



Understanding
Society



Economic
and Social
Research Council



University of Essex



INSIGHTS

2020-21

Findings from the UK Household
Longitudinal Study

Understanding Society

10 WAVES
OF DATA



ABOUT THE STUDY

Understanding Society is the largest longitudinal study of its kind and provides crucial information for researchers and policymakers about the causes and consequences of change in people's lives.

Our participants come from every area of the UK and the Study covers issues from family relationships, education and employment to health, social attitudes and behaviour.

ALL AGES

The Study allows us to understand the experiences of the whole population over time.

WHOLE HOUSEHOLD

Relations between generations, couples and siblings can be explored.

CONTINUOUS DATA COLLECTION

Short- and long-term changes in people's lives can be investigated.

NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL

All four countries of the UK are included. Researchers can compare the experiences of people in different places and policy contexts.

ETHNIC MINORITY SAMPLES

The experiences of specific ethnic minority groups can be investigated.

MULTI-TOPIC

Covering social, economic and behavioural factors makes the data relevant to a range of policymakers and researchers.

DATA LINKAGE

Study data can be linked to administrative records from other sources, building a richer picture.

WORLD-LEADING METHODOLOGY

High-quality data design supported by innovative experimentation, development and testing.


BIOMARKERS AND GENETIC DATA

Data collected by nurses allow researchers to understand the relationship between social and economic circumstances and health.

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or find out more at understandingsociety.ac.uk/research/policy

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COMPLEXITY AND CHANGE

MICHAELA BENZEVAL | DIRECTOR, UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY

This year, Insights is a little different. It still takes a look at what our rich, longitudinal data can tell us about life in the UK – but the release of our Wave 10 data in November 2020 gave us a chance to look back at the breadth of research that *Understanding Society* has helped generate as well as celebrating innovative research from the past year.

The other crucial difference is that 2020 was not what anyone would call a 'normal' year. The Covid-19 pandemic is the biggest thing to happen in most of our lifetimes – certainly for anyone born after 1945 – and it's only natural that a study called *Understanding Society* should respond and explore the effects on people. In the past year, thanks to funding from the Economic and Social Research Council and The Health Foundation, we've delivered a regular coronavirus survey and adapted our annual interviews to include questions on the impact of the pandemic.

Throughout the past year, our participants have been hugely supportive. Thousands of them have contributed to our regular Covid-19 survey and embraced the move from face-to-face interviews to an online or telephone survey. In a challenging and unsettling year, we're very grateful that participants continue to share their lives with us.

Some of the issues covered in this edition of Insights are relevant to the pandemic. Who is self-employed? How does our wellbeing respond to a recession? What are the effects of Universal Credit on mental health?

And some are derived directly from our Covid-19 Survey: what has happened to mental health this year? What has happened to people's incomes?

More importantly, this edition, not only gives a snapshot of where we are now, but also stands as a testament to the strength and value of the Study. We hope, along with everybody else, that things will be back to 'normal' soon, but we're confident that, whatever the future holds, *Understanding Society* will be ready to shine a light on it.

10 YEARS OF DATA

Understanding Society has been collecting data from its participants for 10 years. This year's *Insights*, then, is a chance not only to celebrate the most recent findings, but also to look back at significant papers from the last several years.

This year's publication aims to reflect on the Study's contribution to social and economic research and its future potential. *Understanding Society* set out to have the main benefits of existing panel studies – full household coverage of a nationally representative sample, for example – and to extend the research potential of panel studies.

Its original features include collecting biomarkers and measures of cognitive functioning, to create a truly biosocial survey. The Study also has core content, with other modules at different frequencies to increase the range of topics it can cover. Boost samples allow for research on race, ethnicity and migration, and children are surveyed from the age of 10. The size of the Study and its coverage makes analysis at different geographical scales possible – and the Innovation Panel gives researchers a chance to test questions, embedding methodological innovation in the Study's design.

The learning from that Innovation Panel helped to inform the Covid-19 Survey which *Understanding Society* began in April 2020, and sparked research on subjects such as the economic effects, health and caring, home schooling, family relationships and ethnic differences in the impact of the disease.

Launching an online study into a pandemic at short notice is one example of what *Understanding Society* is capable of – and the next 10 years present an opportunity to expand the possibilities of what a household survey is and can do. One issue which affects all longitudinal studies is attrition on sample sizes and the need to maintain representativeness. The Study carries out extensive work on the best routes to sample maintenance, and plans refreshment samples and repeat immigrant and ethnic minority boost samples. There are also plans to repeat the collection of biomarkers, to allow for longitudinal analysis of these measures of health, and of epigenetic processes.

Another aim is to respond to specific events, such as a birth, a move, or a life transition, such as retirement. Event-triggered modules will enhance understanding of key moments in people's lives, capturing sample members' responses quickly, and keeping them engaged.

User-led innovation allows for changes such as a revised suite of employment questions to better capture the 'gig economy'. Future plans also involve looking for ways to collect data from 'significant others' outside the household – and encouraging users to share code, and enable replication.

These developments will support new directions in research. Direct measures of health will address concerns about measurement error or cultural nuance in reporting. There will be increased potential to apply geo-spatial modelling, and to use contextual

and network data. Collaborations with studies in other countries will continue to offer opportunities for cross-national comparisons. Future measures of national and local elections, and engaging with less predictable events, such as the current pandemic, will allow researchers to investigate causation in social and political matters.

Ultimately, *Understanding Society* has offered, and continues to offer, huge possibilities for socio-economic analysis, particularly when it comes to race, ethnicity and migration, and socio-spatial and biosocial research. With ten waves of data now available, the Study can be considered to have reached maturity – and to be a source whose potential is still only beginning to emerge.

The possibilities *Understanding Society* offers will grow as more researchers engage with it, not only by using the readily accessible data, but also by engaging with opportunities to shape content, to experiment, to undertake training – and to share findings.

Adapted from: Lucinda Platt, Gundi Knies, Renee Luthra, Alita Nandi, Michaela Benzeval, *Understanding Society* at 10 Years, *European Sociological Review*, September 2020. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcaa031>

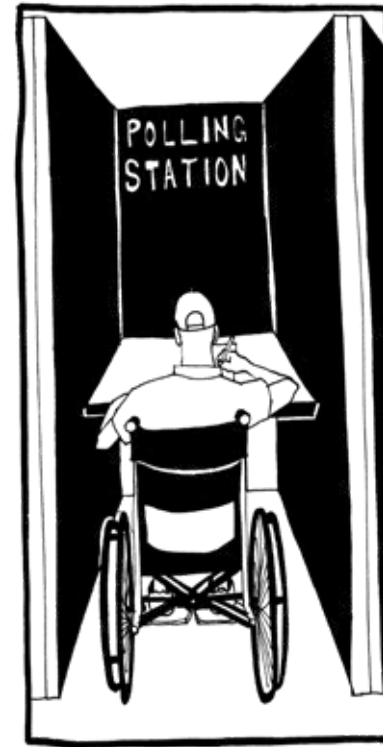
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT



Can youth volunteering reduce age inequalities in turnout?



Do benefit conditions affect people's participation in democracy?



Volunteering increases income – but only for the middle and upper classes.



Can youth volunteering reduce age inequalities in turnout?

STUART FOX | BRUNEL UNIVERSITY

One of the greatest challenges facing modern democracies is the fact that successive generations of young citizens are less likely to vote and engage with politics than their parents and grandparents were at the same age. In the 1970 general election, for example (the first after the voting age was lowered to 18), 65% of 18–24-year olds voted, compared with an overall turnout of 72%. In 2017, however, only 52% did so, while the overall turnout was 68%.

Another concern is that the decline in youth voting is concentrated among those from poorer backgrounds. In 2017, 68% of graduates under 35 voted, compared with 42% of non-graduates. This is a problem not only because it means today's young people – especially those from poorer backgrounds – are under-represented in policy-making, but also because voting is habitual. People who get into the habit of voting during young adulthood are likely to keep voting for the rest of their lives, while those who get into a habit of not voting are likely to be lifelong abstainers. This could lead to politicians and democratic institutions being increasingly influenced and dominated by older, middle-class and educated citizens, and may even lead to questions about their legitimacy to govern.

As a result, policymakers have started to look at ways to help more young people (particularly from poorer areas) to vote in their first elections, such as lowering the voting age to 16 or reforming the citizenship curriculum in schools. An *Understanding Society* research project, *Social Action as a Route to the Ballot Box*, set out to see whether promoting youth volunteering, such as the National Citizen's Service, could help.

Previous research into youth volunteering suggests that it does increase political and civic engagement, but that research has relied on outdated definitions of volunteering, such as being a Scout or Guide, when young people are increasingly volunteering through more informal schemes or networks. Previous research also hasn't taken into account whether young people were interested in politics in childhood, or raised by politically and civically active parents – so it's impossible to tell whether someone who volunteered in school, for example, became more likely to vote as a result, or would have voted anyway.

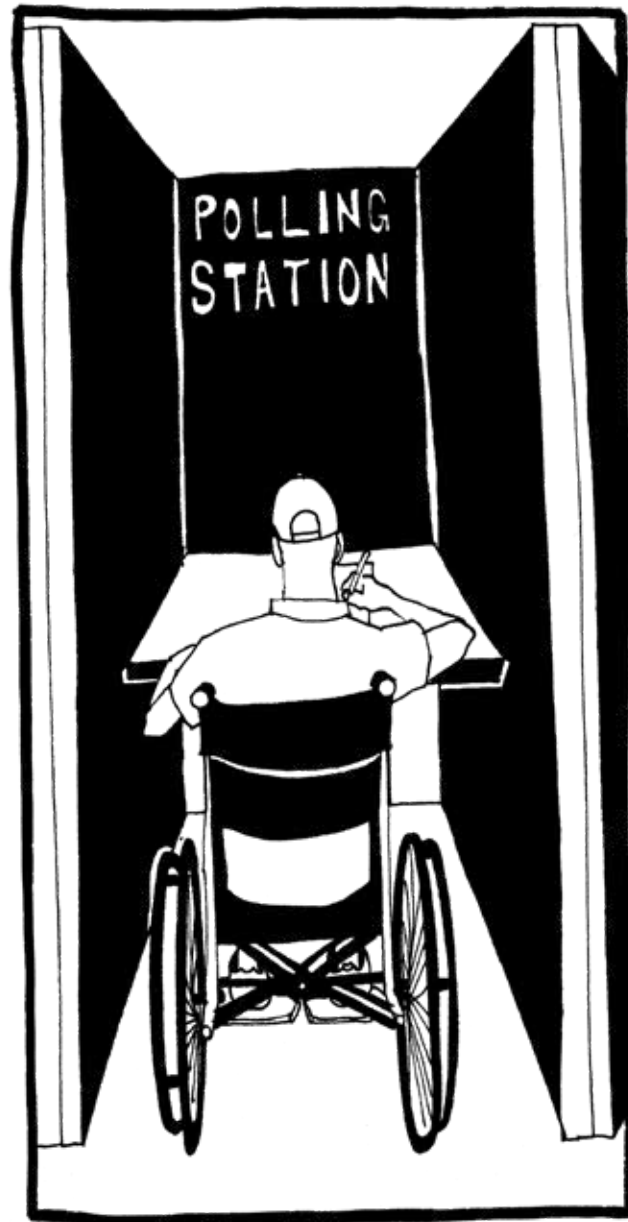
However, *Understanding Society* has a broad measure of volunteering, asking whether respondents volunteered in any way over the previous year. This allows researchers to track respondents' political engagement over time, and to see how it changes after they volunteer. The data can also match respondents to the political characteristics of their parents, allowing researchers to account for the effect of being raised in a politically engaged household.

This project looked at young people between 15 and 22, none of whom had voted before, over several waves of *Understanding Society* from 2011 to the 2015 general election. All of them, regardless of whether they volunteered, became more interested in politics – but people typically do this as they reach adulthood and become eligible to vote anyway. The question was whether there was a difference between the change in political interest over time for volunteers compared to non-volunteers. In fact, the proportion of both groups interested in politics increased by around 16% between the two surveys. In other words, the gap between them remained the same.

The decline in youth voting is concentrated among those from poorer backgrounds. Politicians and democratic institutions could be increasingly influenced by older, middle-class and educated citizens.

There was also no effect for respondents with a politically engaged parent at home, where the proportion of non-volunteers and volunteers interested in politics grew by less than a point. For those without a politically engaged parent, however, there was a substantial volunteer effect: the proportion of non-volunteers interested in politics grew by 2%, but for volunteers it grew by 10%.

The results show that youth volunteering is an effective means of getting more young people to the ballot box – but only for those from politically disengaged households. For most young volunteers, there is little benefit in terms of political engagement, because they are already engaged and likely to vote.



KEY POINTS

People typically become more interested in politics as they reach adulthood and become eligible to vote.

Youth volunteering is an effective means of getting more young people to the ballot box – but only for those from politically disengaged households.

Most young volunteers are already engaged and likely to vote.

DATA USED:

Understanding Society Waves 2, 4, 6 and 8

CITATION:

Volunteering and its Effects on Social Capital and Wellbeing in the UK, Stuart Fox, Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods, <https://wiserd.ac.uk/publications/volunteering-and-its-effects-social-capital-and-wellbeing-uk-insights-united-kingdom>

Do benefit conditions affect people's participation in democracy?

SARA WATSON | OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

There has been a shift in many developed countries in the last 25 years to make access to benefits conditional. In return for getting Universal Credit, for example, participants are expected to look or 'prepare for' work, and failing to do so can result in sanctions – a reduction in payments for a set period. Does conditionality, though, have political consequences? Does it change people's view of government, and their likelihood of political participation?

Those in favour of conditionality argue that interventions such as these should help to integrate citizens into the political sphere. Those against suggest that conditionality is likely to depress democratic participation by teaching benefit recipients that they are relatively powerless in relation to government.

The majority of existing studies rely on cross-sectional analyses, leaving them open to charges of selection bias, while this research used longitudinal data: all 18 waves of the British Household Panel Survey and the first two of *Understanding Society*.

To avoid skewing the results by comparing people on benefits with people who had never received them, the research looked only at people of working age who had at some point received a state cash benefit. It made a number of different comparisons to investigate the effects of conditionality, and measured the effects of conditionality on voter turnout, membership of civic organisations, taking part in those organisations' activities (e.g. whether a member or not), and political and personal efficacy – that is, belief that government responds to ordinary individuals and that the individual has control over events in their life.

It found that being on conditional benefits compared to not being on benefits decreased the likelihood of someone taking part in elections by 8%. People on conditional benefits were 30% less likely to be a member of a civic organisation or to take part in such organisations' activities. They were 7% less likely to believe that the government responds to ordinary people, and 6% less likely to feel that they had control over their own life.

The research also considered people who got non-conditional (or 'rights-based') benefits compared to those on conditional benefits. Those who didn't face conditions were 2.5% more likely to vote, 3% more likely to be a member of a civic organisation, 10% more likely to take part in civic activities, and also more likely to report a feeling of control over their life. There was no effect on their belief in the government's response to ordinary individuals, however.

