Prolific Participant Wellbeing Report

→ 2025

Summary

As a human data provider, our pool of participants is our greatest asset. Every person in Prolific's participant pool is helping us achieve our mission: to build a better world with better data.

To get the best data quality from participants, we need to look after them. That's why we prioritize their wellbeing. We treat them with respect, fairness, and transparency, which fosters trust and loyalty in our community.

Our commitment to participant welfare relies on our strong ethical foundations:

1. **A human-centric approach:** Every participant in our pool is a real person. They give their time, knowledge, and expertise to world-changing research - and we're proud to facilitate them.

2. **Routine wellbeing monitoring:** We regularly check participant wellbeing. It's crucial to help us understand how taking part in research affects them. It also enables us to spot areas where we can improve. We advocate for this to become a standard in our industry.

3. **An ethical approach across the whole research journey:** Wellbeing is about the entire participant experience. We uphold high ethical standards for our participants, including:

   - **Fair compensation:** We make sure participants get fair pay for their contributions.

   - **Tackling issues with task design:** We track technical errors to improve efficiency and keep frustration to a minimum.

   - **Clear expectations:** We enable data collectors to give clear guidelines and content warnings for tasks. This is critical for tasks that involve sensitive topics.

   - **Access to unbiased mediation:** We allow conflicts to be resolved impartially.

   - **Extra support:** We explore ways to support participants who are exposed to certain research material.

By adhering to these principles, we create a more ethical and humane environment for our participants. This will help to shape a healthier and more sustainable industry.

Introduction

Participants are at the heart of everything we do at Prolific. Our carefully recruited and vetted pool is our main asset as a business.

As we grow, we're committed to making sure they are treated fairly. This enables them to stay engaged and motivated - and deliver the highest-quality data. So, we're committed to understanding how studies on Prolific affect our participants and how we can better support them.

Many different types of research take place on the Prolific platform. This ranges from AI training and evaluation tasks to surveys and experiments for academic research.

A small number of these studies may include sensitive or disturbing content. We also know that in some niches, such as AI safety, data collectors don't always have full control over stimuli generation. In light of this, protecting participant wellbeing is our top priority.

That's why we use a widely recognized metric to evaluate the wellbeing of our pool. Measures like this demonstrate our dedication to ethical research - and putting human welfare first.

Why is this important?

1. **It upholds ethical standards.** This ensures participants are treated with the dignity and respect they deserve. It also shows a commitment to due care in research practices.

2. **It enables participants to get the support they need.** This fosters a healthy and supportive environment for their engagement.

3. **It sets industry precedents.** By prioritizing the wellbeing of participants and raising the bar for ethical research, we aim to set industry standards for others to follow.

4. **A healthy environment means more engaged participants.** This results in faster responses and higher-quality data.

Measuring participant wellbeing

WEMWBS

The <u>Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale</u> (WEMWBS) is a way to measure people's wellbeing. Researchers from the universities of Warwick and Edinburgh developed the scale in 2006.

It's based on a model of mental wellbeing that isn't just about the absence of mental illness, but also feeling good and functioning well. The WEMWBS (14-scale) and SWEMWS (7-scale) have been widely validated in different populations and languages.

People taking part in studies that use this scale have found it clear, unambiguous, and easy to complete.

Research on WEMWBS has shown that it:

- Is suitable for those aged 13 years and above.

- Is valid in several other languages.

A short 7-item version, the Short Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS), better meets the scaling properties of <u>the Rasch model</u>.

As a short and psychometrically robust scale, with little or nothing in the way of ceiling or floor effects in population samples, both WEMWBS and SWEMWBS are suitable for monitoring mental wellbeing at a population level.

WARWICK
MEDICAL SCHOOL

Prolific's WEMWBS score

We wanted to capture the best quality data while streamlining the user experience for our participants. So, we decided to use SWEMWBS.

This is a simplified version of the larger scale. The raw score of the SWEMWBS is calculated based on the developers' instructions. Scores range from 7 to 35, with higher scores indicating higher positive mental wellbeing.

The idea of wellbeing is fairly new, so it's hard to fully interpret what the scores mean for each individual. However, it gives a great indication of the mental state of the observed population as a whole.

