

2017

# Vermont Happiness Study



**GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS USA**  
**GNHUSA**

Folena De Geus & Michael Moser

The Vermont State Data Center  
at UVM's Center for Rural Studies

## History

The Vermont Happiness Survey is based on four decades of development of well-being, happiness and quality of life measures from around the globe. The term “Gross National Happiness” was coined by the King of Bhutan in the 1970’s in reaction to the utilization of “Gross National Product”, or “Gross Domestic Product” economic measures of wellbeing.

Canadian researchers Martha and Michael Pennock are credited with developing early versions of a Happiness survey that were implemented in Bhutan, the Canadian province of British Columbia and in Brazil.

Today in the United States, two organizations have emerged to advocate for Happiness and Wellbeing, generally, and for the incorporation of Happiness metrics into more traditional measures of community wellbeing and sustainability, specifically. Each of these organizations have contributed to the Vermont Happiness Study.

[The Happiness Alliance](#) is “inspired by Bhutan” and was “spun-off” of Sustainable Seattle’s sustainability indicators project in 2012. The Happiness Alliance is a not-for-profit entity that, as a part of its work, helps communities access and utilize the Gross National Happiness Index in sustainability metrics projects. The Vermont Happiness Study is grateful to have been able to partner with the Happiness Alliance to utilize the Gross National Happiness Index as a foundation for our research.

[Gross National Happiness USA](#) formed in 2009 after a group of happy Vermonters attended a happiness research conference in Bhutan. This VT-based, National organization seeks to “Increase personal happiness and collective wellbeing by changing how we measure progress and success”. They advance this mission through a variety of outreach activities including the Happiness Walk and Happiness Dinners, convening National happiness conferences, speaking about happiness and wellbeing metrics at events and in organizations, and through their financial support in implementing the 2013 and 2017 Vermont Happiness Studies.

The Vermont Happiness Study is also supported in part by the [Vermont State Data Center](#) and [Center for Rural Studies](#) at the University of Vermont. The VT State Data Center is a data resource for Vermonters, providing assistance with accessing and using a variety of data sources relevant to Vermont. These organizations see the value in supporting the development of holistic indicators that balance and enrich standard population indicators.

One overarching goal of organizations advancing happiness and wellbeing in the U.S. is to see GNH measures incorporated into policy decision-making processes in Vermont, the U.S. and abroad. The Center for Rural Studies, in its role working with VT communities and organizations is uniquely positioned to utilize GNH measures alongside other population measures, leading to a more holistic understanding of our populations, and perhaps better outcomes for the people we seek to assist.

## Methodology

The [Vermont State Data Center](#) and UVM's [Center for Rural Studies](#) fielded the first statistically-significant, state-level Happiness Study in 2013. This study was replicated in 2017 with the goal of developing a longitudinal data set of Vermonter's Happiness.

The 2017 study data were collected the week of July, 24<sup>th</sup>, 2017. Trained telephone interviewers utilized a random sample of Vermont landline and cellphone numbers and interviewed only respondents that were 18 years of age or over. Calling took place between the hours of 9am and 8pm. A total of 529 significantly-completed responses were collected ensuring the VT Happiness data were representative to Vermonters over 18 at a confidence level of 95% and a confidence interval (Margin of Error) of +/-4%.

The Vermont Happiness Study utilizes a vetted survey instrument developed and administered by [The Happiness Alliance](#). Mean scores (included in parentheses) are based on five-point scales, with 5 being the most positive response and 1 being the most negative. The instrument explores happiness within eleven defined domains that include:

- Overall Satisfaction with Life (Satisfaction, happiness, worthwhileness, anxiety)
- Psychological Wellbeing (Engagement, optimism, accomplishment)
- Physical Health (Health, energy, ability, exercise)
- Time Balance (Time for enjoyment, time balance, rushed time)
- Community Vitality (Trust, safety, volunteerism, belonging)
- Social Connectedness (Support, caring, love, loneliness)
- Education and Culture (Cultural opportunity and community culture)
- Physical Environment (Environmental quality and opportunity)
- Governance (Access, trust, confidence)
- Material Wellbeing (Financial security)
- Work Life (Satisfaction, interest, autonomy, pay)

Vermont Happiness study respondent demographics were compared to the most recent available population demographics from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey. While it is not surprising that respondent demographics do not exactly match the population demographics, most fell within acceptable margins. Selected demographics were weighted to match population demographics. This weighting resulted in insignificant changes to the overall results, and thus was not utilized for this report.