When investigating means-tested benefits against those which were contributory or universal (i.e. paid at the same rate to all recipients), the results were mixed – higher on some measures and lower on others.

The research also looked at two groups on different benefits – disabled people receiving Incapacity Benefit and lone parents on Income Support – and how they responded when job search conditions were introduced. Here, the results were markedly different. Disabled people on the 'Pathways to Work' programme showed positive results – including a 42% increase in the likelihood of voting. By contrast, lone parents facing more stringent conditions responded by withdrawing from political and civic life. Voter turnout among those on the 'Lone Parent Obligation' scheme fell by 17%.

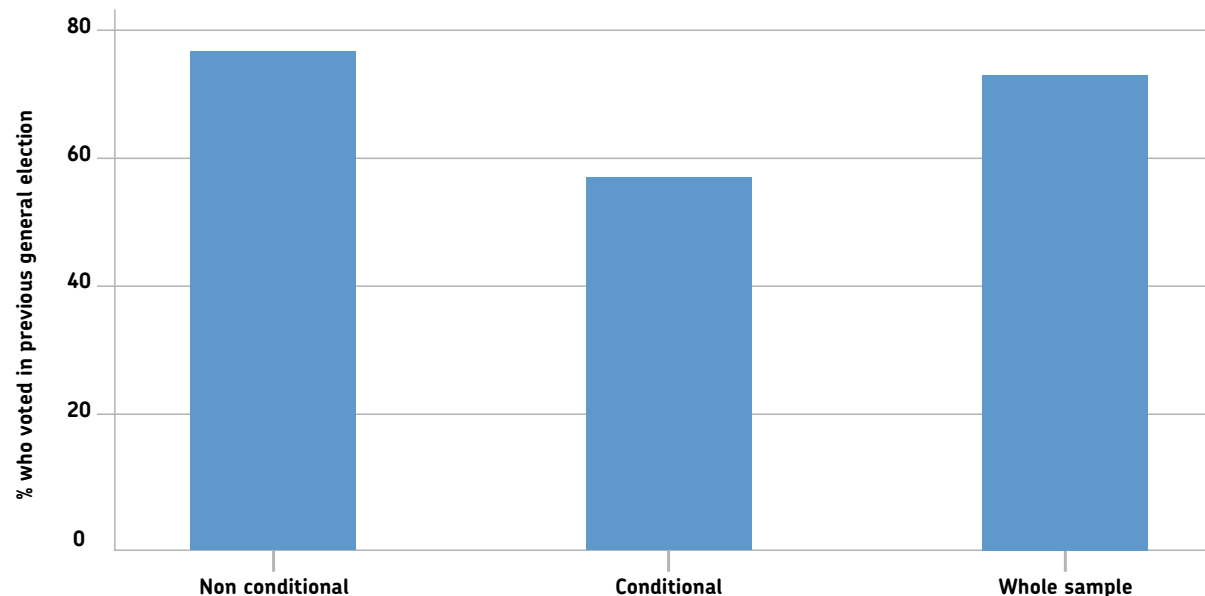
If conditionality substantially lowered democratic action during a period of economic growth, it may have even deeper marginalising effects in periods of austerity.

This may partly be explained by the fact that disabled people are generally viewed by the public with far more sympathy than lone parents and the unemployed – and perhaps more worthy of society's financial support. There is some evidence that Jobcentre Plus caseworkers have internalised this distinction between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' welfare recipients. The author suggests that people receiving benefits may see their experience of that process as typical of government and the political process, and – if it is negative – withdraw from the political process.

Interestingly, the period under investigation (1991–2012) was mostly one of economic growth. The researcher suggests that if conditionality substantially lowered democratic action during an era of prosperity, it may have even deeper marginalising effects in periods of austerity, when finding work becomes harder even for those who don't face barriers to getting into the job market.

Other countries have introduced conditions, but in a different way. In Denmark, for example, although the unemployed are expected to be available for work, there is also job training and publicly provided childcare. In the Netherlands, where there are conditions attached to benefits for disabled people, there are also sanctions for employers which don't provide 'reintegration' measures for disabled ex-employees. An emphasis on shared social responsibility may increase the positive messages that benefit recipients take away from their experiences with the state's bureaucracy.

Voter turnout by welfare conditionality



KEY POINTS

Being on conditional benefits compared to not being on benefits decreased the likelihood of someone taking part in elections by 8%.

People on conditional benefits were 30% less likely to be a member of a civic organisation or to take part in such organisations' activities.

Benefits claimants were 7% less likely to believe that the government responds to ordinary individuals, and 6% less likely to feel that they had control over their own life.

DATA USED:

British Household Panel Survey 1-18
Understanding Society Waves 1-2

CITATION:

Sara Watson, Does Welfare Conditionality Reduce Democratic Participation? *Comparative Political Studies* 48, 5, April 2015
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414014556043>

Volunteering increases income – but only for the middle and upper classes

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As employment has become more precarious and less predictable, employees are increasingly having to market themselves: networking, learning new skills, even taking classes on writing job applications and performing well in interviews. In some cases, people are advised to take unpaid and marginally paid positions such as internships or to perform volunteer work.

This brings social benefits – gratitude from those who benefit, the approval of others, the satisfaction of ‘doing the right thing’ – but do volunteers perform better in the job market, and earn more than non-volunteers?

Volunteering can certainly mean learning new ‘hard’ skills (from software knowledge to carpentry) or soft skills such as communication and teamwork. It might broaden one’s network, and there is evidence that employers look favourably on volunteers. In one experiment, employers advertising jobs were sent two fictitious applications that were identical except for the inclusion of volunteer work on one of the pair. The applicants with volunteer work had a 33% higher probability of being invited for a job interview.

This research looked at the relationship between volunteer work and earned income using seven waves of longitudinal data from the British Household Panel Survey. On average, volunteers earned only slightly more than non-volunteers, although the difference was statistically significant. In this respect, the study confirmed results from a number of previous studies.

But an important new finding was that the economic benefits of volunteering were limited to members of the ‘salaried’ – those in professional, higher technical, administrative and managerial occupations – to the tune of around £2,000 a year.

Neither workers in manual skilled and unskilled occupations that comprise the traditional working class, nor those in occupations at the intermediate level – routine, non-manual and lower technical, manual and supervisory – saw any benefit from volunteer work. Indeed, workers in the lower classes who volunteered earned less money than those who did not.

One reason for this difference is that the ‘capital’ which volunteering creates is only useful for those in occupations where reputation, soft skills, and social contacts have value. In the ‘lower’ occupations, income is largely determined structurally by factors such as unionisation, minimum wages and performance relatedness such as piece-work. Another reason is that middle and upper class volunteers are most likely to choose or be selected for the kind of voluntary work that gives them more value in the labour market, such as serving on a committee or governing board. As with paid jobs, volunteer tasks are distinguished according to their rank, measured by criteria such as power, prestige, autonomy and agreeableness.

Voluntary work is distinguished according to rank ... and social class may determine which kinds of organisation people volunteer for.

In the UK, for example, professionals and managers who volunteer are less likely to engage in tasks such as food preparation and more likely to give presentations, offer advice, serve on a committee, or help with administration. Middle and upper class volunteers also tend to avoid 'hands on' volunteer work such as providing services directly to the needy, focusing instead on making it possible for others to provide these services by organising and supervising fund-raising efforts and soliciting government agencies, businesses, and philanthropic organisations for help. Craft workers and operatives are more likely to do the manual, routine and relatively unskilled work of maintenance, helping out at events, or providing care or transport. Social class may also determine which kinds of organisation people volunteer for.

The researchers concluded that, for people with a university education targeting a career in the 'salariat', voluntary work during and after university probably pays off. For workers in the intermediate and lower classes, although volunteer work can provide all kinds of benefits, higher wages is not one of them.



KEY POINTS

On average, volunteers earn slightly more than non-volunteers – around £2,000 a year.

But the economic benefits of volunteering are limited to members of the 'salariat' – people in professional, higher technical, administrative and managerial roles.

Workers in manual skilled and unskilled jobs saw no benefit from volunteer work – in fact, workers from lower social classes who volunteered earned less than those who did not.

This may be because the 'capital' which volunteering creates is only useful for those in 'higher' occupations – and middle and upper class volunteers are more likely to do the kind of voluntary work that gives them value in the labour market.

DATA USED

British Household Panel Survey 1996-2008

CITATION

John Wilson, Noemi Mantovan, Robert M. Sauer,
The economic benefits of volunteering and social class,
Social Science Research, Volume 85, January 2020,
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2019.102368>

Is social media good for us?

Social media is controversial, and people disagree about whether it has benefits for our wellbeing, or if it harms mental health. Much of the existing evidence relies on small-scale studies or cross-sectional data – but research using *Understanding Society*, looking at the life-course, suggests a nuanced picture.

Although using social media is concentrated among people under 25, it's used by all ages, with particular growth among the middle-aged – and it has benefits for wellbeing. This may be due to social connectedness, and to people's shared values and sense of identity. However, heavy users of social media – more than four hours a day – generally report lower levels of wellbeing. Those heavy users, though, are also predominantly younger and in education, unemployed or economically inactive, and may also be on a low income or have other disadvantages, which may account for heavy use and the associated lower levels of subjective wellbeing.

DATA USED

Understanding Society Waves 3 and 6

CITATION

Daniel Wheatley and Sarah L. Buglass, 2019. Social network engagement and subjective well-being: a life-course perspective, *British Journal of Sociology*, December 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12644>

Which political party's supporters give more to charity?

Research in the US has suggested both that conservatives give more to charity, and that it's liberals who are more generous. The first study to explore this in the UK (and to use longitudinal data) found that men give less than women (in terms of both time and money), and that people on a higher income give a smaller proportion of their income – but not that people on the right give more than those on the left. However, people who support a political party do seem to be more likely to give time and/or money than those who don't support or feel close to any one party.

Feeling closest to the Green Party is associated with donating about 73% more of annual income to charitable causes and volunteering 54% more hours than those who don't feel close to any party – and those figures for Lib Dem supporters are 48% and 35%, respectively; for Conservatives 37% and 22%, and for Labour 32% and 18%.

DATA USED

Understanding Society Waves 2, 4 and 6

CITATION

Sarah Brown and Karl Taylor, 2019. Charitable Behaviour and Political Ideology: Evidence for the UK, Working Papers 2019002, The University of Sheffield, Department of Economics. <https://ideas.repec.org/p/shf/wpaper/2019002.html>



EDUCATION AND TRAINING

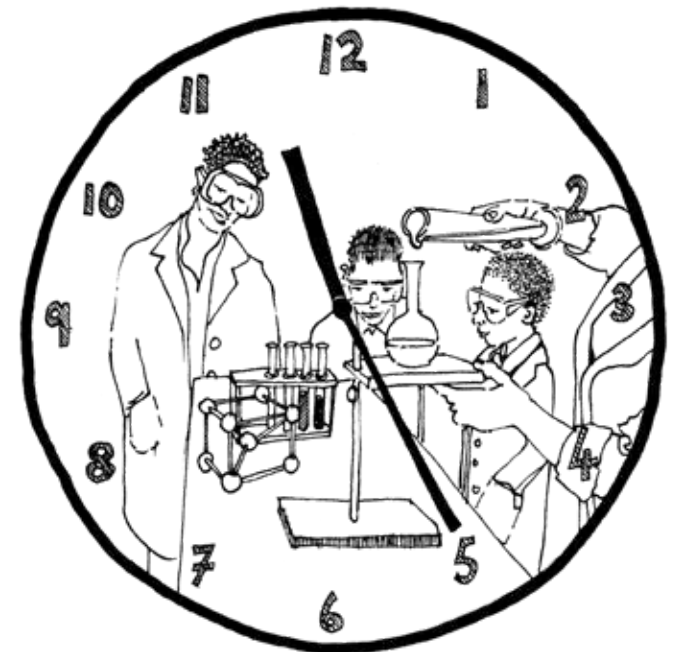
Levelling up educational aspirations and attitudes

Recruiting and retaining teachers



Why a good Ofsted report can be bad for GCSE results

Workplace training in the UK – who participates and what effect does it have on wages?



Levelling up educational aspirations and attitudes

MARK TAYLOR
TINA RAMPINO | UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND

The role of young people's aspirations and attitudes in raising educational attainment is a key area for policy discussion. Differences in attainment by socio-economic status are large, and on average children from less advantaged backgrounds perform less well than their more advantaged peers. This can create barriers to social mobility, with educational disadvantage persisting across generations. Encouraging young people to have positive aspirations is expected to raise attainment and is particularly important for children who are in economically disadvantaged groups.

This research examines whether educational aspirations and attitudes are affected by the business cycle. The researchers particularly wanted to know whether the youth unemployment rate in an area had an impact on how young people feel about their future. Does a high unemployment rate reduce educational aspirations? Or does a weak labour market increase willingness to participate in further and higher education? The researchers looked at both aspirations. Firstly, whether a young person would like to participate in post-compulsory education and secondly, attitudes, through the importance young people place on schooling.

The data came from the Youth Panel of the British Household Panel Survey and the *Understanding Society* youth survey – particularly the questions 'How much does it mean to you to do well at school?' and 'How important do you think it is for you to get your GCSE exams?' – matched with the Labour Force Survey to capture regional unemployment rates.

The first finding is that most young people are keen to do well at school. 61% reported that doing well at school means a great deal to them and a

further 33% reported that it means quite a lot. Similarly, 77% of 11-15 year olds report that getting GCSEs is very important. There is a small, but statistically significant gender difference, with girls having a more positive attitude than boys. Gender differences become clearer when young people think about whether they would like to go on to higher education: 70% of boys and 81% of girls said they would. These aspirations for university compare with an actual participation rate in higher education of 47% (42% for men and 52% for women). The number of young people who aspire to higher education is larger than that who actually attend, suggesting that in this area low aspirations are not a substantial problem.

Young people tend to have more positive attitudes and aspirations when regional youth unemployment rates are higher. The average unemployment rate faced by boys who report that doing well at school means a great deal is 15.6%, more than 0.5% higher than for boys who do not report this view. Children living in regions with higher rates of unemployment are more likely than those in regions with low unemployment to report a positive attitude to school – in other words, school is viewed more positively when the opportunity cost of schooling is low. Over the time the research considered, the male youth unemployment rate within regions fluctuated by as much as 20 points (from 10% to 30%). The researchers found that the probability of a child reporting a positive attitude to schooling could increase by 12% between the peak and the trough of the economic cycle, suggesting that one outcome of the recent recession has been to improve attitudes to schooling among young people.

A macroeconomic shock will benefit children with highly educated parents, but have negative effects for children with low-educated parents.

This research also shows that children from different backgrounds experience macroeconomic shocks in different ways. Children with more highly educated parents react more positively to macroeconomic shocks that raise youth unemployment, compared to those with less-educated parents. Aspirations for further and higher education are also more positively affected by the prevailing youth unemployment rate for those young people with more highly educated parents.

