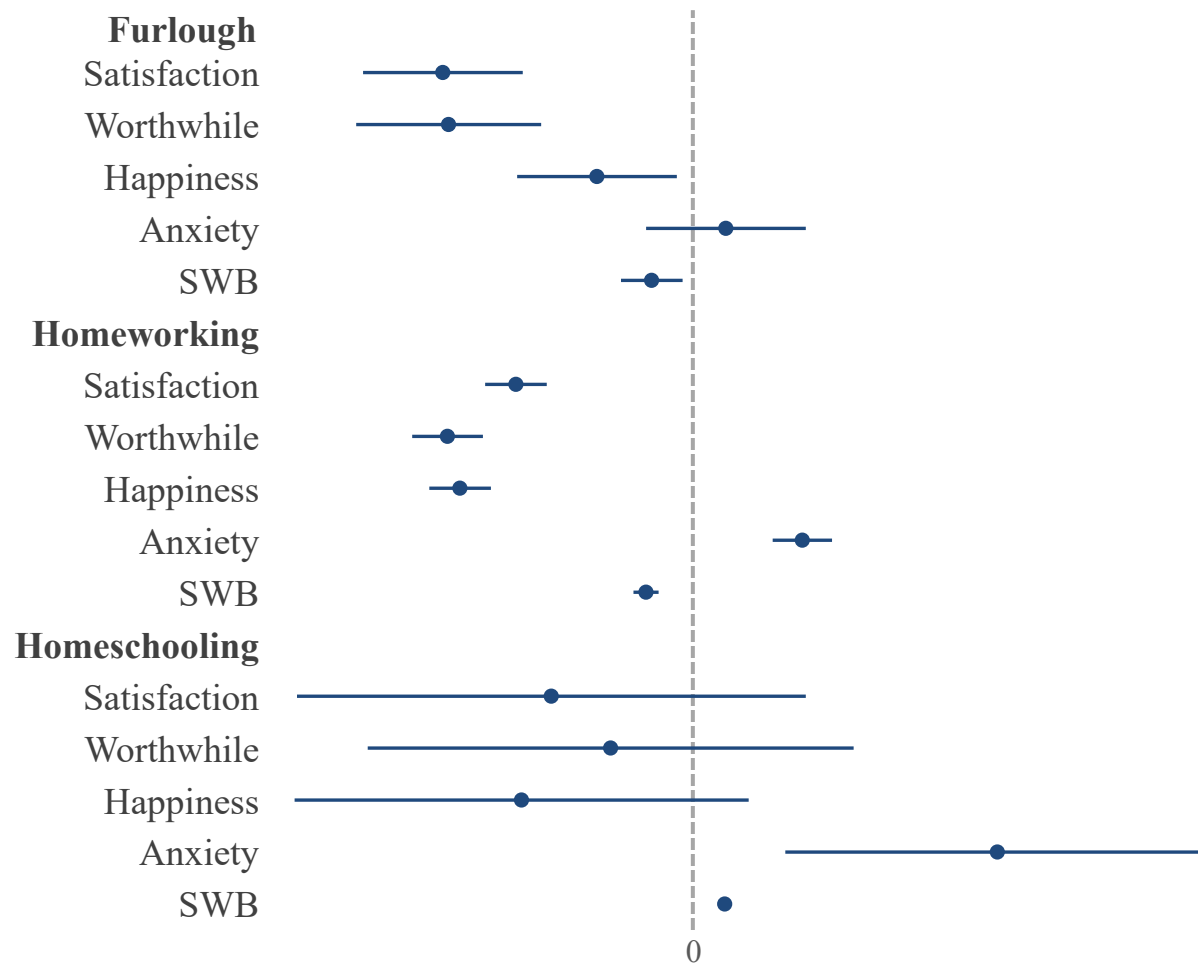
Notes: Standard errors in parentheses; Significance levels: *=10%; **=5%; ***=1%.

Impacts and outcomes experienced by those on furlough, compared to those not on furlough

