Introduction

This User Guide covers the ELSA self-completion data relating to personal beliefs and wellbeing, otherwise known as the Ryff scale. More detail about the Ryff scale, including who was asked to complete it, can be found below.

The self-completion with which this data was collected is distinct from, and in addition to, the core self-completion questionnaires that respondents have been asked to complete during or after their main ELSA interview at each wave of ELSA.

For further information about other aspects of ELSA (such as the sample, the data collection methods used or the content of the main or nurse questionnaire), please see the relevant User Guides that are available from the Data Archive. This User Guide will cover only the questionnaire used to collect information on the Ryff scale. If you wish to link the data deposited here with other ELSA data at the Data Archive then you will need to use the unique analytical identifier (IDAUNIQ) to do so.

Eligibility and Response for Personal Beliefs and Wellbeing Self-Completion

The Personal Beliefs and Wellbeing self-completion questionnaire was given out, at random, to one respondent in one in ten households at the end of the ELSA Wave 2 nurse visit. All ELSA core sample members who completed a Wave 2 interview were eligible for a nurse visit, with the exception of those interviews that were carried out by proxy. The number of respondents who had a productive Wave 2 nurse interview is 7666, which is 88.2% of those eligible for a nurse visit (i.e. core sample members), or 71.2% of all those eligible for an ELSA Wave 2 interview. Of these 7666, 747 respondents (9.7%) were selected to receive the self-completion. The number of respondents who returned an at least partially completed questionnaire was 408, or 54.6% of those who were given the questionnaire. One respondent returned a questionnaire with no responses at all, and has been removed from this dataset.

The variable OUTNSCW2 shows whether the questionnaire was partially or fully completed - a partial completion was defined as one that had 15 or more responses missing (out of a total of 43 items).

Completion of this additional questionnaire was entirely voluntary, and respondents were encouraged to answer at least some of the questions if they did not want to answer all of them. The handing out of the questionnaire was, in some ways, an experiment to determine whether it added sufficiently to the measures of wellbeing already on ELSA, without adding undue burden to the respondents.

Users of this data should note that the subsample of the main ELSA sample that received the questionnaire is a select one, being those who had taken part in both an interview and nurse visit at Wave 2 and still been willing to complete this additional questionnaire. Users are cautioned against using the information other than for exploratory purposes – it has not been quantified how representative the subsample who
completed the questionnaire are of the rest of the ELSA sample, or of the population in
general (e.g. in terms of socio-demographics or CES-D score).

**Content and Format of Questionnaire**

Ryff’s scales of Psychological Wellbeing (Carol Ryff, 1989, 1995) were designed to
measure six theoretically motivated constructs of psychological wellbeing, which are:

- **Autonomy** - independence and self-determination;
- **Environmental mastery** - the ability to manage one’s life;
- **Personal growth** - being open to new experiences;
- **Positive relations with others** - having satisfying, high quality relationships;
- **Purpose in life** - believing that one’s life is meaningful;
- **Self-acceptance** - a positive attitude towards oneself and one’s past life.

**Scale Length and Item Content**

The original questionnaire included 120 items (20 per dimension) but shorter versions
comprising 84 items (14 per dimension), 54 items (9 per dimension), 42 items (7 per
dimension) and 18 items (3 per dimension) are now widely used.

The overlap between items in the shorter versions is quite low; for example, the 18-item
version has only 6 items in common with the 42-item version, one item for each
dimension. The version used in ELSA has 43 items (7 per dimension except 8 for
purpose in life) and has 30 items in common with the similar length 42-item version. The
questionnaire itself is archived along with this User Guide and the data.

The response format for all items normally comprises seven ordered categories labelled
from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’. Empirical data, such as that presented here,
has been found to be highly skewed towards the conceptually more positive response
categories. Levels of agreement in this data have been found to be extremely high with
regards to the ‘positive’ questions (see below), and similarly with high levels of
disagreement with the ‘negative’ questions.

Each length version includes a mixture of positive and negative item content. Questions
with negative item content need to be reverse scored prior to analyses in order to be
comparable. The ELSA version of the questionnaire includes 21 questions with positive
and 22 questions with negative item content. The ‘negative’ questions are in **bold** text in
the table below.

The developers of the scale have suggested the following structure for the data, in the
form of subscales for each construct listed at the start of this section:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Question number (variable name in data)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>15 (RFINFLU), 17 (RFCONFI), 18 (RFJUDGE), 19 (RFVOICE), 25 (RFDECIS), 31 (RFDIFF), and 37 (RFDISAG)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental mastery</td>
<td>4 (RFDEMAN), 8 (RFCHARG), 9 (RFMANAG), 24 (RFFITIN), 30 (RFOVERW), 36 (RFARRAN), and 42 (RFBUILD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal growth</td>
<td>11 (RFLEARN), 12 (RFEXPER), 14 (RFIMPRO), 23 (RFHORIZ), 29 (RFNIMPR), 35 (RFDEVEL), and 41 (RFTRICK)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive relations with others</td>
<td>6 (RFCLOSE), 13 (RFSHARE), 16 (RFWARM), 22 (RFLOVIN), 28 (RFLONEL), 34 (RFRIEN), and 40 (RFTRUST)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose in life</td>
<td>3 (RFWAND), 7 (RFONEDA), 10 (RFDONE), 20 (RFSENSE), 26 (RFACCOM), 32 (RFGOALS), 38 (RFPLANS), and 43 (RFACTIV)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-acceptance</td>
<td>1 (RFPERS), 2 (RFSTORY), 5 (RFDISAP), 21 (RFPOSIT), 27 (RFMORE), 33 (RFATTIT) and 39 (RFCOMPA)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

'Negative' questions in bold

The names of the variables in the deposited dataset are somewhat arbitrary – they do not represent standard names for these variables and have been allocated primarily to be more informative than just the question numbers alone.

Those unfamiliar with the Ryff scale should be aware that the psychometric properties are controversial, in particular whether the six dimensions proposed by the author of the scale are valid. There is no agreement, however, as to what would constitute a better structure.

A number of references are given below so that users can decide how they wish to use the data.

References


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