These findings have clear policy implications. The fact that macroeconomic shocks have different effects on educational attitudes and aspiration, suggest that without suitable interventions, the motivation and attainment of children whose parents have lower education and aspirations will fall behind those of children whose parents are better educated and more aspiring. Policymakers should respond to economic shocks with policies that aim to maintain positive educational attitudes and aspirations among both children and parents in neighbourhoods where a high proportion of the adult population have low qualifications.



KEY POINTS

Young people tend to have more positive attitudes and aspirations when regional youth unemployment rates are higher.

Parental attitudes and aspirations have an impact on children's attitudes and aspirations.

Children with more highly educated parents react more positively to macroeconomic shocks that raise youth unemployment, compared to those with less educated parents.

DATA USED

British Household Panel Survey Waves 5-18 and
Understanding Society Wave 1

Mark Taylor and Tina Rampino, Educational Aspirations and
Attitudes over the Business Cycle. *Economica*, 2014.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/ecca.12091>

Recruiting and retaining teachers

JACK WORTH, SARAH LYNCH, JUDE HILLARY, CONNIE RENNIE, JOANA ANDRADE
NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

The supply of teachers in England is a major policy issue, with pupil numbers rising, increasing numbers of teachers leaving the profession and shortages of trainee teachers. (Since Covid-19, applicant numbers have risen, but the number of training placements has fallen.) The Department for Education's figures suggest that pupil numbers in secondary schools will rise by 19% between 2017 and 2026, making this sector a particular concern. This research by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) explored why teachers leave the profession and whether there are particular features of teaching that make it challenging for the sector to recruit and retain staff.



NFER used *Understanding Society* alongside two other datasets, the School Workforce Census and the Labour Force Survey. They used *Understanding Society* to study teachers' labour market behaviour, including the external and personal factors that influence their behaviour, and what they did after they left teaching. The researchers also compared teachers' working conditions with those of nurses and police officers. These professions were chosen because they were also in the public sector, and somewhat comparable in the sense of mission that often motivates people to embark on these careers.

The analysis showed that the rates at which teachers leave the profession and move school have both risen since 2010. This gives schools more vacancies to fill each year, more staffing uncertainty to cope with, and greater costs for recruiting replacements. Some subjects have been more affected than others. Maths, science and modern foreign languages teachers had above-average leaving rates, and the number of new teachers being recruited into these subjects over the last five years has been running below the government's targets. The report suggested that the government should provide financial incentives to encourage retention in the first few years after training.

In a normal working week during term time, teachers worked considerably longer hours than nurses and police officers, and may have been working additional hours when schools were closed. Teachers had the lowest satisfaction with their amount of leisure time, compared to nurses and police officers – and had a higher rate of leaving their profession. The government launched a campaign with Ofsted and teaching unions in 2018 to reduce workload, and the report recommended that this should continue. It also recommended that schools consider having a governor, trustee or member of the management team who is responsible for staff welfare.

School leaders should monitor job satisfaction, and intervene to increase support and reduce workload pressures.

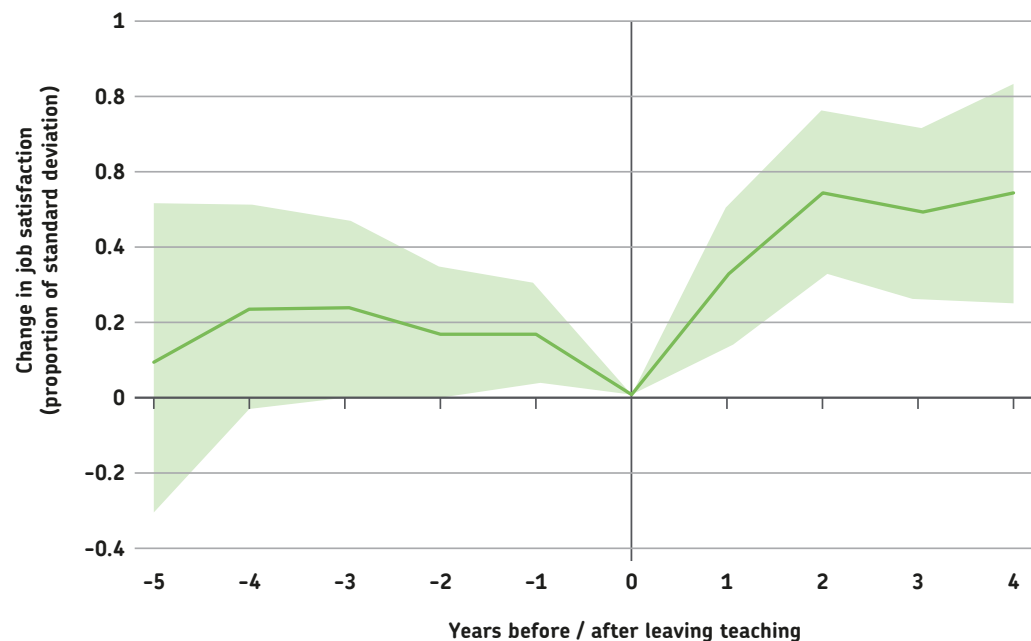
Improving job satisfaction was a prime motivation for leaving teaching. Although 78% of teachers were satisfied with their jobs in 2015/16, for those who left, job satisfaction declined in the years before, and increased considerably after they left. Salary level was less important though, with pay not the most important thing that teachers considered when thinking about leaving. On average, teachers who left the profession earned 10% less than they did before – and their satisfaction with their income fell. This suggests that many teachers take a salary cut in favour of other benefits, such as improved job satisfaction or the opportunity to work part-time.

The analysis highlighted that there are not enough opportunities for part-time working for secondary teachers. 20% of full-time secondary teachers who leave teaching for another job take up

part-time work – and a lack of part-time and flexible working opportunities is one of the main barriers for people who want to return to teaching. The NFER recommended that there be more opportunities for part-time working in secondary schools – as well as more research to understand how to support part-time working.

The report also found that Ofsted ratings influence teachers' career decisions. Teachers in schools rated 'inadequate' were more likely to leave the profession or move school. The NFER recommended that school and system leaders need to do more to identify and support good teachers in schools with low Ofsted ratings.

Teachers who leave are more satisfied in their new job



KEY POINTS

The rates at which teachers leave the profession and move school have both risen since 2010.

Teachers who leave the profession take a salary cut in favour of other benefits, such as improved job satisfaction or the opportunity to work part-time.

Ofsted ratings influence teachers' career decisions – in schools rated 'inadequate', they were more likely to leave the profession or move school.

DATA USED

Understanding Society Waves 1-7, the School Workforce Census and the Labour Force Survey

CITATION

Jack Worth, Sarah Lynch, Jude Hillary, Connie Rennie, Joana Andrade, Teacher Workforce Dynamics in England. NFER, 2018. <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/teacher-workforce-dynamics-in-england/>

Why a good Ofsted report can be bad for GCSE results

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The Office for Standards in Education, Ofsted, regularly inspects state schools in England and rates their quality from 'outstanding' to 'inadequate'. The ratings can provide information for parents on the quality of education provided by schools and existing evidence shows that parental school choices and house prices are affected by Ofsted reports. This research investigates how parents react when they receive news about the Ofsted quality ratings of their child's school. In particular, it looks at whether the amount of time parents spend on helping their children with their school work changes. Does a better-than-expected Ofsted review motivate parents to invest more time in their children? Or do they reduce time if they learn the school is doing a good job?

This research uses a unique combination of survey data from *Understanding Society* with administrative data on Ofsted inspections and school performance between 2009 and 2015. The researchers used data from households that received an Ofsted inspection in the same academic year as their *Understanding Society* interview, specifically comparing households that know the outcome of the inspection with those where the Ofsted rating is still unknown.

The researchers found that parents who receive good news about the quality of the school their child attends are significantly less likely to increase the amount of time they invest in helping their children with school work. Parents receiving good news are around 20 percentage points more likely

to reduce help with homework. In contrast, when parents receive news of a lower than expected Ofsted rating, their time input does not change – they do not respond by increasing their help at home. Taken together, parents who receive good rather than bad news about the quality of their child's school are 24 points more likely to reduce the help they give their children with homework and 14 points less likely to increase it.

The analysis shows that providing information on Ofsted inspections is likely to reduce overall parental investments. Parents with children in schools that receive good news react more strongly than parents whose children are in schools that receive bad news.

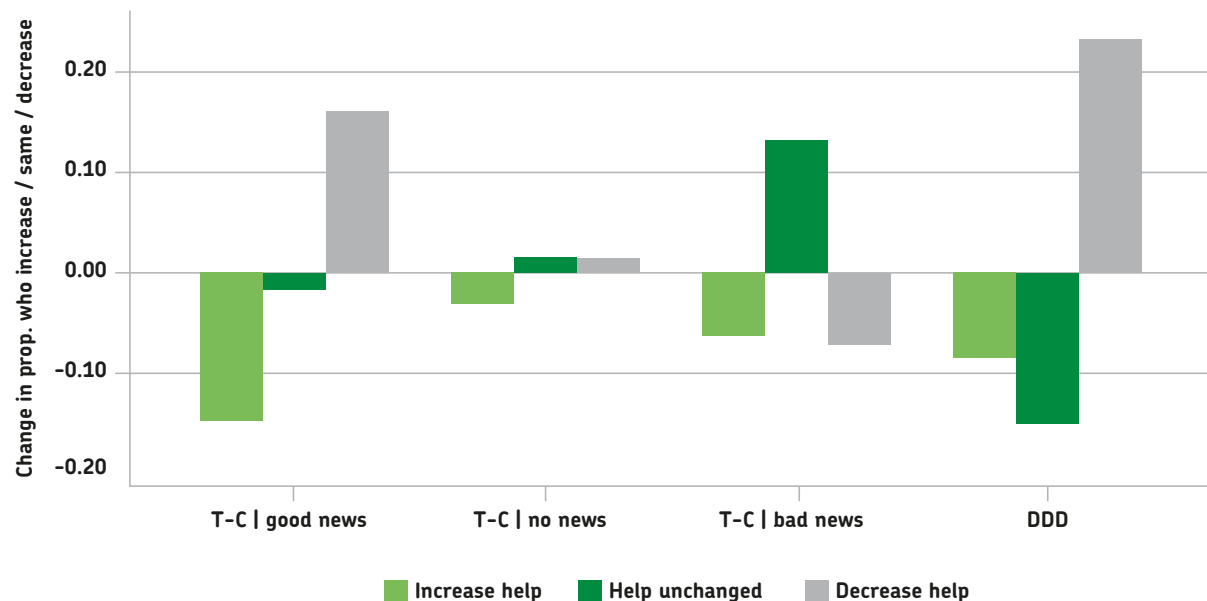
Information provided by Ofsted inspections is also likely to increase equality in how much parents help their children across schools in England. This is because good schools (often with highly motivated parents) are more likely to receive more good news about school quality, leading to lower investments by parents. This makes the help received by children in good schools more similar to that received in bad schools.

When the researchers looked at children's own time investments, they found that they move in the opposite direction to parents' help with homework. Children in households that have received good news about their school rating are significantly more likely to increase the time they spend doing homework. It appears that children partly compensate for the loss of parental input by increasing their own time investment.

It appears that children partly compensate for the loss of parental input by increasing their own time investment.

But do Ofsted ratings have an impact on test results? The researchers found that children whose families received good news early in the academic year performed significantly worse in their GCSE exams compared to those where the good news came later in the academic year, indicating that the reduced help by parents lowered children's exam performance. This is despite children's own time investment in schoolwork increasing in response to the same information. This suggests that the Ofsted inspection regime lowers educational attainment overall for those children who are inspected in the year of their high-stakes formal exams, such as GCSEs.

Parental Investment by News



KEY POINTS

Parents typically reduce help at home when school quality increases unexpectedly.

Providing information through Ofsted inspections is likely to reduce overall parental investments, because parents in schools that receive good news on school quality react more strongly than parents in schools with bad news.

Children whose families received good news early in the academic year performed significantly worse in the GCSE exams than those where good news came later.

DATA USED

Understanding Society Waves 1, 3 and 5, Department for Education school performance tables, school census data, Ofsted inspections data.

CITATION

Ellen Greaves, Iftikhar Hussain, Birgitta Rabe and Imran Rasul, Parental Responses to Information About School Quality: Evidence from Linked Survey and Administrative Data, ISER Working Paper 2019. <https://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/research/publications/working-papers/iser/2019-03>

Workplace training in the UK – who participates and what effect does it have on wages?

DARIA LUCHINSKAYA | UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK
PETER DICKINSON | UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

Despite a policy focus on job quality and fair work in the UK, there is still concern that a substantial part of the UK economy is made up of low-quality jobs with few opportunities for learning and training. Public expenditure on training in the UK as a proportion of GDP was among the lowest of the G7 countries between 2004 and 2011. Research on training opportunities in the UK suggests that younger people are more likely to undertake training than older workers and that better-qualified people tend to access training more than those with few or no qualifications. Findings from the UK National Adult Skills Audit suggested that almost half of people from the lowest socio-economic groups had not participated in any learning since they left school. Part-time working and being employed in the private sector are also associated with lower participation in training.

To find out how participation in workplace training might affect different groups of people and to see whether training made a difference to earnings, this research used seven waves of *Understanding Society*. It focused on adults in employment aged 25 to 64, and looked at whether individuals had undertaken any employer-provided, job-related training in the last year. It included gross monthly wages and socio-economic background in their analysis. It explored the characteristics that affected the decisions to take part in employer-provided training and whether training was associated with wages.

The researchers found that the type of work people do makes a difference to whether they have training. Women working in intermediate occupations were less likely to have done employer-related training in the last 12 months, compared to women working in professional occupations. However, there was no significant effect of current occupation type on the probability of doing employer-provided training for men.

Further patterns emerged when they looked at the type of training being done. Women and men in routine occupations were more likely to have done health and safety training than those working in managerial and professional roles. Men in routine occupations were less likely to do training to improve their skills in their current job, compared to men working in professional occupations, but there was no significant difference for women. Women in intermediate and routine jobs were less likely to engage in training to maintain their professional status or meet occupational standards, compared to those working in managerial and professional roles. Women from intermediate and routine jobs and men from routine jobs were also less likely to do training for promotion-related reasons, compared to those working in professional occupations.

