



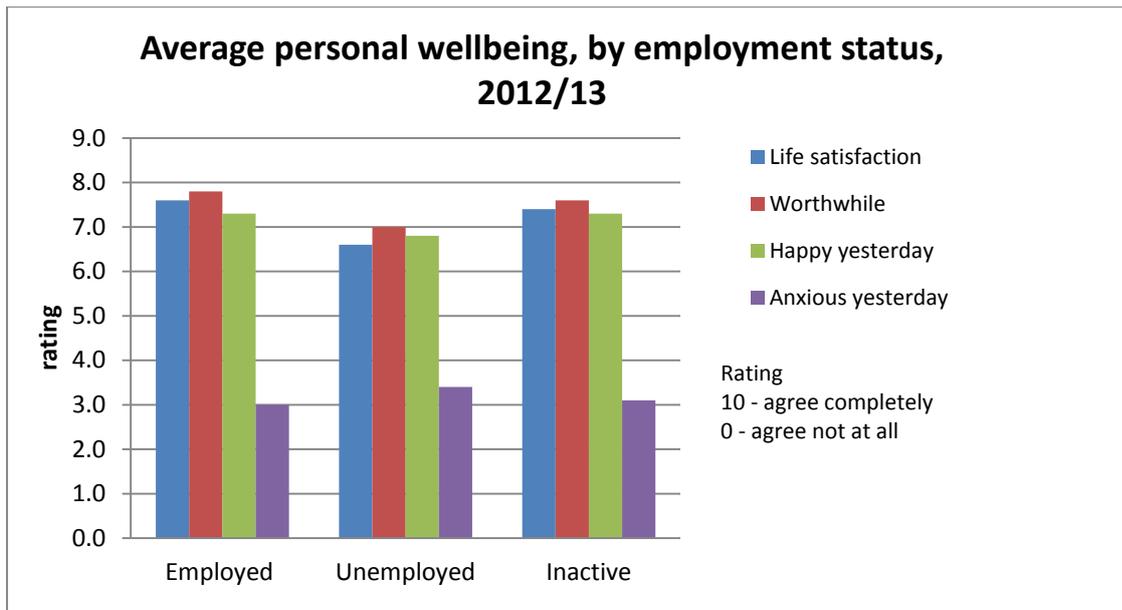
Department
of Health

WORKING WELL

- *Those in unemployment tend to have lower levels of wellbeing than those in employment.*
- *Those with greater job security tend to have higher levels of wellbeing.*
- *Job quality is also important for wellbeing; jobs which cause high levels of stress can have adverse effects on wellbeing.*
- *Higher income is associated with higher levels of wellbeing.*
- *There is evidence that unemployment of a parent may cause a child to have reduced levels of wellbeing in the longer term.*
- *People claiming Job Seekers' Allowance (JSA) have poorer mental health than the general population*

1. **Work and Wellbeing**

- Work is a key determinant of people's wellbeing and the relationship between the two is complex. It appears to demonstrate two-way causality with people's employment status influencing their wellbeing and people's wellbeing influencing their employment status. Individuals who have low levels of subjective wellbeing may be more likely to become unemployed¹.
- Work is not necessarily always good for wellbeing. For example, whilst employment can improve self-esteem, it can also cause stress². However, on balance, **employment is overwhelmingly positive for wellbeing.**
- **Unemployed people self-report lower levels of feeling worthwhile, being satisfied with life, and happiness than those in employment. Unemployed people also have higher levels of anxiety.** The average rating for life satisfaction is 6.6 out of 10 for unemployed people compared with 7.6 out of 10 for those in employment³.
- Eudemonic wellbeing (optimal self-efficacy and psychological functioning) has been found to be lower for those who were unemployed but the effects for hedonic wellbeing (happiness and life satisfaction) were not as strong⁴.
- Unemployment can exacerbate other negative circumstances for an individual and tends to cluster with such disadvantages in both the long and short term⁵.



Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Population Survey (2012/13)

2. Job Security

- **There is a body of evidence to show that an association exists between job security and mental health. Those with less secure jobs have been found to have worse mental health.** Low end service sector workers have shown this relationship to be especially true⁶. There is evidence to suggest this is not just due to the financial insecurity this brings.
- For women, being in insecure employment is not as strongly associated with poor mental health as it is for men. This is not to say that women in insecure employment don't have worse mental health⁶.
- After controlling for other factors **people classified as permanently sick appear to be around three times as likely to report low levels of subjective wellbeing**, subjective wellbeing being based on the GHQ-12 measure⁶.
- Controlling for other factors the **unemployed and insecurely employed both appear to be around 70cent more likely to have low levels of subjective wellbeing⁶**. For people in employment, including the self-employed, the highest levels of wellbeing have been observed⁷.
- **Those who are economically inactive and are not registered unemployed or permanently sick are around 20% more likely to have low levels of subjective wellbeing⁶**.
- Other sources have also found that long term sick and disabled people reported lower levels of wellbeing. Those who were economically inactive but not retired have been found to have lower levels of subjective wellbeing than the employed and those who were unemployed had even

lower levels of subjective wellbeing⁷. Additionally, people in part time work have been found to have lower levels of wellbeing⁸.

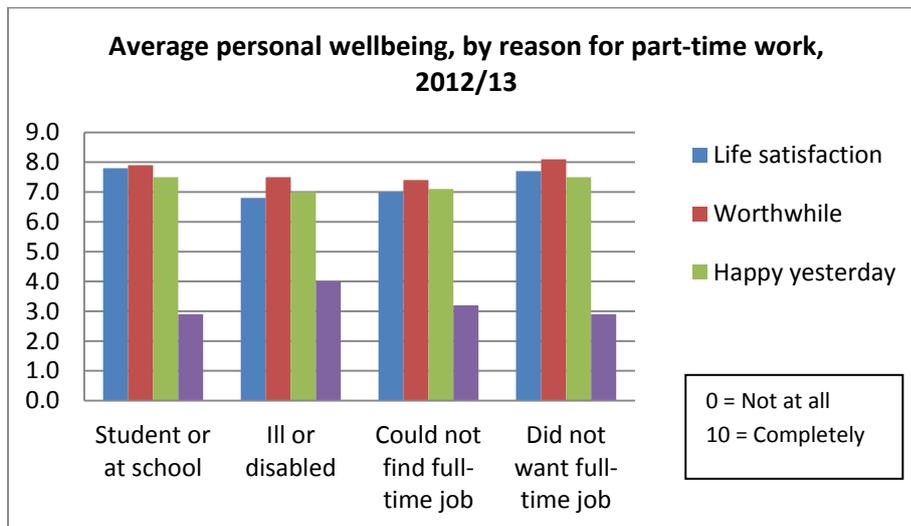


Figure 1: Wellbeing and reason for part-time work (Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Population Survey (2012/13))

- Figure 1 suggests those who work part time through circumstances which might be expected to be less forced such as being a student or “not wanting a full time job” have higher levels of wellbeing than those such as the ill, disabled and those who cannot find work³.
- Those working full-time across age-groups have reported near average levels of wellbeing, however those who are employed and 65 and over have been found to have particularly high levels of wellbeing. It is not clear in this case which way causality is running.^{viii} The positive relationship between employment and subjective wellbeing has been shown to hold even when age and region were controlled for⁷.
- Among the self-employed, the highest levels of wellbeing are found among young self-employed people⁸.
- People who are satisfied with their job, income and amount of leisure time have been found to report higher levels of wellbeing. It is possible, though, that this relationship emerges due to people who report high levels of wellbeing having more positive attitudes in general⁸.
- Unemployment rates also affect well-being, possibly due to the fear of personal unemployment¹.
- One study found very large negative regional spill over effects of unemployment that reduce the subjective wellbeing of those who are still employed but who live in regions with higher general unemployment rates^{9,10}.

3. Job Quality and Job Satisfaction

- The nature of employment is important. Work can cause stress as well as be beneficial to wellbeing. **Job quality has been found to be an important factor in whether employment aids wellbeing.** A number of factors are identified as influencing job quality. These include
 - Control
 - Interest and variety
 - Social support
 - Opportunities for advancement
 - Work intensity²

Other sources have also noted the importance of autonomy⁷.