The mean SWEMWBS score of the first Prolific data collection was 23.13. This is comparable to the mean SWEMWBS scores of England's population (Mean SWEMWBS scores for men and women were 23.7 and 23.6, data from Health Survey for England 2010-2013).

This suggests that the research we facilitate on our platform currently has a neutral effect on participants' mental wellbeing.

SWEMWBS transformed score for Prolific power users Dec 2023

Mean = 23.13
Std. Dev. = 4.68
N = 503

SWEMWBS transformed score health survey for England 2011

Mean = 23.61
Std. Dev. = 3.903
N = 7,196
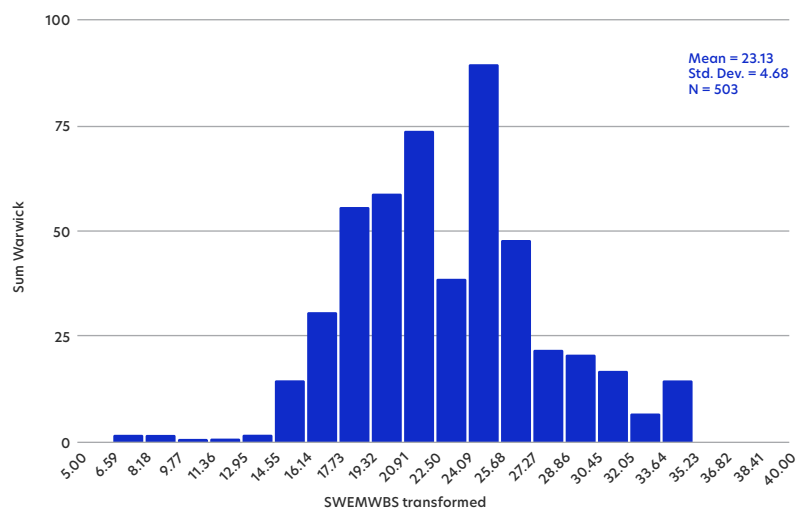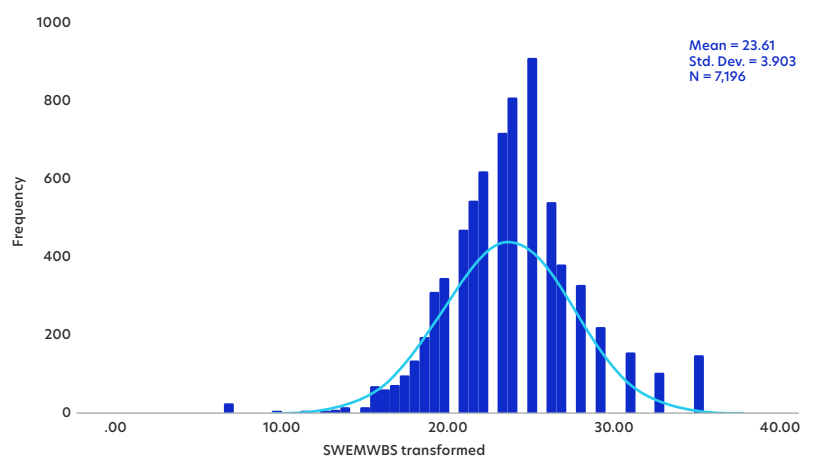
As the types of research being run on Prolific continue to broaden, this initial baseline score is crucial. It acts as a reference point that allows us to detect and monitor changes in the mental wellbeing of our pool.

For example, in the past two years, we've seen many more tasks related to generative AI model and application development. Our mid-year 2025 scores show a similar outcome to our 2023 baseline, suggesting that these new tasks have a similarly neutral effect on participant wellbeing.

Going forward, we will be able to compare more specific datasets to this baseline, too. For example, measuring the wellbeing of only those who have taken part in studies that cover sensitive or disturbing topics.