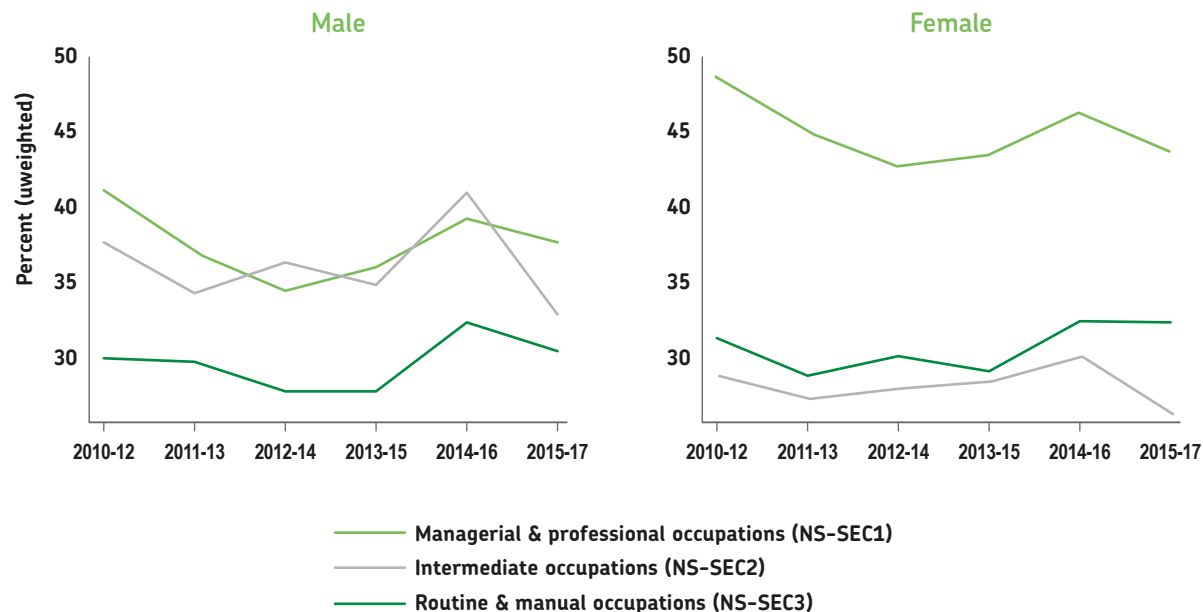
The researchers also found some evidence of associations between training and wages, especially when looking over several years of employment and wage histories. This suggests that gains from training may take time to materialise.

Ongoing inequalities in access to training can perpetuate virtuous circles of learning for more advantaged people and vicious circles for more disadvantaged people.

They found a small positive effect on wages for men, and to a lesser extent women, who took part in training. When they looked at those who had actively chosen to do training, they found that participation in training to maintain professional status was positively associated with women's wages. They also found evidence of a negative association between health and safety training and wages for women, and to a lesser extent for men. This could be because this type of training is provided for statutory reasons or because such training tends to be more prevalent in lower-paid jobs.

These findings seem to tentatively support the view that general skills training to maintain occupation standards or professional status is associated with higher wage returns than specific skills training, like health and safety or induction training. People working in lower-level jobs may not only be less likely to access training in general, but also more likely to undertake the specific skills training associated with lower wages.

Participation in employer-provided training in last 12 months, by sex and own NC-SEC.



KEY POINTS

Workers in lower-level occupations are not only less likely to do training in general, but also less likely to do training associated with wage increases.

People in managerial and professional roles are more likely to do training for promotion-related reasons, compared to those in intermediate or routine occupations.

Adult workers in lower-level occupations who do have training are more likely to take part in statutory training, rather than skills-developing training which would improve their wage prospects.

DATA USED

Understanding Society Waves 1-7

CITATION

Daria Luchinskaya and Peter Dickinson, 'Virtuous' and 'Vicious' Circles? Adults' Participation in Different Types of Training in the UK and Its Association with Wages, *Social Inclusion*, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v7i3.2039>

Educational aspirations among UK young teenagers: exploring the role of gender, class and ethnicity

In the UK there are large socio-economic differences in educational attainment and participation in higher education. This research looked at the role of gender, class and ethnicity in educational aspirations, focusing on teenagers born in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

The researchers found that overall, 66% of 10- to 15-year-olds stated positive aspirations to attend college or university, but boys were less likely to aspire (58%) than girls (74%). When looking at ethnicity, aspirations were highest for Black Caribbean (86%), Black African (81%) and Bangladeshi (78%) teenagers. Within all ethnic groups, girls are more likely to have higher educational aspirations than boys.

There are aspirations by class group, although the majority in all class groups had high aspirations. For boys, positive aspirations are much higher among those from managerial and professional backgrounds (67%) compared to those with intermediate (57%) or routine class backgrounds (50%).

White boys from the lowest occupational class and from workless households have the lowest aspirations, but the percentage who aspire to go to university is still higher than the percentage who actually go. In other words, more 'working class'

people aspire highly than succeed. Among girls, those from the most advantaged backgrounds are also more likely to hold high aspirations (80%), but the difference between this group and those in intermediate occupations (74%) is smaller.

We might expect to find lower aspirations in teenagers living in single-parent families, because of the disruption to their lives, or because they are poorer after the separation. However, once parental occupational class and parental education are taken into account, these teenagers, and those living with a step-parent, are no less likely to aspire to college/university, although the small number living with neither natural parent is less likely to aspire.

DATA USED

Understanding Society Wave 1

CITATION

Ann Berrington, Steven Roberts and Peter Tammes, Educational aspirations among UK young teenagers: exploring the role of gender, class and ethnicity, British Educational Research Journal, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3235>

More 'working class' people aspire highly than succeed.

How home shapes teenagers' education aspirations

Raising educational aspirations is a key feature of educational policy. This research looked at how the home environment and family life influences teenagers' aspirations. Using data from the *Understanding Society* youth survey, it found that 10-15 year-olds' general wellbeing and self-efficacy are good predictors of educational aspirations. Teenagers who measured lower on these scores were more likely to say that GCSEs were not important and less likely to aspire to going to university.

Emotional closeness to parents and perceived parental involvement in school predicted young people's views regarding the importance of GCSEs, but not their aspirations for higher education. A culture of learning in the home – and family participation in cultural activities, such as visiting art galleries or discussing books at home – was more likely to influence young people's aspirations, especially after 16. As participation in cultural activities decreased, there was a 14% increase in the odds of not wanting to attend university.

The findings from this study showed no shortage in young people's educational aspirations, although trends emerged with certain groups, with pre-adolescents and boys being less aspirant than middle adolescents and girls.

DATA USED

Understanding Society Waves 2-3

CITATION

Dimitra Hartas, Young people's educational aspirations: psychosocial factors and the home environment, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 2016.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2016.1145634>

Does private school give women an advantage in marriage?

Going to private school in the UK is associated with substantial labour market advantages, including better access to high status and influential jobs and a large pay premium, but does it also influence who you marry?

Researchers from the UCL Institute of Education looked at private and state educated women in the British Household Panel Survey and *Understanding Society*, comparing whether they married men who had also been privately educated, and looking at their husbands' annual earnings. They found that privately educated women are 7% more likely than state educated women of a similar background to marry privately educated men.

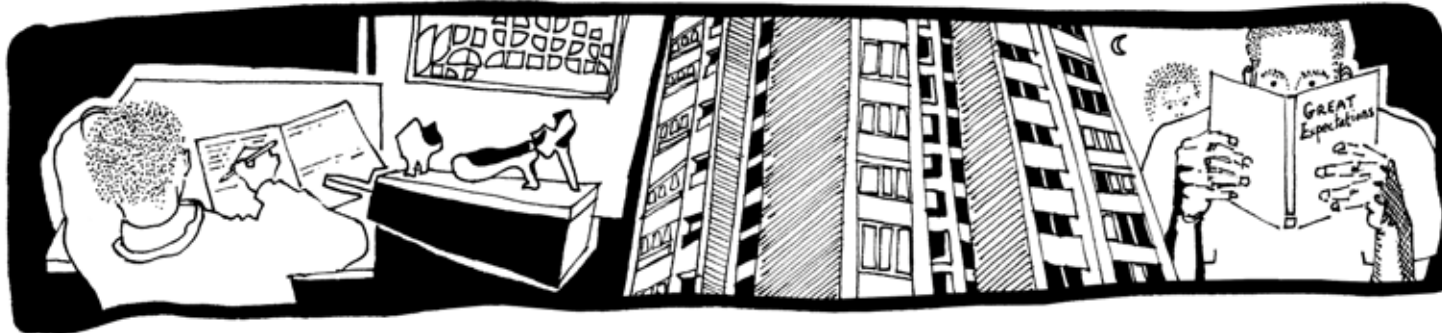
They also found that privately educated married women have husbands who earn 15% greater hourly pay. The husbands of the privately educated were much more likely to work in high status occupations, more likely to be earning in the 90th percentile, and less likely to be earning below the median, than the husbands of state educated women.

DATA USED

British Household Panel Survey and *Understanding Society* 1991-2013

CITATION

Francis Green, Golo Henseke, Samantha Parsons, Alice Sullivan, Richard Wiggins, Do private school girls marry rich? *Longitudinal and Life Course Studies*, 2018.
<https://doi.org/10.14301/llcs.v9i3.496>



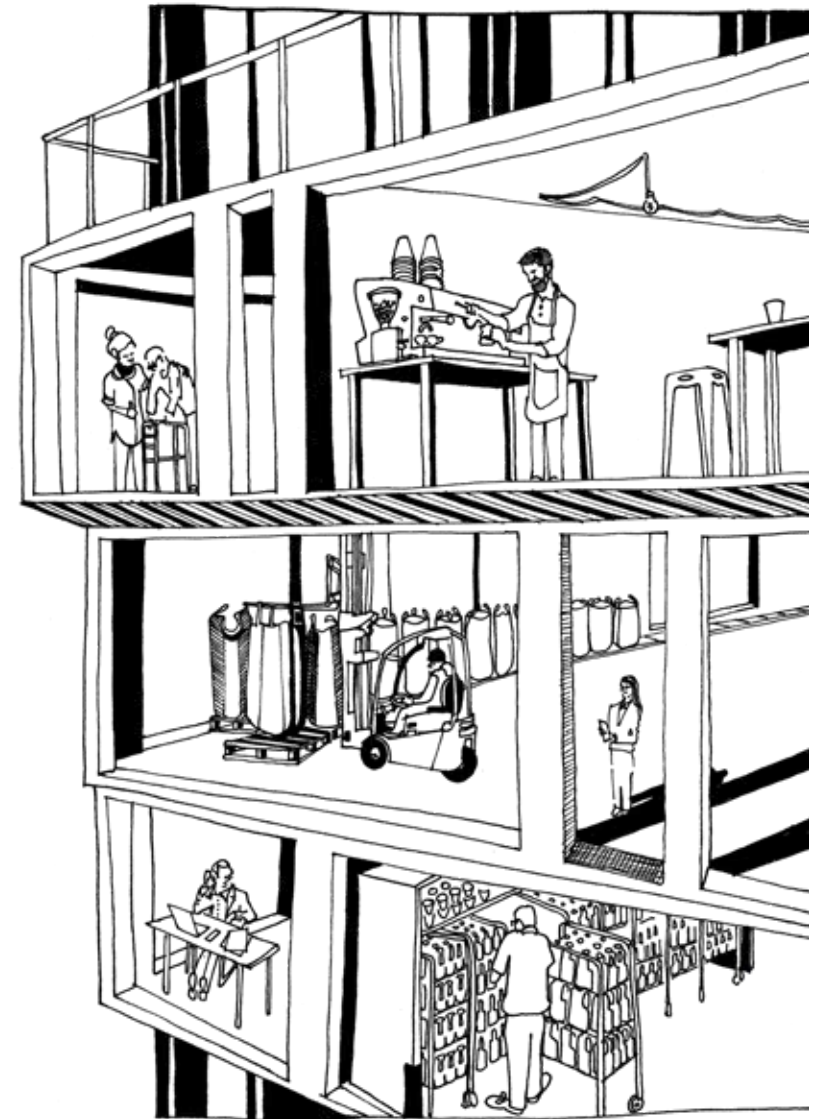
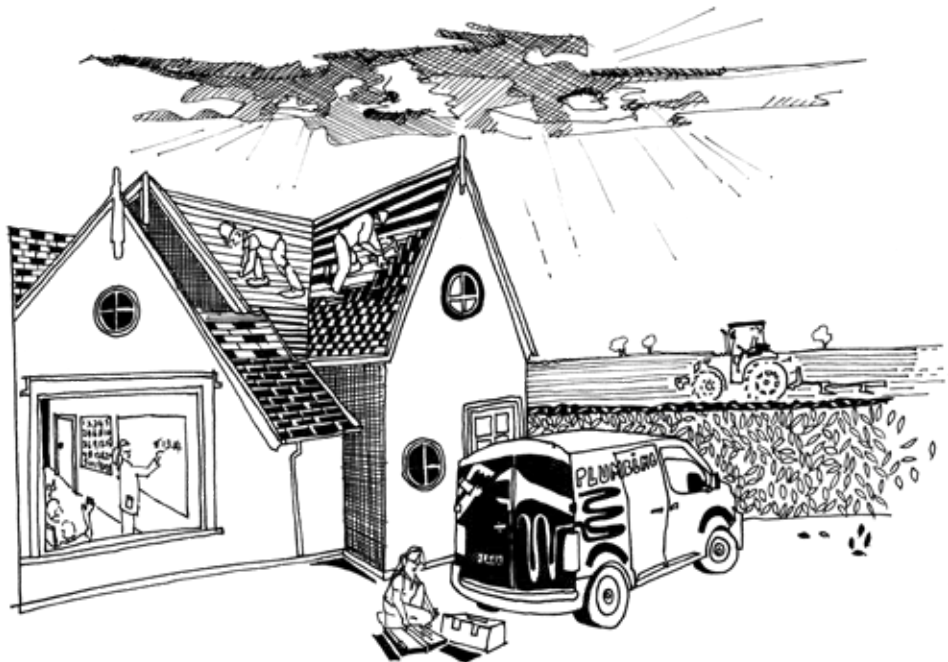
EMPLOYMENT AND NON-EMPLOYMENT

A shorter working week for everyone?

Do unions cause job dissatisfaction?

Is control over our work good for wellbeing?

What does self-employment mean to people from ethnic minority backgrounds



A shorter working week for everyone?

DAIGA KAMERÄDE | UNIVERSITY OF SALFORD

SENHU WANG, BRENDAN BURCHELL, SARAH URSULA BALDERSON AND ADAM COUTTS | UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Technological advances are thought to be putting jobs at risk, with research suggesting that anything between 9% and 47% of jobs are at risk of automation. Opinion is divided on how likely this is, and what governments might do about it, but there is consensus on the need to understand the problem better and have some contingency plans in place.

High levels of long-term unemployment would lead to poverty and inequality, and to a decline in mental and physical health. It would also increase government welfare and health spending. A rapid and permanent rise in unemployment could therefore have devastating effects on public services, communities and individuals.

One option for tackling the problem is a shorter working week for everyone – but the debate is happening when some people are working long hours and others shorter hours. Previous studies suggest that working long hours has negative consequences for health, wellbeing, leisure and families – but also that working fewer hours than one would like has a negative effect on mental health. Earlier research has established that paid work brings mental health and wellbeing benefits, but not how much or how little paid work is needed to gain these benefits.