## Demographics

Vermont demographics utilize the Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) 2015, 1-year estimates. County-level demographics utilize 2011-2015, ACS 5-year estimates.

Median Age	VT Happiness Survey	VT Population
	50	43

Gender	VT Happiness Survey	VT Population
Female	56.3%	50.7%
Male	43.5%	49.3%
Some other gender affiliation	0.2%	NA

Educational Attainment	VT Happiness Survey	VT 18+ Population
Less than high school graduate	3.5%	8.3%
High school graduate or GED	17.6%	28.6%
Some college or vocational but no degree	16.7%	21.2%
Associates degree or equivalent	10.7%	7.9%
Bachelor's degree or equivalent	32.2%	21.2%
Master's degree or higher	19.4%	12.8%

Income	VT Happiness Survey	VT Population
Less than \$10,000	5.1%	4.9%
Between \$10,000 and \$25,000	12.4%	16.3%
Between \$25,000 and \$50,000	25.0%	22.3%
Between \$50,000 and \$75,000	20.6%	19.3%
Between \$75,000 and \$100,000	15.7%	14.2%
Over \$100,000	21.2%	23.0%

County of Residence	VT Happiness Survey	VT Population*
Addison	6.8%	5.9%
Bennington	3.8%	5.8%
Caledonia	4.5%	4.9%
Chittenden	25.7%	25.5%
Essex	0.9%	1.0%
Franklin	11.2%	7.7%
Grand Isle	0.9%	1.1%
Lamoille	4.0%	4.0%
Orange	5.9%	4.6%
Orleans	3.8%	4.3%
Rutland	8.5%	9.7%
Washington	11.2%	9.4%
Windham	5.5%	7.0%
Windsor	7.4%	9.0%

\*2011-2015 ACS 5-year estimates (1 year estimates not available for all Counties)

## Results Synopsis

Domain	Mean Score 2013	Mean Score 2017	Change
Satisfaction with Life	4.0	4.0	0.0
Psychological Wellbeing	4.1	4.1	0.0
Physical Health	3.8	3.7	-0.1
Time Balance	3.3	3.1	-0.2
Community Vitality	3.6	3.6	0.0
Social Connectedness	4.4	4.3	-0.1
Education & Culture	3.9	3.9	0.0
Physical Environment	4.2	4.2	0.0
Governance	3.2	3.0	-0.2
Material Wellbeing	3.8	3.5	-0.3
Work Life	3.9	3.9	0.0
<b>Vermonters' Overall Happiness</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>-0.1</b>

## Satisfaction with Life

**Domain Mean Score: (2013: 4.0/2017: 4.0)**

Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays? (4.2)	Frequency	Percent
Very Dissatisfied	21	4.0
Somewhat Dissatisfied	33	6.3
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	34	6.5
Somewhat Satisfied	180	34.2
Very Satisfied	258	49.0
Total	526	100.0

To what extent do you feel the things you do in life are worthwhile? (4.5)	Frequency	Percent
Very Unworthwhile	7	1.3
Somewhat Unworthwhile	10	1.9
Neither Unworthwhile nor Worthwhile	17	3.3
Somewhat Worthwhile	184	35.4
Very Worthwhile	302	58.1
Total	520	100.0

Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday? (4.0)	Frequency	Percent
Very Unhappy	24	4.6
Somewhat Unhappy	45	8.6
Neither Unhappy nor Happy	46	8.8
Somewhat Happy	202	38.5
Very Happy	208	39.6
Total	525	100.0

<b>Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday? (3.5)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Very Anxious	31	5.9
Somewhat Anxious	137	26.2
Neither Anxious nor Unanxious	91	17.4
Somewhat Unanxious	76	14.5
Very Unanxious	188	35.9
Total	523	100.0