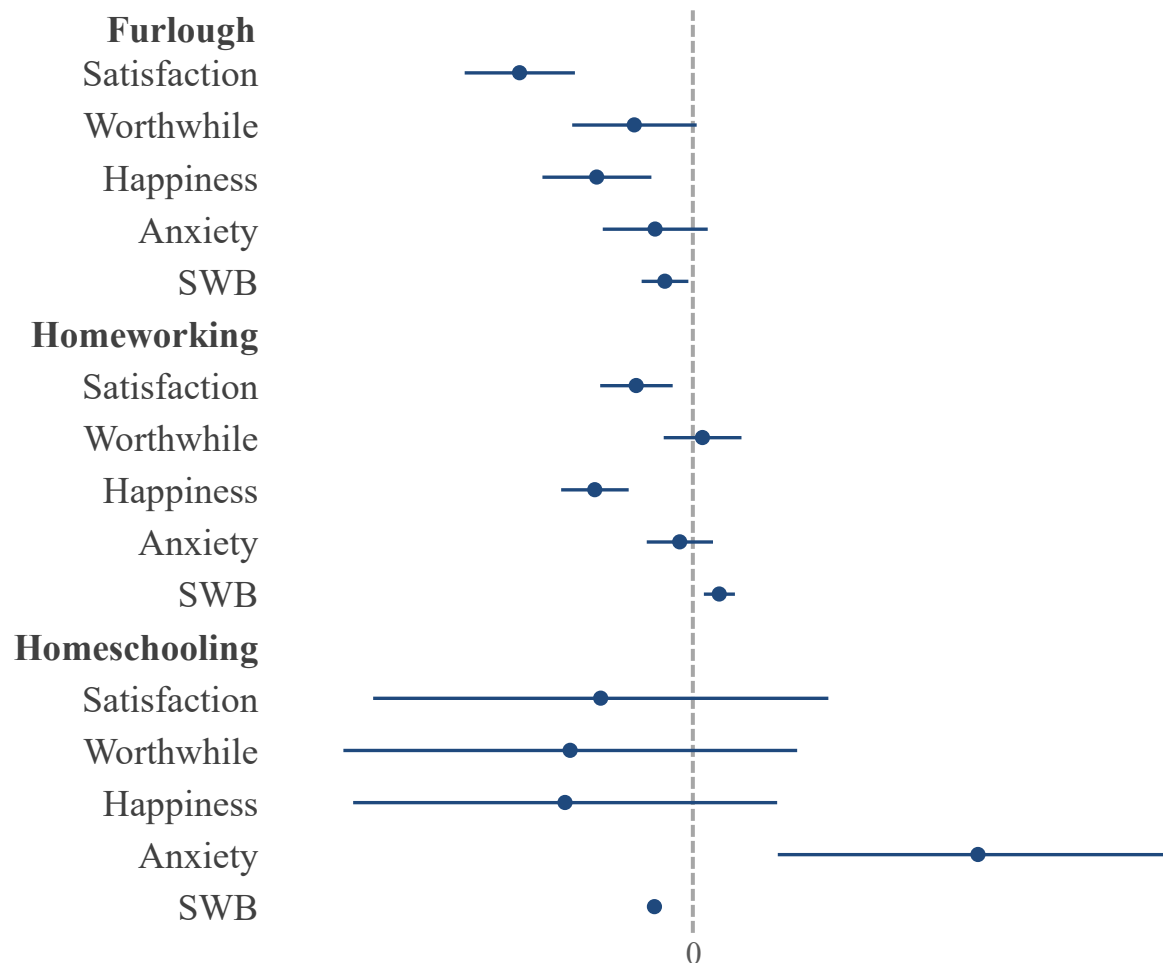


Source: OPN

Wellbeing outcomes experienced by females, compared to males



Wellbeing outcomes experienced by those with median or below median income, compared to those with above median income