New research using *Understanding Society* data aimed to establish a minimum amount of paid employment needed to deliver some or all of the wellbeing and mental health benefits that employment has been shown to bring; and the optimum number of working hours at which the mental health of workers is at its highest.

The findings show that working just eight hours a week is enough to get the psychological benefits associated with employment. There were some variations according to gender, such as a dip in satisfaction for men at the point where they start working 16 hours a week, but not for women. This may be because women are still more likely to care for children, and people on Income Support lose benefits if they work more than 16 hours a week – but if they have children, they gain access to other benefits. Also, for those on a low wage, especially men, working 16–20 hours a week can be problematic, because the wages earned are less than the benefits they previously received. Overall, however, the significant difference in mental health and wellbeing is between those with paid work and those with none.

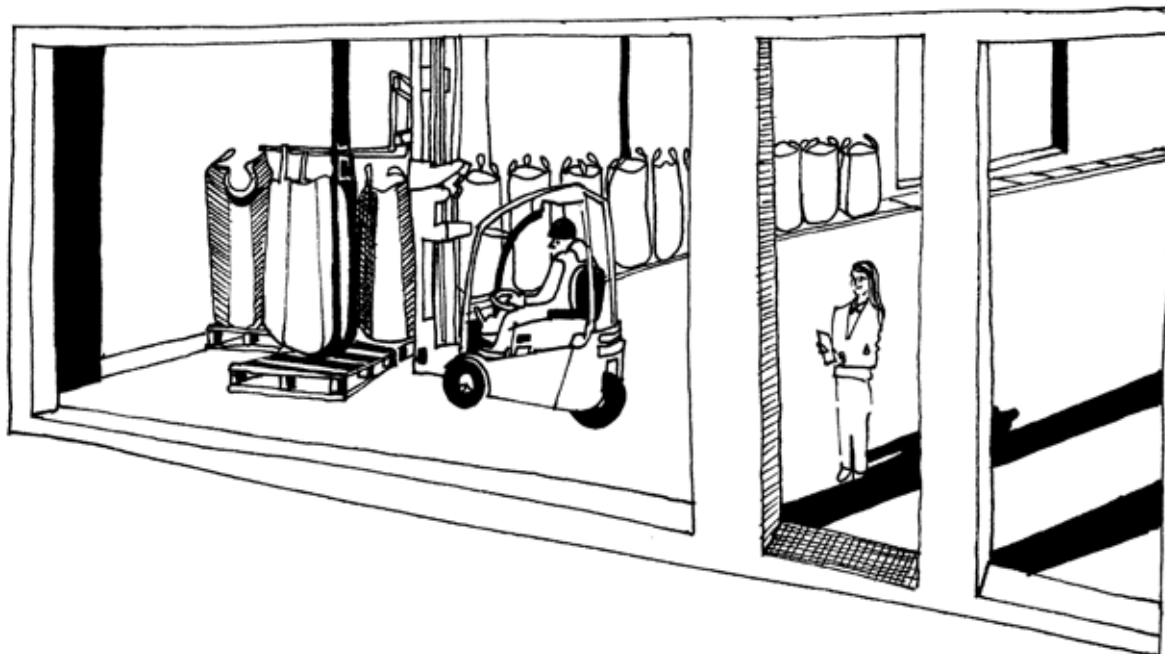
The study also showed that there is no optimum number of working hours for wellbeing and mental health. There was no evidence to suggest that – when hourly pay, type of work and whether the contract was permanent were taken into account – the standard 36–40 hour working week is best. The results suggest that working full-time is better for mental health than working under 16 hours a week for men and over 40–44 hours a week for women (possibly because of the difficulties of combining longer working hours with childcare). However, full-time work was not significantly different from any other working hours category in terms of mental health and wellbeing.

One of the most talked-about policy options for addressing a potential rise in unemployment levels is universal basic income (UBI), but if the average effective dose of employment for mental health and wellbeing is only about the equivalent of one day per week, a more radical alternative could be to redistribute working hours.

Universal basic income is widely discussed, but if the average effective dose of employment for mental health and wellbeing is only about the equivalent of one day per week, it could be possible instead to redistribute working hours.

In this scenario, work is distributed to everybody who wants it, thus also spreading the wellbeing benefits of working. This would reduce unemployment and the associated public health costs, and could also increase productivity, reduce CO2 emissions from commuting, production and consumption, and improve work-life balance. It may be possible to achieve this by reducing the length of the working day, or the 'normal' working week, or by increasing annual holidays.

The researchers note, however, that they considered population-averaged effects of working hours on mental well-being, and looked at relatively short-term effects of changes in working hours. More work is needed on different groups, such as those in insecure or poor-quality jobs, and on the longer term impact on wellbeing and mental health.



KEY POINTS

Working eight hours a week is enough to gain the wellbeing benefits of employment.

The wellbeing of employees is similar regardless of the length of the working week, up to 48 hours.

There is scope for the working week to be radically reduced.

Reduced hours of work are preferable to job losses due to artificial intelligence.

DATA USED

Understanding Society Waves 1-8

CITATION

Daiga Kamerāde, Senhu Wang, Brendan Burchell, Sarah Ursula Balderson and Adam Coutts, A shorter working week for everyone: How much paid work is needed for mental health and well-being? *Social Science & Medicine* 2019.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2019.06.006>

Do unions cause job dissatisfaction?

IOULIA BESSA, ANDY CHARLWOOD AND DANAT VALIZADE | UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

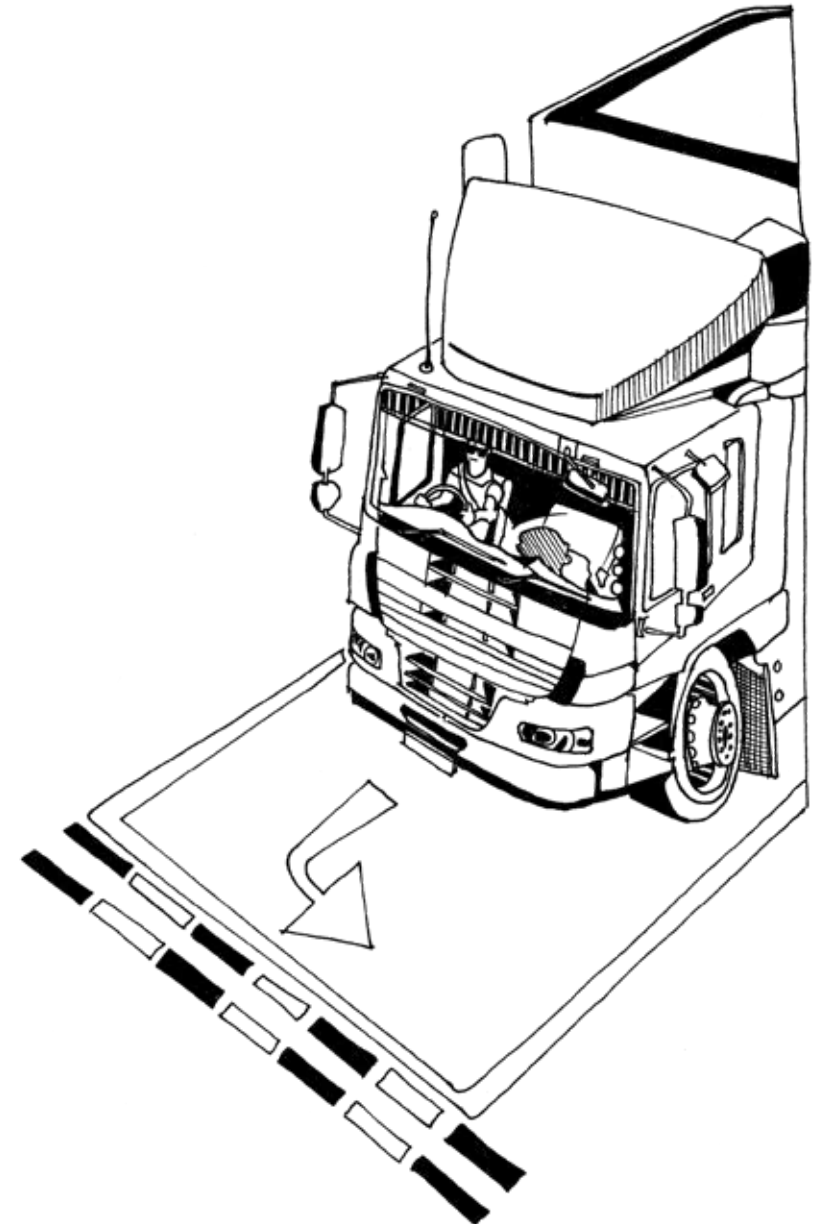
Union members are often found to be less satisfied with their jobs than their non-union counterparts, and this apparent paradox has a number of possible explanations. The first is that unions make workers dissatisfied with their working conditions in order to encourage them to press for improvements. Because they tend to be successful, union members tend to be paid more and enjoy more secure roles, so they quit less, but retain some unhappiness with their roles and conditions – and this leads to a larger stock of dissatisfied workers.

It's also been suggested that union membership and job satisfaction are both influenced by working conditions, so that what's causing dissatisfaction is not union membership, but the conditions. Alternatively, workers who are more likely to be dissatisfied with their work may be more likely to become union members. The answer matters, because job satisfaction is important to workers and desirable for employers. Managing employees' satisfaction levels is a global industry worth hundreds of millions of pounds a year.

New research using British Household Panel Survey and *Understanding Society* data tested the theory that union membership causes dissatisfaction by examining changes in job satisfaction around the time of a significant change in working conditions – 2011's alterations to UK workers' pension arrangements. These would involve increased pension contributions for most workers, and led to a major industrial dispute involving unions representing 2.1 million workers.

The researchers asked whether the pension announcement saw a fall in job satisfaction among those affected, and if so, was that fall greater for union members? By tracking job satisfaction for affected workers compared to those unaffected, they were able to show that unionised and non-unionised workers both experienced a decline in job satisfaction at the time of the dispute.

The findings suggest that there is no relationship between union membership and job satisfaction.



They then investigated whether the fall in job satisfaction might have caused not by the changes themselves, but by the trade union campaign on the issue. They did this by comparing affected union members and affected non-members, and the results indicated that union members weren't disproportionately affected by the pensions dispute.

They had taken into account factors such as workers' personalities and values, demographic characteristics like gender and age, social status, and terms and conditions of employment – including income. The findings suggested no causal relationship between union membership and job satisfaction.

However, these results needed further investigation, because they assume that a person's place in the groups being studied – union members and non-members – is random. The decision to join a union, though, is influenced by each worker's values and personality, and by social norms that cause workers to prefer public sector jobs and/or union membership. The researchers had taken these variables into account, but also carried out further tests to make sure their results were robust.

Using a different analysis technique, they compared workers who were affected by the dispute, but not by the pension changes, because they had reached normal retirement age before the increase in pensions contributions in April 2015. If union campaigns affect job satisfaction, the satisfaction of those due to retire before the pensions changes took effect should be affected in a similar way to those retiring slightly later whose incomes fell as a result of the increased pension contributions. In fact, job satisfaction was lower among those affected by the changes, suggesting it was the pensions change, not the union campaign that caused job satisfaction to be lower.

To understand the issue better, further research is needed into job satisfaction in the public and private sectors, in countries outside the UK, and into whether workers engage with union campaigns and how effective they believe their union is. Future studies also need to examine working conditions which unions can't influence.

Overall, though, this research supports the idea that union membership does not have a causal effect on job satisfaction. Union members' job dissatisfaction is the result of cumulative changes to their working conditions in workplaces and sectors that employ larger numbers of union members.

KEY POINTS

Union members are often found to be less satisfied with their jobs than their non-union counterparts.

This research looked at job satisfaction and union membership before and after 2011's changes to UK workers' pension arrangements.

The findings suggest union membership does not have a causal effect on job satisfaction.

Union members' job dissatisfaction is the result of cumulative changes to working conditions in workplaces and sectors that employ larger numbers of union members.

DATA USED

British Household Panel Survey and *Understanding Society* 2004–15

CITATION

Ioulia Bessa, Andy Charlwood and Danat Valizade, Do Unions Cause Job Dissatisfaction? Evidence from a Quasi-Experiment in the United Kingdom, *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjir.12543>

Is control over our work good for wellbeing?

DANIEL WHEATLEY | UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

The quality of work has become an increasingly important policy issue in recent years – and the degree of control we have over our work is a significant part of a job's quality. Autonomy at work is important both for employees, because it's connected to their wellbeing, and for employers, with its likely impact on productivity and employee retention.

Research using *Understanding Society* data set out to find out whether levels of control differ between jobs in the UK, what impact these levels have on wellbeing, job satisfaction and life satisfaction, and whether they vary by gender.

The research breaks autonomy down into two types: job control (over one's tasks and how we carry them out) and schedule control (over where we work and what hours). It looked first at how levels of job and schedule control differ between occupations, expecting to find that control is greater in highly skilled roles.

It found that autonomy levels do indeed differ considerably between occupations, and also by gender. For example, around 90% of managers report having “some” or “a lot” of autonomy over all aspects of job control. Professionals report relatively high levels of job control, but notably less than managers do. In particular, women professionals report less job control (38.2% report “a lot” of autonomy over tasks, and 38.6% over work pace) than men.

Some people in skilled trades have high levels of job and schedule control, and others relatively little, particularly over working hours – which may reflect differences between contractors and people who work for large construction companies. The lowest levels of job control are found in lower skilled jobs, such as sales and customer service, where 23% report no autonomy.

Managers have less control over schedules than they do job control, with fewer than 50% reporting a lot of control over working hours – and the results were also starkly divided by gender. Just over 60% of professional men said they had a flexible schedule, compared to just under 42% of professional women.

The research also asked how autonomy affected subjective wellbeing, and whether the different types of control had different effects on people's satisfaction with their job, leisure time, and life overall. It found that autonomy has positive effects on wellbeing, especially where people report “a lot” of autonomy.

There are also differences between the effects of job control and schedule control on different measures of wellbeing. Control over job tasks is strongly related to job satisfaction, for example, for both men and women “a little” or “some” autonomy here has positive effects. Schedule control (being able to decide working hours and having informal flexibility) has positive effects on job, leisure, and overall life satisfaction.

Managers have high levels of autonomy, but resist offering it to employees. Ways could be found to balance the needs of both groups.