## Psychological Wellbeing

**Domain Mean Score: (2013: 4.1/2017: 4.1)**

<b>I lead a purposeful and meaningful life. (4.2)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strongly Disagree	8	1.5
Disagree	22	4.2
Neither Agree nor Disagree	47	9.0
Agree	242	46.3
Strongly Agree	204	39.0
Total	523	100.0

<b>I am engaged and interested in my daily activities. (4.2)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strongly Disagree	5	1.0
Disagree	23	4.4
Neither Agree nor Disagree	34	6.5
Agree	256	48.7
Strongly Agree	208	39.5
Total	526	100.0

<b>I am optimistic about my future. (4.0)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strongly Disagree	15	2.9
Disagree	41	7.9
Neither Agree nor Disagree	50	9.6
Agree	224	43.0
Strongly Agree	191	36.7
Total	521	100.0

<b>Most days I feel a sense of accomplishment. (3.9)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strongly Disagree	9	1.7
Disagree	44	8.3
Neither Agree nor Disagree	64	12.1
Agree	273	51.8
Strongly Agree	137	26.0
Total	527	100.0

## Physical Health

**Domain Mean Score: (2013: 3.8/2017: 3.7)**

<b>In general, would you say your health is... (3.5)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Poor	26	4.9
Fair	72	13.7
Good	155	29.4
Very Good	183	34.7
Excellent	91	17.3
Total	527	100.0

<b>During the past week, would you say you had a lot of energy... (3.8)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Very Rarely or Never	25	4.8
Rarely	35	6.7
Sometimes	131	25.0
Often	177	33.8
Very Often or Always	156	29.8
Total	524	100.0

<b>How satisfied were you with your ability to perform daily activities? (4.0)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Very Dissatisfied	13	2.5
Somewhat Dissatisfied	44	8.3
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	47	8.9
Somewhat Satisfied	246	46.7
Very Satisfied	177	33.6
Total	527	100.0

<b>How satisfied were you with the quality of your exercise? (3.5)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Very Dissatisfied	44	8.5
Somewhat Dissatisfied	75	14.5
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	84	16.2
Somewhat Satisfied	195	37.6
Very Satisfied	120	23.2
Total	518	100.0

## Time Balance

**Domain Mean Score: (2013: 3.3/2017: 3.1)**

<b>In a typical week, how much of your time can you spend doing things that you enjoy? (3.3)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
None of your time	9	1.7
Not much of your time	83	15.7
Some of your time	235	44.5
Most of your time	169	32.0
All of your time	32	6.1
Total	528	100.0

<b>In the past week, my life has been too rushed. (3.1)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strongly Agree	47	8.9
Agree	142	26.9
Neither Agree nor Disagree	124	23.5
Disagree	163	30.9
Strongly Disagree	51	9.7
Total	527	100.0

<b>In the past week, I have had plenty of spare time. (2.9)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strongly Disagree	75	14.3
Disagree	165	31.4
Neither Agree nor Disagree	73	13.9
Agree	147	27.9
Strongly Agree	66	12.5
Total	526	100.0

## Community Vitality

**Domain Mean Score: (2013: 3.6/2017: 3.6)**

<b>When thinking about your neighbors, do you trust... (3.7)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
None of them	29	5.6
A few of them	59	11.4
Some of them	94	18.1
Most of them	209	40.3
All of them	128	24.7
Total	519	100.0



<b>When thinking about businesses in your community, do you trust... (3.7)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
None of them	11	2.1
A few of them	34	6.6
Some of them	111	21.6
Most of them	289	56.1
All of them	70	13.6
Total	515	100.0

<b>Now, imagine that you lost a wallet or purse that contained two hundred dollars. How likely would it be to have all your money returned if it was found by someone who lives close by? (3.3)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Not at all likely	60	11.5
Somewhat likely	100	19.1
Fairly likely	103	19.7
Very likely	171	32.7
Extremely likely	89	17.0
Total	523	100.0