SWEMWBS transformed score for Prolific power users Aug 2025
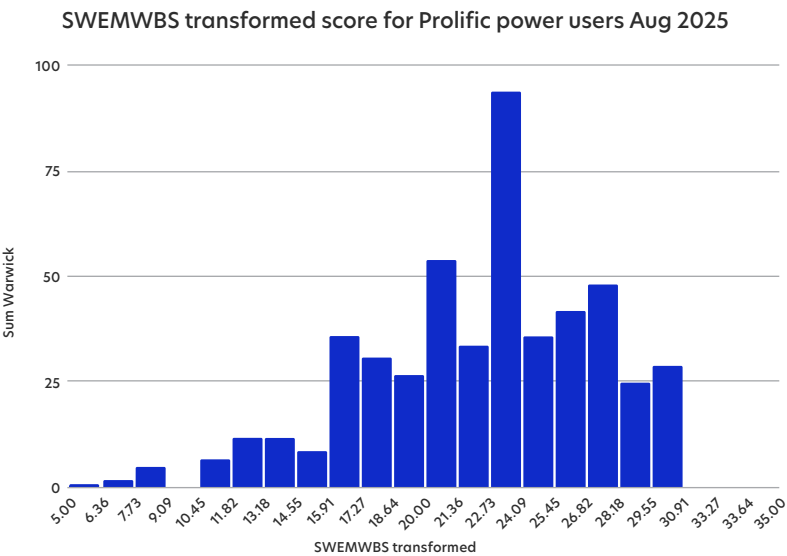
Additional variables

As well as the seven items on the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Scale, we also included some of our own questions in our survey. We wanted to learn more about the subjective opinions of our participants. This gave respondents the chance to go into more detail about their experience of Prolific, in relation to their wellbeing.

These questions asked about the effect Prolific might have on individual wellbeing. They also included standard product-market fit scoring. The answers confirmed that taking part in studies on Prolific generally has a neutral to positive effect on our participants. There was no indication of any alarming or negative effects.

> "Prolific has really helped me get through some dark days. It has made me realize I have more skills and strengths than I was aware of."

> "Prolific helps me to feel useful, like I am making a difference. I enjoy the variety of studies and the professionalism of the platform and the researchers. I also appreciate that it is a way to earn some extra money."

> "I really do enjoy doing studies and Prolific is the only platform I don't feel like my time is being stolen from me."

We're also tracking the uptake and awareness of features that help ensure our participants are treated ethically. Through continuous monitoring, we can spot areas where we can improve. We can also identify potential issues for our teams to proactively address.

Amongst other UX metrics, in this specific context, we monitor:

- Technical errors of studies run on Prolific.
- Feedback provided by participants on studies (both qualitative and quantitative).
- Uptake of the 'blocking researchers' feature.
- Hourly payment rate across all studies and per study type.
- Mediation resolution time between data collectors and participants.

Sample characteristics

To get the baseline score, we chose participants from our pool based on select criteria.

These were participants who:

- Spent an average of 45 minutes a day on Prolific in the previous 3 months.
- Spent a minimum of 1350 minutes spent on Prolific in the previous 3 months.
- Reside in the United States or the United Kingdom.

We focused on this demographic as these users spend the most time, most regularly participating in studies on Prolific. Their state of wellbeing is a good indicator of how research impacts the mental health of all participants on our platform.

In the first data collection, we gathered data from US and UK based participants as ~80% of submissions are from these countries.

Here's a further breakdown of the sample:

Sample size	503	
Male, Female breakdown	277 - M	226 - F
Mean age	42	
Country breakdown	238 - US	265 - UK

The SWEMWBS was distributed on Prolific and completed by the participants.

Our commitment

In our journey ahead, we must continue to ensure participants are treated ethically and fairly. As a platform, we play a unique role in bringing data collectors and participants together. We must uphold the highest standards in this regard.

Confirmed actions include:

- **Regular and consistent data collection:** We aim to collect data every six months. However, we can increase this if we see a surge in studies focusing on specific topics. This will allow us to stay ahead of trends and provide the most up-to-date information possible.

- **Explicit opt-in for sensitive content:** Studies that ask participants to discuss sensitive topics, or tasks that might expose them to explicit, disturbing, or NSFW content, should always include content warnings. This allows participants to make an informed decision about opting in or out. It ensures that no one is caught off guard or put in an uncomfortable situation.

- **Dedicated product team:** Our participant-focused product team is committed to creating and improving user journeys. This ensures participants are supported and treated fairly and with respect while using our platform.