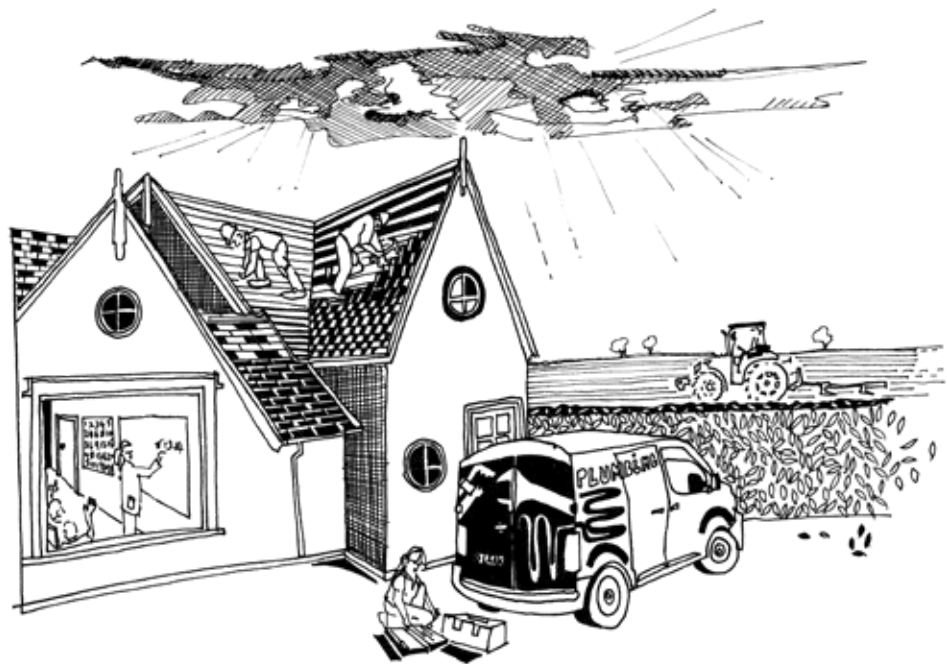
The intensity or pace of work is also significant for job satisfaction among both men and women. Also, although schedule control is important, the researchers found that control over the order in which one completes one's tasks is not.

Some of the differences, though, are gendered. For men, control over their working hours has a statistically significant effect on leisure satisfaction, and for women, the manner of work (the way one completes it) affects life satisfaction.

Finally, the researcher hypothesised that schedule control would offer greater benefits for women, and this was true. While job tasks and the pace of work were important for men, the manner of work and schedule control were found to be more relevant to wellbeing for women. Considered alongside flexibility in work

location, specifically homeworking, this suggests that mothers and women with other caring responsibilities, benefit from being able to balance paid work and household management.

Overall, it appears that job and schedule control have benefits for employees, and that – while managers report high levels of autonomy themselves – they resist the idea of offering it to employees. The research suggests that managers may be worried that workers will 'shirk' if given more control. Not all forms of autonomy can be offered to all employees – it's often not practical to have autonomy over work schedules in customer-facing roles, for example. However, where greater autonomy is feasible, methods could be found which balance the needs of managers and employees.



KEY POINTS

Autonomy is an important part of job quality, and has benefits for employees' wellbeing – and for employers in the form of productivity.

Around 90% of managers report having control over their jobs, but other professionals have less, with women reporting less control than men.

Control over job tasks is strongly related to job satisfaction for both men and women.

For men, control over working hours is significant for leisure satisfaction, and for women, the way they complete their work affects life satisfaction.

DATA USED

Understanding Society Waves 2 and 4

CITATION

Daniel Wheatley, Autonomy in Paid Work and Employee Subjective Well-Being, *Work and Occupations* 2017.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0730888417697232>

What does self-employment mean to people from ethnic minority backgrounds?

MALCOLM BRYNIN, MOHAMMED SHAMSUL KARIM, AND WOUTER ZWYSEN | UNIVERSITY OF ESSEX

It is commonly argued that ethnic minorities have a proclivity for self-employment, and that this is partly a cultural disposition – but there are other reasons for a higher rate of self-employment among ethnic minorities. For example, the fact that people from ethnic minorities are likely to earn less than someone from the majority population for similar work could make self-employment attractive. Also, some ethnic groups in the UK have close family and peer networks that create social capital, which may help to attract start-up funding, employees, and customers. Or, living in an ‘ethnic enclave’ may create opportunities to start businesses which cater specifically to that population, perhaps dealing in speciality foods or clothing.

However, levels of self-employment actually vary little by ethnicity, so this research used data from the Labour Force Survey and *Understanding Society* to find out more about ethnic minority attitudes to self-employment, whether they prefer employment to self-employment, and why.

Self-employment broadens a person’s work opportunities, but also entails greater risk – of not having enough work, or not making enough money from it. These risks have grown since the financial crisis of 2007–8 and the subsequent recession, when earnings fell for the employed but more for the self-employed. Self-employed people generally have higher job satisfaction than employees, but this advantage, too, has fallen in recent years – and the ‘gig economy’ has seen part-time self-employment grow faster than full-time self-employment.

For people from ethnic minority backgrounds then, the decision on whether to become self-employed is complicated by several factors – they also have to weigh up not only the chances of getting a good job compared to succeeding in self-employment, but also their chances of achieving either compared to white British people, in the face of disadvantages on the labour market.

This research found that fewer than 15% of white British people are self-employed, and that this rate is similar for Bangladeshis, and lower for black Africans and Caribbeans. The only group which is substantially more likely to be self-employed is people of Pakistani heritage.

Self-employment among Pakistani and Bangladeshi minorities helps close the wage gap with the majority population, but this is not true for other minority groups. Also, ethnic minorities generally have to work more hours than the white British majority when they are self-employed, and most enjoy less job satisfaction from this kind of work than the majority group.

When they compared different waves of data, the researchers found that most ethnic minorities who are self-employed in one wave, are less likely to remain self-employed in the next, and that at the same time, there is a movement towards paid employment. This suggests that self-employment might serve as a pathway into paid employment for some minority groups, and that – even if they are self-employed for some time – it’s a transitional phase.

Ethnic minorities generally have to work more hours than the white British majority in self-employment, and most enjoy less job satisfaction through this form of work than the majority group.

One significant factor in attitudes to self-employment is higher education. The percentage of white British graduates who are employed is the same as those who are self-employed. This is also true of people of black Caribbean or Indian heritage. Among Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Chinese people, the self-employed are far less likely to be graduates than the employed, and those who are employed are far more likely to be graduates than the white British employed. (Only black Africans have a higher proportion of graduates among the self-employed.)

This suggests that education is a strong 'pull' towards being an employee, rather than running one's own business. In the face of perceived and actual discrimination, employment carries risks for ethnic minorities, but the researchers suggest that self-employment also involves considerable risk, and more so for ethnic minorities than for the majority working population. People from minority groups will try to reduce labour-market risks – and higher education is an important part of this strategy, because it predisposes them to employment rather than self-employment.

The research suggests that self-employment might be more of a last resort for the less well educated, and more of a free choice for the more educated. So, as education increases even more among ethnic minorities, their reliance on self-employment may well fall. If anything, self-employment is not an ethnic-minority phenomenon – in fact, the reverse is probably true.



KEY POINTS

It is sometimes argued that some ethnic minorities have a cultural predisposition towards self-employment – but levels of self-employment actually vary little by ethnicity.

The only group substantially more likely to be self-employed than the white British population is people of Pakistani heritage.

Ethnic minorities generally have to work more hours than the white British majority when they are self-employed, and most enjoy less job satisfaction from this kind of work than the majority group.

Education is a strong 'pull' towards being an employee rather than having to rely on self-employment for ethnic minorities, but not so much for the white British.

DATA USED

Understanding Society Waves 1–7, Labour Force Survey 1993–2014

CITATION

Malcolm Brynin, Mohammed Shamsul Karim, Wouter Zwysen, *The Value of Self-Employment to Ethnic Minorities*, Work, Employment and Society 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017019855232>

In memory of Dr Malcolm Brynin <https://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/2020/06/29/tributes-to-dr-malcolm-brynin>

How does being in a union affect your health?

Union membership has fallen in the last 60 years, from around 40% of workers in the UK in 1960 to less than a quarter today. However, the percentage of workers employed in a company where there is a labour organisation is still relatively high, at around 50%. This research studies whether the presence of a union in a workplace could have an effect on workers' health. The results showed that unions, and specifically collective negotiation in the workplace, play a role in supporting workers' physical and, in particular, mental health.

About half of the British working population is employed in companies where there is no collective negotiation and, consequently, cannot join a union. This has a particular impact in terms of health and safety, despite new regulations aiming at promoting workers' participation in companies where there is no union representation. Collective negotiation in British companies is a clear way to improve workers' mental and – to a lesser extent – physical health, so securing recognition of labour unions could be seen as a lever for improving workers' health.

DATA USED

Understanding Society Waves 2, 4, 6 and 8

CITATION

Jacques Wels, The role of labour unions in explaining workers' mental and physical health in Great Britain. A longitudinal approach, *Social Science & Medicine* 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2020.112796>

Motherhood and the gender pay gap

In the early 1990s, average hourly wages were almost 30% lower for women than for men. The gender wage gap has shrunk, but is still around 20%, and the gap has not been falling among graduates. The gap is about 10% before a woman has a first child, and widens gradually but significantly from the late 20s and early 30s. Men's wages continue growing rapidly, while women's wages plateau.

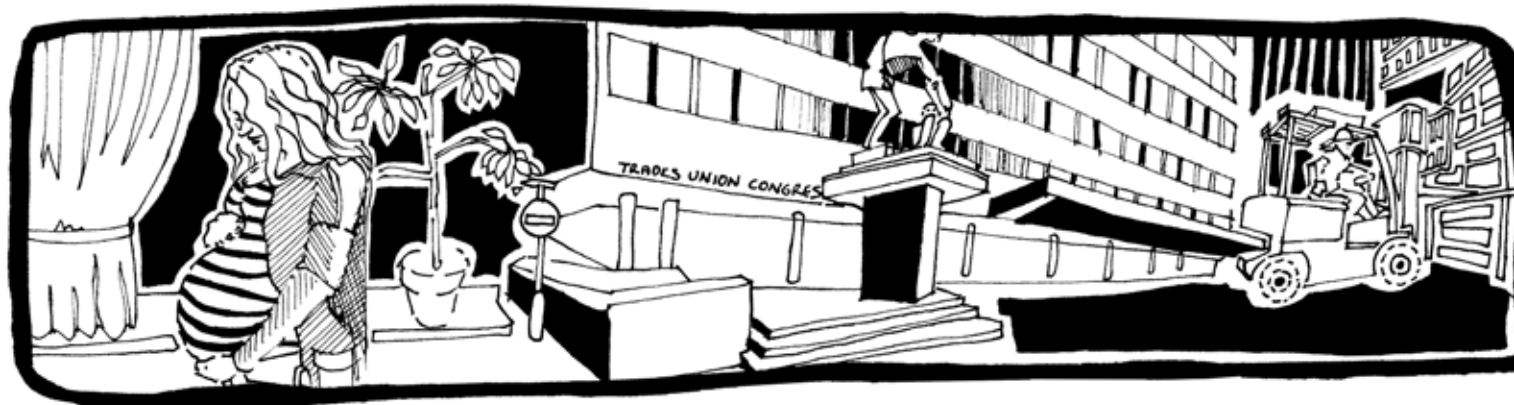
One major factor is that there is a big difference in employment rates between men and women after the birth of the first child. By the time that child is 20, women have on average been in paid work for three years less than men and in full-time paid work ten years less. Not working full-time tends to shut down wage progression, and this has a large impact for more highly educated women, who would otherwise have seen the most progression. However, differences in women's experiences in the labour market after childbirth still leave a significant chunk of the gender wage gap unexplained. Some of it was there before they had a child, and women may be less likely to successfully bargain for higher wages, and more likely to enter family-friendly occupations over high-paying ones.

DATA

British Household Panel Survey and *Understanding Society* 1991–2015, the Labour Force Survey

CITATION

Monica Costa Dias, Robert Joyce and Francesca Parodi, Wage progression and the gender wage gap: the causal impact of hours of work, *Institute for Fiscal Studies* 2018. <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/10358>



Who escapes low pay, and who gets stuck?

Is low-paid work the first rung on a ladder to higher earnings, or a trap that people can't escape? The Resolution Foundation tracked low-paid workers over a decade to see how many moved into higher-paid work. Staying in work is the most important factor in progressing up the pay scale, even though the largest group among those who do not progress are regularly in work. The proportion of employees who escape low wages varies across sectors, but working in hospitality or a sales role is linked to a lower chance of escaping low pay.

One reason cited in focus groups for people not progressing is that the difference in pay between an entry-level job and a supervisory role (with more stress and difficulty in arranging work-life balance) is often as little as 30p or 40p extra an hour.

Less than one-in-four people regularly in work are able to permanently escape low pay over a ten-year period, with a far larger group cycling in and out of low-paid work. Some groups appear to be particularly disadvantaged. Those working part time, single parents, older workers and people with disabilities find escaping from low pay especially difficult. Employers and government should consider how current support and funding could be better targeted at these groups to help them in their careers.

DATA USED

British Household Panel Survey and *Understanding Society* 2001-11, New Earnings Survey Panel Dataset

CITATION

Conor D'Arcy and Alex Hurrell, *Escape Plan: Understanding who progresses from low pay and who gets stuck*, Resolution Foundation 2014.
<https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/escape-plan-understanding-who-progresses-from-low-pay-and-who-gets-stuck/>

Young, female and forgotten?

ONS figures show that almost 8% of young women aged 16-24 are classed as not in education, employment or training (NEET) and economically inactive, compared to 3.6% of men of the same age. Being 'economically inactive' (EI) means they are currently unable to enter the labour market (as opposed to economically active – unemployed and seeking work). However, 29% of young women who were NEET and EI said they would like to work, and 86% thought they would in the future.

Using *Understanding Society* data, this report showed that the journey to becoming NEET and EI is linked to being a mother, a carer, in poor health or in transition between education and employment. Moreover, these criteria apply regardless of qualification levels. The analysis showed that young women with degrees are subject to the same risk of becoming NEET and EI as young men who have left school with no qualifications. Young women want to work so they can avoid relying on benefits or on family and friends, but face significant challenges, and this is especially true of young mothers. They were held back by high childcare costs, low wages and precarious working patterns, as well as anxiety about leaving pre-school-age children. The report made 17 recommendations for various government departments and agencies for tackling the barriers faced by young women in the NEET and EI group.

DATA USED

Understanding Society 2009-15

CITATION

Sue Maguire and Emma Mckay, *Young, female and forgotten*, Young Women's Trust report 2017 <https://www.youngwomenstrust.org/young-female-forgotten-2017>

FAMILY, HOUSEHOLD AND SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

Gender attitudes – do we learn them from our parents?

Grey divorce and mental health



Having a family, your parents' background, and owning a home

Parents' health and children's help

Gender attitudes – do we learn them from our parents?

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JAVIER POLAVIEJA | UNIVERSIDAD CARLOS III DE MADRID

In the UK women are still paid less than men, and do more unpaid work than men, even though there are more women in the workplace, laws against discrimination, and more people believing that girls and boys should have the same opportunities.

Women's employment rates overall have increased significantly in recent decades – in 2013, 67% of those aged between 16 and 64 were working. Over 40% of them, though, were working part-time, compared to 13% of working men. Women still work an average of 100 minutes a day less than men, and do around five hours more housework and 13 hours more family care per week.