<b>How satisfied are you with your personal safety in your community? (4.3)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Very Dissatisfied	3	0.6
Somewhat Dissatisfied	22	4.2
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	44	8.4
Somewhat Satisfied	209	40.0
Very Satisfied	245	46.8
Total	523	100.0

<b>In the past 12 months have you donated money... (3.4)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Not in the past 12 months	97	18.7
About once in the last year	57	11.0
About once every six months	78	15.0
About once every three months	114	21.9
About once a month	174	33.5
Total	520	100.0

<b>In the past 12 months have you volunteered your time... (3.3)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Not in the past 12 months	133	25.7
About once in the last year	47	9.1
About once every six months	73	14.1
About once every three months	84	16.2
About once a month	181	34.9
Total	518	100.0

<b>Would you describe your feeling of belonging to your local community as... (3.4)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Very weak	44	8.4
Somewhat weak	60	11.5
Neither weak nor strong	133	25.4
Somewhat strong	194	37.1
Very strong	92	17.6
Total	523	100.0

## Social Support

### Domain Mean Score: (Connection) (2013: 4.4/2017: 4.3)

<b>How satisfied are you with your personal relationships? (4.2)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Very Dissatisfied	7	1.4
Somewhat Dissatisfied	27	5.2
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	51	9.9
Somewhat Satisfied	195	37.9
Very Satisfied	235	45.6
Total	515	100.0

<b>People in my life care about me. (4.6)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strongly Disagree	4	0.8
Disagree	3	0.6
Neither Agree nor Disagree	18	3.4
Agree	176	33.7
Strongly Agree	321	61.5
Total	522	100.0

<b>During the past week have you felt lonely... (4.1)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Very Often or Always	15	2.9
Often	33	6.3
Sometimes	100	19.1
Rarely	106	20.3
Very Rarely or Never	269	51.4
Total	523	100.0

<b>During the past week have you felt loved... (4.4)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Very Rarely or Never	12	2.3
Rarely	13	2.5
Sometimes	59	11.3
Often	126	24.1
Very Often or Always	312	59.8
Total	522	100.0

## Education & Culture

**Domain Mean Score: (2013: 3.9/2017: 3.9)**

<b>In your community, how satisfied are you with your access to sports and recreational activities? (3.7)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Very Dissatisfied	14	2.8
Somewhat Dissatisfied	55	10.9
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	130	25.7
Somewhat Satisfied	166	32.8
Very Satisfied	141	27.9
Total	506	100.0

<b>In your community, how satisfied are you with your access to artistic and cultural activities? (3.7)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Very Dissatisfied	17	3.4
Somewhat Dissatisfied	69	13.6
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	115	22.7
Somewhat Satisfied	174	34.3
Very Satisfied	132	26.0
Total	507	100.0

<b>In your community, how satisfied are you with your access to learning opportunities like informal seminars or trainings? (3.5)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Very Dissatisfied	24	4.8
Somewhat Dissatisfied	66	13.2
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	143	28.5
Somewhat Satisfied	177	35.3
Very Satisfied	91	18.2
Total	501	100.0

<b>How often do you feel uncomfortable or out of place in your community because of things like your ethnicity, culture, race, skin color, language, accent, gender, sexual orientation, or religion? (4.5)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
All of the time	6	1.2
Most of the time	11	2.1
Some of the time	49	9.4
Rarely	108	20.8
Never	345	66.5
Total	519	100.0

## Physical Environment

**Domain Mean Score: (2013: 4.2/2017: 4.2)**

<b>How healthy is your physical environment? (3.9)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Not at all Healthy	9	1.7
A little Healthy	11	2.1
Somewhat Healthy	116	22.3
Very Healthy	270	51.8
Extremely Healthy	115	22.1
Total	521	100.0

<b>How satisfied are you with efforts to preserve the natural environment in your community? (4.0)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Very Dissatisfied	12	2.3
Somewhat Dissatisfied	30	5.8
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	92	17.8
Somewhat Satisfied	226	43.8
Very Satisfied	156	30.2
Total	516	100.0