- **Partnership on AI (PAI):** The PAI community enables us to stay at the forefront of AI research and implementation, so we can provide the best service possible to our participants.

Our current wellbeing program

Minimum payment: Ensuring fair compensation

One of our foundational principles is to ensure participants get fair compensation. Our minimum payment policy gives participants a clear overview of the compensation they can expect for their time and effort.

We recommend researchers pay participants at least £9.00 / $12.00 per hour. The minimum pay allowed is £6.00 / $8.00 per hour.

Mediation process: Guiding fairness

For disputes or concerns between participants and researchers, we have a mediation process to guide fair resolutions.

Led by our independent mediation team, this process injects a human element into conflict resolution. While data collectors endeavor to be fair in their dealings, our mediation team steps in to ensure fair outcomes if necessary.

Data protection and GDPR compliance: Safeguarding privacy

We prioritize data protection and GDPR compliance to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all user information. This includes details that participants provide to us.

Transparency: Empowering informed choices

Transparency is key to empowering participants to make informed choices. We have explicit opt-in options and content warnings for studies that contain sensitive material.

We also offer guidance to data collectors on how to give clear information to participants, which helps to promote transparency across the research process.

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Innovative eligibility system: Improving participant experience

Our participants' time is important. So, we've put eligibility measures in place to protect it.

Using our participant waitlist, we carefully manage the balance of supply and demand in our participant pool to ensure a consistent flow of available studies. Our screening functionality also guarantees that data collectors only release studies to participants who meet specific criteria. This offers a personalized experience for each participant.

Unlike similar platforms, we prohibit unpaid mid-study screening, ensuring payment for the entire duration of their engagement with Prolific studies. This commitment not only shows our respect for participants' time but also cultivates trust and dependability in our community.

We put these policies and practices in place to not only protect participants, but also uphold high ethical standards. We're committed to creating a fair, transparent, and supportive research environment for all involved.

Further resources:
Participants can access these at any time in our help center.

- Participant Wellness - How we look after participants

- How to run studies with sensitive or disturbing content - Guidance for researchers

- How to navigate studies with sensitive or disturbing content - Guidance and help resources for participants

- Data Privacy and GDPR compliance - Our safeguarding policy for all our users

- Prolific's payment principles

- Mediation process

Appendix

The Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (SWEMWBS)

Below are some statements about feelings and thoughts.

Please tick the box that best describes your experience of each over the last 2 weeks.

Statements	None of the time	Rarely	Some of the time	Often	All of the time
I've been feeling optimistic about the future	1	3	3	4	5
I've been feeling useful	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling relaxed	1	2	3	4	5
I've been dealing with problems well	1	2	3	4	5
I've been thinking clearly	1	2	3	4	5
I've been feeling close to other people	1	2	3	4	5
I've been able to make up my own mind about things	1	2	3	4	5

Figure 0: The Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being scale

Statistics

SWEMWBS transformed

N	Valid	7196
	Missing	3421
Mean		23.6093
Std. Error of Mean		.04601
Median		23.2100
Std. Deviation		3.90264
Skewness		.177
Std. Error of Skewness		.029
Kurtosis		1.451
Std. Error od Kurtosis		.058
Minimum		7.00
Maximum		35.00
Percentiles	23	21.5400
	50	23.2100
	75	26.0200

Figure 1: SWEMWBS Population Norms in Health Survey for England data 2011

SWEMWBS transformed score health survey for England 2011
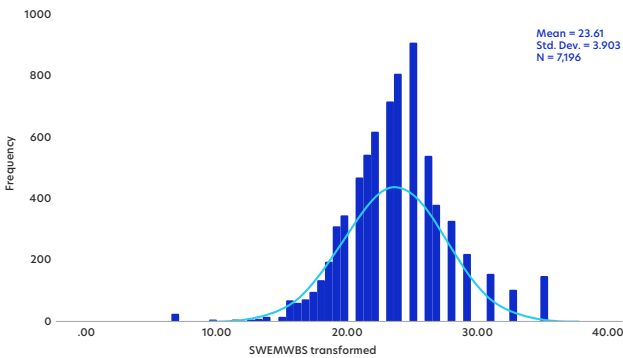
Mean = 23.61
Std. Dev. = 3.903
N = 7,196