- The European Social Survey provides data for the UK on a number of these factors². From 2004 to 2010, women's self-assessment of the amount of control they have over their job has increased from 6.9 to 7.2 out of 10.
- **Lack of control and influence can be a risk factor for stress¹¹.** Job control can be particularly important; lack of job control is correlated with higher levels of sickness absence, mental ill health and heart disease¹², as well as symptoms of stress.
- There has been a significant fall in the number of men who feel their job had "a lot of variety" from 72% to 64% from 2004 to 2010. The level of social support over the same period did not show much change overall².
- People's perceptions around their opportunities for advancement show a difference between men and women. From 2004 to 2010 the proportion of men who felt their "opportunities for advancement were good" increased from 40% to 47%. However, the proportion of women who felt their "opportunities for advancement were good" fell from 48% to 42%².
- The percentage of people who agreed their job requires them to work very hard increased from 2004 to 2010 from 78% to 88%, however the percentage agreeing they never seem to have enough time to get everything done did not change. This could reflect increased job insecurity².
- Difficult and hazardous working conditions can lower quality of life after retirement. This can operate through associated poor physical and mental health. It has been suggested that improving working conditions can lower premature retirement rates and improve people's long term wellbeing¹³.
- Increases in certain aspects of job satisfaction may be due to lower expectations during recession.

4. Wellbeing and Income

- **Subjective wellbeing is associated with equivalised household income⁷.** There is evidence income might be most important to wellbeing for those with low income⁷.

- **Higher income has been related to higher levels of wellbeing**^{14, 15}. However, in terms of income it has been found that relative income is the key factor, as although wealthier individuals within a society are happier than poorer individuals, average levels of subjective wellbeing remain constant as all members become wealthier^{1, 15}.
- It is also important to consider wealth alongside income; **factors such as home ownership, shares and savings can influence the impact of changes in income**. Those who experience an increase in income may be paying off debts, whereas those who have a reduction in income may have a 'safety-net' of assets and savings¹⁶.

5. Parent's Employment Status

- **There is evidence that unemployment of a parent may cause a child to have lower levels of wellbeing in the longer term**. If a child's father is unemployed, even if the father is reemployed, in future years this may adversely affect a child's happiness and self-esteem¹⁷.
- It is argued the reason parental unemployment does not have a strong effect on child wellbeing in the short term could be due to an increased parent-child interaction in the short term but a diminished role model effect for the father, with the role model effect becoming more dominant only as the child gets older¹⁷.
- **Maternal unemployment is found to have an adverse effect on children's self-esteem but not their happiness**¹⁷.

6. Welfare

- International comparisons demonstrate that **interactions with the welfare system that result in stigma or humiliation reduce resilience for low income households**. Resilience can be defined as "doing better than expected in the face of adversity". It is argued that this is possibly why poverty is more harmful to health in the UK than Sweden for instance¹⁸. Personalised support and being shown respect through interactions with jobseekers' services has been shown to be important to jobseekers¹⁹.
- **People claiming Job Seekers' Allowance (JSA) have poorer mental health than the general population**¹⁹.
- After standardising the JSA claimants who started a JSA claim for the first quarter of 2011, around 15% were found to have severe neurotic symptoms. This is just under twice as high a prevalence as is found in the general population¹⁹.
- Around a fifth of these JSA claimants had a common mental disorder (CMD) such as anxiety or depression. In the following months the mental health of female claimants improved but the same was not true for male claimants¹⁹.

- People with a CMD were less likely to be satisfied with job centre resources. Some conditions make it particularly difficult to engage with jobseekers' services, for instance panic attacks, paranoia and agoraphobia¹⁹.
- **Two-thirds of JSA claimants felt employment would improve health¹⁹.**
- Employment outcomes can be worse for those with CMDs as these conditions lower levels of optimism and self-belief. However, **starting employment can aid recovery.**

Further information on policy interventions to improve wellbeing through employment can be found in the "What Works" factsheet from "A Compendium of Factsheets: Wellbeing Across the Lifecourse"

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