One explanation for this might be that traditional expectations about the division of labour persist, and that they are being handed down across the generations. There has been a substantial decline in traditional gender attitudes around the world. In Britain in the mid-1980s, almost half the population agreed that “a man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family”, falling to 13% by 2012; but, among the more recent cohorts, traditional attitudes seem to be stabilising, rather than continuing to ‘die out’.

Previous research has shown a strong correlation between children's attitudes and those of their parents, but not how these attitudes are transferred – and it has tended to focus on mothers and daughters, not on men. Also, research tends to assume that parents are actively transferring their attitudes in what they say, but there may be differences between what parents say and what they do. This research wanted to see if children were learning from both.

Longitudinal household data allow research to examine parents' behaviour and attitudes, and the effects they have on children. In particular, this research wanted to establish whether fathers had more influence over boys' attitudes than girls', and whether the reverse was true for mothers.

Testing the effects of what parents said they believed about the gender division of labour, the analysis showed that boys are more affected by their fathers than by their mothers. Fathers' traditionalism influences boys even if mothers are not traditional, while mothers' traditionalism only influences boys if fathers are also traditional. Girls, on the other hand, seem to be influenced by the traditionalism of both parents to a similar extent.

Seeing how parents behave is a major part of how children form their attitudes to gender and work, regardless of what their parents say they believe.



When the researchers looked at whether both parents worked, and how much housework each parent actually did, they found that when mothers did more housework, boys had more traditional attitudes. Boys whose mothers worked full-time, however, tended to have less traditional attitudes. For girls, having a mother who worked full-time influenced their attitudes, but the amount of time their mother spent on housework didn't.

Overall, the results suggest that being a role model is an important way of influencing children's attitudes to the sexual division of labour. In other words, seeing how parents behave is a major part of how children form their attitudes, regardless of what the parents say they believe. Interestingly, if a son is raised in a home with a lone mother, this does not increase how much her attitudes influence him – but the amount of time she spends on housework does.

The findings also show that people with traditional attitudes in early adolescence are more likely to hold traditional attitudes later in life. For women, their attitudes as both children and adults are linked to their subsequent behaviour, in terms of housework and their attachment to the labour market. For men, only their childhood attitudes – not their adult ones – are significantly linked to how much housework they do as adults. This may suggest a developing inconsistency between men's stated attitudes and their behaviour, which could be a factor in continuing gender inequalities in paid and unpaid work, despite men being increasingly likely to express egalitarian views.

Ultimately, fathers matter in the cultural transmission of gender attitudes, with consequences not only for the division of labour within their families but also for subsequent generations.



KEY POINTS

The number of people who believe that men work and women look after the home has fallen substantially in recent decades, but women are still paid less than men, and do more unpaid work.

Traditional attitudes to the division of labour persist, and are being handed down across generations.

When mothers do more housework than fathers, sons develop more traditional attitudes. Boys whose mothers worked full-time tended to have less traditional attitudes.

Seeing how parents behave is a major part of how children form their attitudes, regardless of what the parents say they believe.

DATA USED

British Household Panel Survey Waves 3-18,
Understanding Society Wave 2

CITATION

Lucinda Platt and Javier Polavieja, Saying and Doing Gender: Intergenerational Transmission of Attitudes towards the Sexual Division of Labour, *European Sociological Review*, 2016.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcw037>

Grey divorce and mental health

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THIJS VAN DEN BROEK | ERASMUS UNIVERSITY ROTTERDAM

Divorce rates among older people are rising in many western countries, but we don't yet know very much about the consequences of this for mental health. There is only a small body of research so far looking into this area, and it often relies on cross-sectional data. It shows that divorced people have worse mental health in later life, but can't definitively tell us if there is a causal link, or if people's personality, socio-economic status and physical health have led to both their divorce and their poor mental health. Cross-sectional data also cannot distinguish between older people who have recently divorced and those who split from their partners some years ago.

Some research using longitudinal data shows that depressive symptoms increase after a break-up, and gradually recover. This new study looked at the run-up to a divorce as well – allowing the researchers to see whether people's mental health recovers fully to the level it was at two years before separation, or only to the level they had in the year before separation, when their circumstances would probably already have been stressful.

This approach allowed them to test two theories of divorce: separation may be a crisis, which involves a temporary decrease in wellbeing followed by a recovery, or a chronic condition, where a break-up causes a persistent decline in subjective wellbeing and mental health. They also looked at gender differences, at whether having children changed the impact of 'grey divorce', and whether the mental health implications of first divorces are different from those of subsequent divorces.

There are several possible effects these factors could have. For example, it is said that divorce affects women more than men, but most previous

research has found little evidence of this – and some suggests men benefit from divorce, while women suffer as a result of it, because they are less likely to remarry. If so, this could worsen with age.

Also, we know that having young children makes divorce worse for young parents, but we know much less about later life. Adult children can be an important source of companionship and support to ageing parents, and a divorce could jeopardise these relationships. Adult children could take sides in a conflict, or withdraw from relationships with both parents – and existing research has shown that parental divorce is associated with less frequent parent-child contact and a poorer quality relationship between parents and adult children.

The question of how many times a person has been married before might affect them positively or negatively. Having experienced divorce before might make a person better able to cope if it happens again – or it may create feelings of failure or social stigma.

The findings showed that older adults' depressive symptoms increase a year before divorce or separation – not surprising, given that the period leading up to a separation is likely to involve conflict and see the relationship deteriorating. They increase further at the point of separation, too. However, although there are fluctuations, the depressive symptoms quickly return to the level they were at before. This supports the 'crisis' model of divorce, rather than the 'chronic' idea of a long, slow recovery. The researchers also found no conclusive evidence of gender differences.

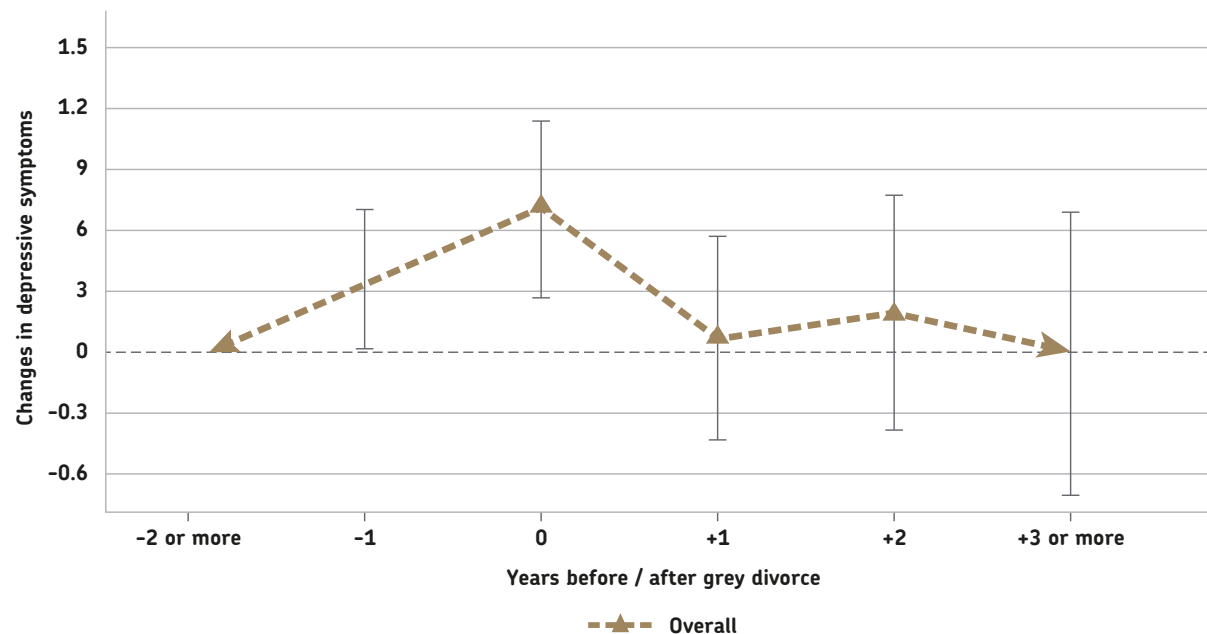
Divorce involves stress and conflict in the build-up to separation, but is followed by a fairly quick recovery.

There were some differences between people with children and those without. For both, their depressive symptoms increased in much the same way before divorce, but those without children tended to recover to their previous levels within a year, while those with children took up to three years to get back to their pre-divorce happiness levels.

There were some signs that older adults who divorce or separate for the second time adjust more slowly than first-time divorcees, but the evidence wasn't conclusive.

Overall, the results supported the idea of later-life divorce as a crisis which involves stress and conflict in the build-up to separation but is followed by a fairly quick recovery. Although these separations involve older (and more fragile) people, marital break-up does not have permanent effects on their mental health. The findings are derived from a relatively small sample size, but the rich longitudinal data allowed the researchers to look at changes in people's mental health before, during and after 'grey divorce'.

Predicted change in depressive symptoms relative to baseline



KEY POINTS

Divorce rates among older people are rising in many western countries, but we don't yet know very much about the consequences of this for mental health.

Older adults' depressive symptoms increase a year before divorce – as the relationship deteriorates – but quickly recover.

Older people without children recovered within a year, while those with children took up to three years to get back to pre-divorce happiness levels.

DATA USED

Understanding Society Waves 1-9

CITATION

Marco Tosi and Thijs van den Broek, Gray divorce and mental health in the United Kingdom, *Social Science & Medicine* 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2020.113030>

Having a family, your parents' background, and owning a home

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We know that family dynamics and parents' socioeconomic status influence when young adults buy their first home – but we know much less about how these factors may vary internationally. New research comparing British and German data has highlighted important national differences which may inform how governments can help young people in the housing system.

In many countries, young adults are finding it increasingly difficult to buy their first property because of a combination of factors such as high prices, debts (often due to the cost of higher education), delayed family formation, less welfare provision and difficulty in finding secure, well-paid work. Previous research shows that as precarity becomes more prevalent in young people's lives, homeownership increasingly depends on having parents who are in a financial position to help.

In Britain, owner-occupation is seen as a mark of social success, while renting, particularly in the social sector, is more stigmatised. Some see Germany – where the rate of homeownership is lower than the Western average – as a 'role model' of a better, fairer housing system; where it is still common to rent for a lifetime, renting is less stigmatised and rental property is often of higher quality than in Britain.

Renting is easier in Germany too. There has been greater public and, increasingly, private investment in rental housing there since the 1950s, while in Britain, the social housing sector has shrunk dramatically in recent

decades. In Germany, tenants' rights are protected by indefinite contracts and rent controls – and mortgage lending is conservative, predominantly targeted at better off social groups. In the UK, a competitive mortgage market – supported by government initiatives such as Help to Buy – offers a wide range of products to a broader cross-section of households.

Higher levels of education boost first-time homeownership in Britain, but education has no significant effects in Germany as comparatively few young people buy homes. Similarly, higher incomes increase the relative likelihood of first-time homeownership in both countries, but the effect is greater in Britain. The effect of employment status is also stronger in Britain, where securely employed people are more likely to become homeowners than any other group (such as the self-employed or people who work part time). In Germany, only unemployment significantly reduces the likelihood of first-time homeownership compared to secure employment.

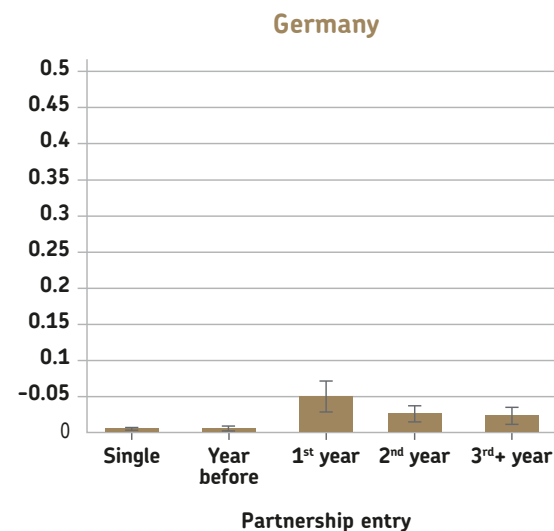
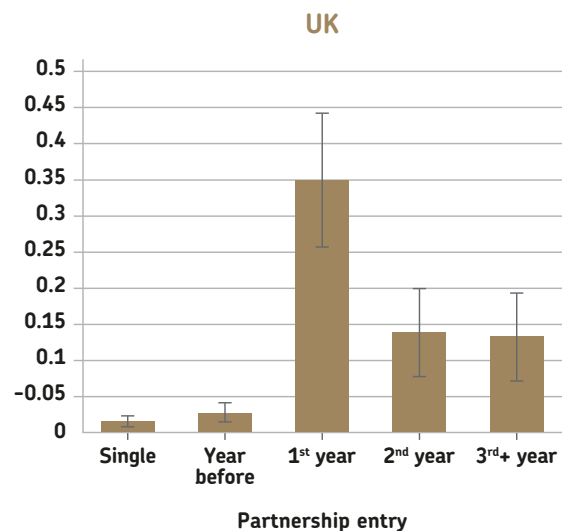
In terms of family dynamics, Germans tend to buy their first property around the time they have their first child, while Britons do it earlier, when forming partnerships. Also, greater time spent outside the parental home significantly reduces the likelihood of buying a home in Britain, but not in Germany. This could be because Britain's high rents make it hard to save for a deposit, and those in social housing already have relatively affordable and secure accommodation and so may not feel the same urge to own.

Becoming a first-time buyer in early adulthood in Britain is more common than in Germany, but also more influenced by socio-economic status.

When it comes to family background, people are more likely to buy their first home in Britain if their parent(s) had a degree, but the effect of parental higher education is negligible in Germany. In both countries, children are much less likely to buy a home if their parents' property is rented rather than owned. This is probably due to socialisation (what people are familiar with) as well as children of renters having less access to family wealth. The negative effect of renting is more pronounced when parents rent from a social rather than private landlord – perhaps a sign that parents in social housing are more economically disadvantaged than private renters.

Overall, buying a home in early adulthood is more common in Britain than in Germany, but also more strongly influenced by socio-economic status. These results indicate that British government initiatives to help young adults buy property are likely to disproportionately benefit more advantaged social groups and effectively increase inequality in the housing market and in wealth accumulation. Given the strong downward pressure on young Britons' homeownership, the German results suggest that a fairer way to improve young people's residential conditions would be to improve the cost and quality of rental property; thereby reducing the motivation to enter homeownership and more effectively helping those who lack the resources to own.

Probability of becoming a homeowner by partnership



KEY POINTS

In Germany, it is common to rent for a lifetime and renting carries far less stigma than in Britain.

Germans tend to buy their first property around the time they have their first child, while Britons do it earlier, when forming partnerships.

Becoming a first-time buyer in early adulthood in Britain is more common than in Germany, but also more influenced by socio-economic status.

A fairer way to improve young people's residential conditions would be to improve the cost and quality of renting, reducing the need to own property.