Figure 2: SWEMWBS Population Norms in Health Survey for England data 2011

Target Population Characteristics (i.e. who the study was open to)	Prolific Power Users. Participants who spent an average of 45 minutes a day on Prolific in the previous 3 months and a minimum of 1350 minutes spent on Prolific in the previous 3 months and reside in the United States or United Kingdom.	
Sample Size	503	
Male, Female breakdown	277 M	226 F
Mean Age	42	
Country Breakdown	238 United States	265 United Kingdom

Figure 3: Target population for SWEMWBS Transformed Score for Prolific power users Dec 2023

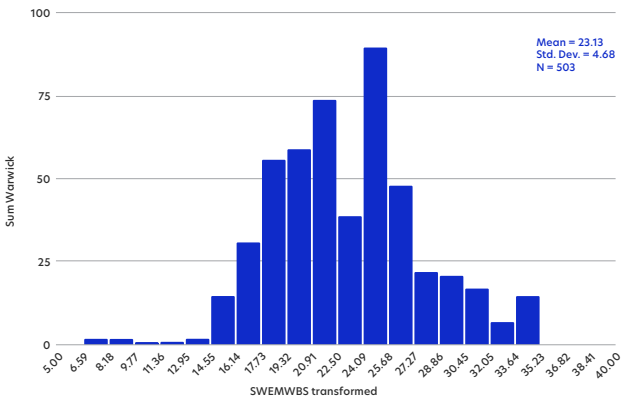SWEMWBS transformed score for Prolific power users Dec 2023

Mean = 23.13
Std. Dev. = 4.68
N = 503

Figure 4: SWEMWBS Transformed Score for Prolific power users Dec 2023

	N		503
	Mean WEMWBS score (i.e. Mean transformed SWEMWBS)		23.13
	Stand. Deviation WEMWBS		4.68
	Median		23.21
	Max Possible		35.00
Percentiles		25	19.98
		50	23.21
		70	26.02

Figure 5: SWEMWBS Transformed Score for Prolific power users Dec 2023

Appendix

SWEMWBS transformed score for Prolific power users Aug 2025
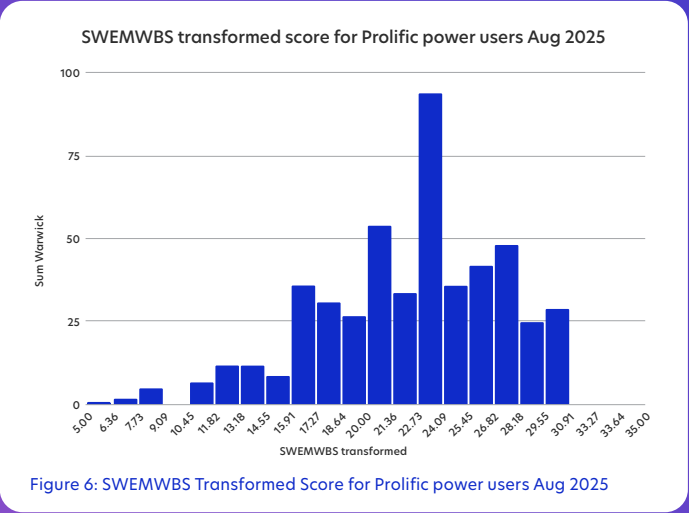
Figure 6: SWEMWBS Transformed Score for Prolific power users Aug 2025

N	501
Mean WEMWBS score (i.e. Mean transformed SWEMWBS)	22.3
Stand. Deviation WEMWBS	4.96
Median	23
Max Possible	35
25th Percentile	19
50th Percentile	23
75th Percentile	26

Figure 7: SWEMWBS Transformed Score for Prolific power users Aug 2025

Target Population Characteristics (i.e. who the study was open to)	Prolific Power Users. Participants who spent an average of 45 minutes a day on Prolific in the previous 3 months and a minimum of 1350 minutes spent on Prolific in the previous 3 months and reside in the United States or United Kingdom.	
Sample Size	501	
Male, Female breakdown	301 M	200 F
Mean Age	46	
Country Breakdown	432 United States	69 United Kingdom

Figure 8: Target population for SWEMWBS Transformed Score for Prolific power users Aug 2025