3. Macro Results

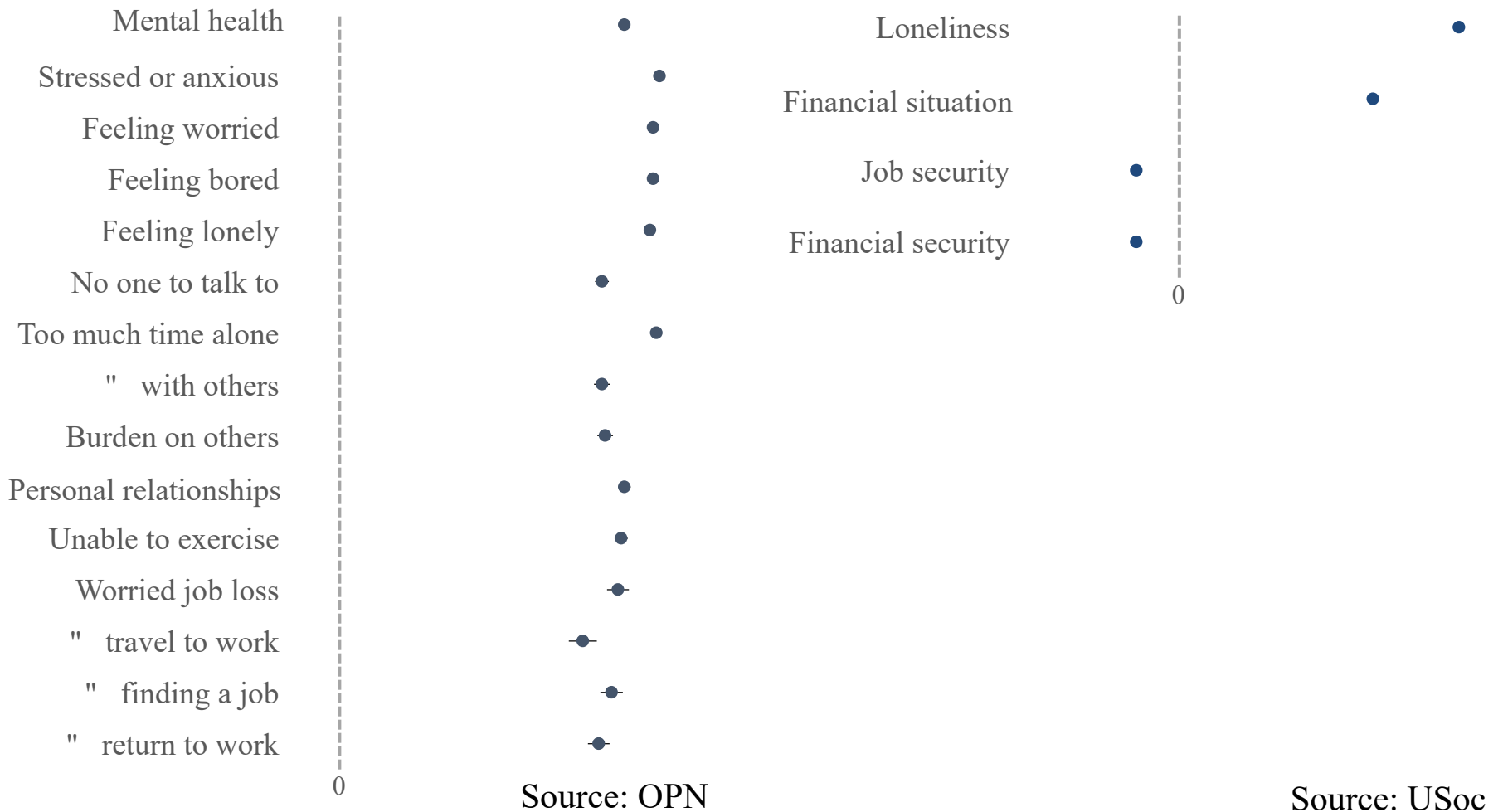
Stringency & Wellbeing

Wellbeing conditional on OxCGRt Stringency Index

	Satisfaction	Worthwhile	Happiness	Anxious	SWB
Britain	-0.006*** (0.001)	-0.000 (0.001)	-0.003*** (0.001)	0.002*** (0.001)	-0.019 (0.013)
England	-0.006*** (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.004*** (0.001)	0.002*** (0.001)	-0.015*** (0.002)
Wales	-0.015** (0.006)	0.002 (0.007)	0.002 (0.006)	0.011* (0.006)	0.048 (0.119)
Scotland	-0.005 (0.005)	0.001 (0.005)	-0.003 (0.005)	0.003 (0.005)	-0.019 (0.016)

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses; Significance levels: *=10%; **=5%; ***=1%.

Additional impacts and outcomes conditional on OxCGRT Stringency



Summary

Conclusion

- We consider the differential effects of Covid-related economic and social interventions on people's wellbeing during the pandemic.
- We find that average subjective wellbeing scores were lowest during the pandemic, and have not returned to their pre-pandemic levels.
- We found being furloughed, working from home and home-schooling during the pandemic are significantly associated with subjective wellbeing.

Limitations

- The study considers the outcomes associated with policy responses rather than claims any causal inference (see Bhrolcháin and Dyson 2007).
- COVID-19 counterfactuals are challenging if not impossible to determine, “if it weren’t for the virus?”, or “what if Government hadn’t provided support?”.
- Disentangling “pandemic effects” from “policy effects” here is also challenging given similar/same temporal context (see Foa et al 2022).

Permissions & Acknowledgements

- The study is supported by ESRC grant reference ES/W001187/1 (UKRI COVID-19 award): ‘Understanding the Social Impacts of Coronavirus Under Different Health Restrictions: A Pooled Analysis of the ONS OPN Covid-19 Survey’.
- The ONS material used in this study is Crown Copyright and has been used with relevant permissions: COVID-19 Social Impacts Project, Project ID: 238122, registered at the UK Data Service
- The project is registered with the ONS Secure Research Service (SRS), Project Reference No. 2001318.
- Project 2001318 is accredited by the Research Accreditation Panel (RAP), UK Statistics Authority (UKSA).
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Thank you
for listening!

Questions?