<b>How satisfied are you with opportunities you have to enjoy nature? (4.6)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Very Dissatisfied	2	0.4
Somewhat Dissatisfied	12	2.3
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	19	3.7
Somewhat Satisfied	143	27.6
Very Satisfied	342	66.0
Total	518	100.0

<b>How satisfied are you with the air quality in your environment? (4.4)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Very Dissatisfied	5	1.0
Somewhat Dissatisfied	8	1.5
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	33	6.3
Somewhat Satisfied	182	35.0
Very Satisfied	292	56.2
Total	520	100.0

## Governance

**Domain Mean Score: (2013: 3.2/2017: 3.0)**

<b>Corruption is widespread throughout government in my community. (3.4)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strongly Agree	43	8.5
Agree	73	14.4
Neither Agree nor Disagree	129	25.4
Disagree	179	35.3
Strongly Disagree	83	16.4
Total	507	100.0

<b>Public officials in my community pay attention to what people think. (3.5)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strongly Disagree	32	6.3
Disagree	56	11.0
Neither Agree nor Disagree	114	22.5
Agree	229	45.2
Strongly Agree	76	15.0
Total	507	100.0

<b>How much confidence do you have in your Local government? (3.1)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
No confidence	33	6.5
Not very much confidence	72	14.2
A fair amount of confidence	272	53.5
Quite a lot of confidence	100	19.7
A great deal of confidence	31	6.1
Total	508	100.0

<b>How much confidence do you have in your National government? (2.0)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
No confidence	173	33.9
Not very much confidence	203	39.7
A fair amount of confidence	108	21.1
Quite a lot of confidence	13	2.5
A great deal of confidence	14	2.7
Total	511	100.0

## Material Wellbeing

**Domain Mean Score: (2013: 3.8/2017: 3.5)**

<b>In general, how much stress do you feel about your personal finances? (3.2)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Overwhelming stress	52	10.0
High stress	67	12.9
Moderate stress	196	37.7
Low stress	141	27.1
No stress at all	64	12.3
Total	520	100.0

<b>How often do you find yourself just getting by financially or living paycheck to paycheck? (3.2)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
All of the time	103	20.0
Most of the time	73	14.2
Sometimes	106	20.6
Rarely	104	20.2
Never	128	24.9
Total	514	100.0

<b>In the last 12 months, how often have you eaten less because there wasn't enough money for food? (4.4)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
About once a month	54	10.4
About once every three months	24	4.6
About once every six months	11	2.1
About once in the last year	20	3.9
Never	408	78.9
Total	517	100.0

<b>I have enough money to buy the things that I want. (3.5)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strongly Disagree	40	7.8
Disagree	87	17.0
Neither Agree nor Disagree	89	17.4
Agree	194	37.9
Strongly Agree	102	19.9
Total	512	100.0

## Work Life

**Domain Mean Score: (2013: 3.9/2017: 3.9)**

<b>How satisfied are you with your current work life? (4.1)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Very Dissatisfied	11	2.9
Somewhat Dissatisfied	27	7.0
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	42	11.0
Somewhat Satisfied	144	37.6
Very Satisfied	159	41.5
Total	383	100.0

<b>How often do you find your current work life interesting? (4.1)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Very rarely or never	16	4.2
Rarely	18	4.7
Sometimes	71	18.5
Often	100	26.1
Very often or always	178	46.5
Total	383	100

<b>My work conditions allow me to be as productive as I can be. (4.1)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strongly Disagree	3	0.8
Disagree	37	9.7
Neither Agree nor Disagree	40	10.4
Agree	162	42.3
Strongly Agree	141	36.8
Total	383	100.0

<b>Considering my work efforts and achievements, I get paid appropriately. (3.3)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strongly Disagree	37	9.7
Disagree	85	22.3
Neither Agree nor Disagree	39	10.2
Agree	156	40.9
Strongly Agree	64	16.8
Total	381	100.0

<b>I am allowed to decide how to get my work done. (4.1)</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Strongly Disagree	12	3.1
Disagree	23	6.0
Neither Agree nor Disagree	36	9.4
Agree	168	43.9
Strongly Agree	144	37.6
Total	383	100.0