DATA USED

British Household Panel Survey and *Understanding Society* 1991-2016 and German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP)

CITATION

Sait Bayrakdar, Rory Coulter, Philipp Lersch and Sergi Vidal, Family formation, parental background and young adults' first entry into homeownership in Britain and Germany, *Housing Studies* 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673037.2018.1509949>

Parents' health and children's help

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As people age, especially if they're in poor health or have disabilities, they rely on their adult children to help them. This can play a crucial role in keeping parents in their own home and avoiding the high cost of care.

This research set out to discover how adult children respond to their parents' needs. Does their response vary according to whether the parent has a partner or is living alone, or on whether they are ill, and in what way?

It's an important area to understand, because while healthcare in the UK is free at the point of use, social care is organised by local authorities and varies by area according to budgets and local policies. Many authorities only give financial support to people who are classed as having substantial or critical needs, leaving significant numbers without state support.

There has been previous research in this area, but it has often been based on cross-sectional data, and it's not always easy to find reliable measures of people's need. This research uses *Understanding Society's* longitudinal data to look at the same people over time, to see how changes in their health, marital status and financial resources affect getting care from their children.

It looked first at self-reported health and its effects on four kinds of help: getting lifts in an adult child's car; washing, ironing or cleaning; help with basic personal needs, such as dressing; and dealing with personal affairs, like paying bills. The research took into account factors such as age, gender, marital status, income, education level and having a grandchild.

When a parent said their health was 'fair' or 'poor', 43% also reported that they got some regular help from children, compared to 29% for those with good to excellent health. This was more likely for women, though. If a mother's health deteriorated from excellent or good to fair or poor, the number of types of help they got went up, but fathers' health had no impact.

For either parent, being widowed, divorced, or separated significantly increased the chances of receiving help – as did having a grandchild, perhaps in return for the older generation's help with childcare.

The analysis also showed that getting these four kinds of help was more likely for parents who had lower levels of education, lower income, and more children. Family norms and culture may play a role, in that 'working class' parents may have higher expectations of help from their children, and may also have poorer health.

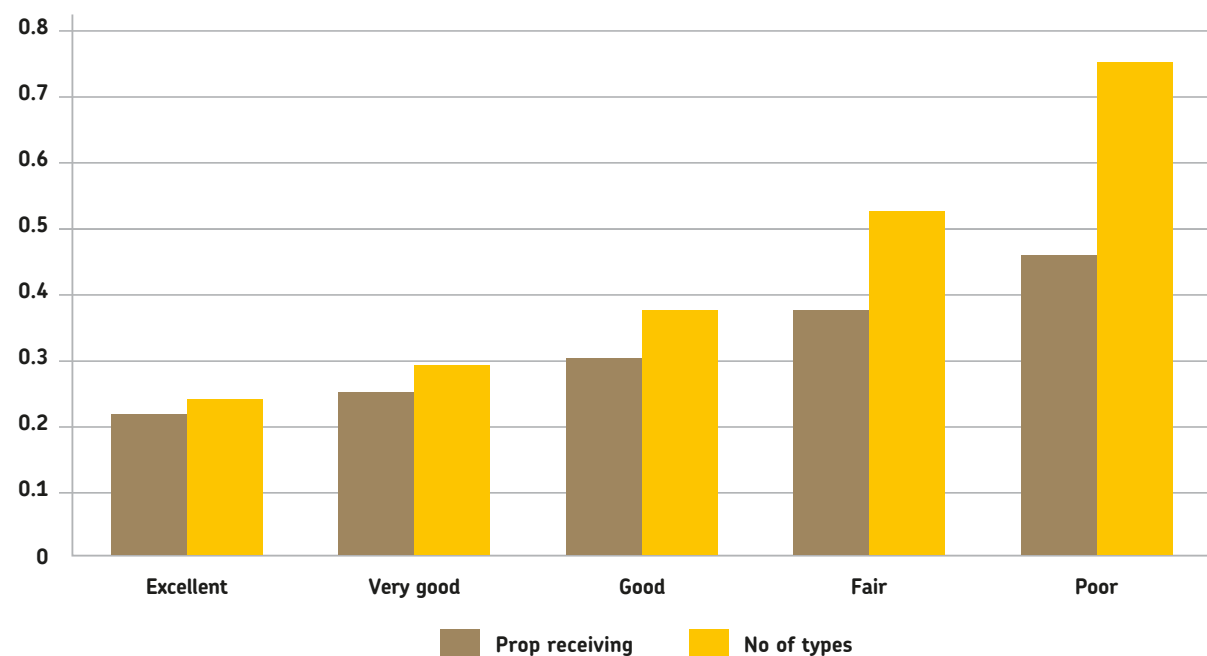
The research then looked specifically at help with activities of daily living (ADLs). These are defined as eating, bathing, getting dressed, going to the toilet, walking, and getting in and out of bed. They are particularly associated with needing help – as are another measure, instrumental ADLs: activities which aren't so fundamental, but which let an individual live independently.

Children may find it easier to help parents with driving, shopping or cooking than with eating, dressing and going to the toilet.

The findings showed that the number of types of help a parent needs increases with the number of problems with daily activities that they report. However, the level of help children provide doesn't change in response to more severe difficulties with activities of daily living – only in response to instrumental ADLs. Problems with ADLs such as eating, dressing, and going to the toilet may require help every day, which children find hard to provide because of other demands on their time. Help with instrumental ADLs and mobility, such as difficulties with driving, shopping, or cooking meals, are easier for children to provide, even on a regular basis.

More research is needed, because this study relied on parents' reports of the help they received, and it would be better to have reports from 'dyads' – paired reports from children and parents. However, it does shed useful light on the nature of social care, and who provides it. The cost of care was a significant issue in 2017's general election, and with an ageing population, it isn't going away.

Proportion of parents receiving 'costly help' from child by their health status



KEY POINTS

Ageing parents rely on help from their children in order to stay in their own home and avoid the high cost of residential care.

The amount of help children give varies according to their parents' health.

If a mother's health deteriorates, they receive more help, but fathers' health does not affect the amount of help they get.

Being widowed, divorced, or separated increases the amount of help a parent gets – as does having grandchildren.

DATA USED

British Panel Household Survey Waves 11 and 16, *Understanding Society* Waves 1-3 and the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing

CITATION

John Ermisch, Parents' health and children's help, *Advances in Life Course Research* 2014. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.alcr.2014.09.001>

Ethnic differences in starting a family

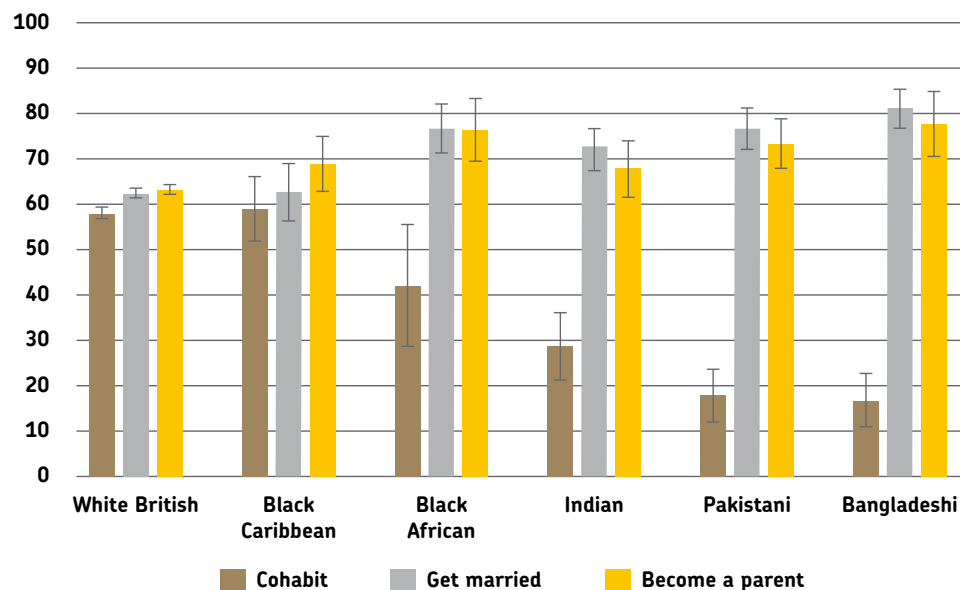
Are patterns of marriage and parenthood among the descendants of post second-world-war immigrants converging with those of white British young adults? This research found that expectations of marriage and parenthood are unanimously high, but that there is more uncertainty among White British and Black Caribbean adolescents about the age at which this will happen.

Most young White British men and women expect to cohabit – only 5% of men and 4% of women don't. The numbers of Black Caribbean men and women who expect to cohabit are similar to their White peers, but are significantly lower among Black Africans, Indians, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis. Over 50% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi men and almost 75% of women do not expect to cohabit.

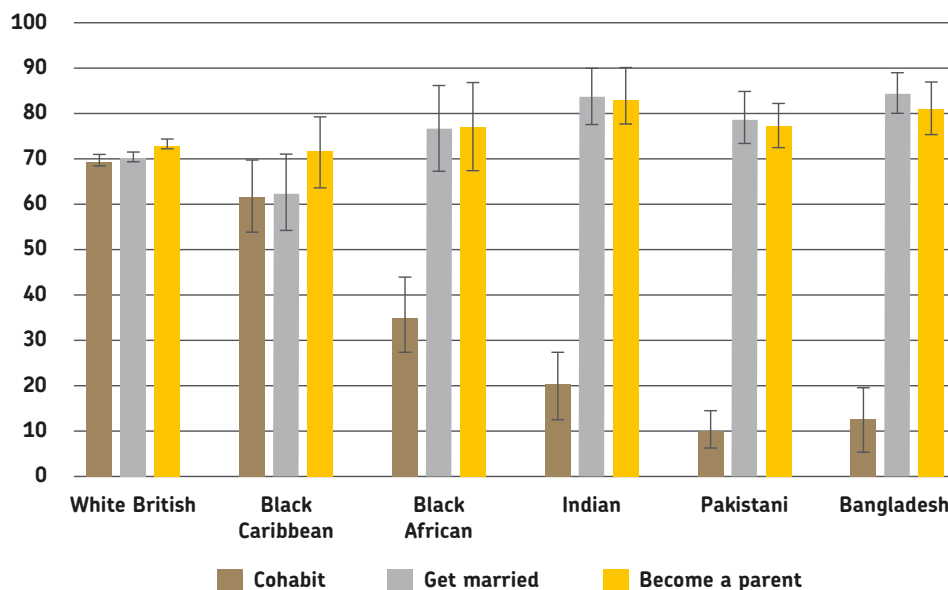
Second-generation Indians have slightly higher expectations for cohabitation than second-generation Bangladeshis or Pakistanis suggesting divergence within South Asian communities.

In South Asian communities, marriage practices have been changing, with young adults increasingly being involved in choosing who they marry. More research is needed into this and into how increasing educational enrolment and attainment are having an effect on the timing and type of partnership formation. Understanding ethnic differences in family formation can help policy and planners direct resources to the right people and places.

UK born women aged 16-21, 2010-2014, UK



UK born men aged 16-21, 2010-2014, UK



DATA USED

Understanding Society Waves 1-5

CITATION

Ann Berrington, Expectations for family transitions in young adulthood among the UK second generation, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2018.1539276>

How family ties affect long-distance moves

Research has shown that people who live close to their parents are less likely to move long distances than those who live further away from family. But does the amount of actual contact with the family member make a difference to the decision to move away? This research examined this, and also took into account contact with neighbours and how long people had lived in their home before they moved.

The findings showed that living far from parents increases the likelihood of moving longer distances. Seeing parents weekly and having more interactions with neighbours made this less likely, but those who lived far away were still more likely to move than those who lived near family.

These results held true if people had lived in their current home for five years or less, and if they were highly educated. It could be that making one move away from family (for work or higher education, for example) makes further moves in later years more likely. Alternatively, frequent contact with parents may be a sign of strong family ties, and this aspect of someone's life is what makes them less likely to move a long way away.

DATA USED

Understanding Society Waves 1–4

CITATION

John Ermisch and Clara H. Mulder, Migration Versus Immobility, and Ties to Parents, *European Journal of Population* 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10680-018-9494-0>

Men, housework and the number of children people have

Men's role in the home is changing, and this research asked whether, where men have more egalitarian views on gender roles and when a child is born, the men do more housework, compared to men with less egalitarian views. It also asked: is the effect greater the more children there are? And if men do more housework, does that affect the couple's intentions to have further children?

The findings showed that a male partner's housework hours increase with the number of children born – and the increase is steeper when he holds more progressive gender role attitudes. This supports the idea that more progressive men are more responsive to the increased housework burden that comes with additional children – but women still do considerably more than men.

The absolute increase in men's housework with each additional child is never more than an hour a week, even among the most egalitarian men. Increases in women's housework are at least two to three times higher.

Also, in theory, as men take on more domestic labour, their female partners should experience less work-family conflict, leading to couples intending to have additional children. This research did not find this to be true.

DATA USED

British Household Panel Survey various Waves from 1992–2007, *Understanding Society* Wave 4

CITATION

Barbara S. Okun and Liat Raz-Yurovich, Housework, Gender Role Attitudes, and Couples' Fertility Intentions: Reconsidering Men's Roles in Gender Theories of Family Change, *Population and Development Review*, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padr.12207>

The happiness gap

Research shows that married people have higher subjective wellbeing than those who are not married, but increasing numbers of people are cohabiting. Are they seeing the same beneficial effects? A 2019 study used *Understanding Society* and similar datasets from Australia, Germany, and Norway to compare married and cohabiting people, and their reported wellbeing levels, across the four countries.

There were some differences between countries, but overall the study shows that marriage doesn't lead to higher subjective wellbeing – especially when people's propensity to marry and their satisfaction with their relationship is taken into account. Marriage does not cause higher levels of wellbeing – instead, cohabitation is a symptom of economic and emotional strain. The findings suggest that policymakers wanting to increase people's happiness should aim to reduce disadvantages, in childhood and adulthood, instead of creating incentives to marry.

DATA USED

Understanding Society Wave 4, Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA), Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP, Germany), Norwegian Generations and Gender Survey (GGG)

CITATION

Brienna Perelli-Harris, Stefanie Hoherz, Trude Lappegård and Ann Evans, Mind the "Happiness" Gap: The Relationship Between Cohabitation, Marriage, and Subjective Well-being in the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, and Norway, *Demography*, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13524-019-00792-4>

How does our wellbeing respond to a recession?

Is urban regeneration good for our health?



Can data predict healthcare costs?

APOSTOLOS DAVILLAS | UNIVERSITY OF EAST ANGLIA
STEPHEN PUDNEY | UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

Healthcare costs have risen faster than economic growth in OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries, and this is expected to continue as medical technology advances, people's expectations rise, and their needs increase as the population ages. As a result, policymakers need to be able to identify which sections of the population have high and rising costs, so they can plan where to allocate limited resources, and target prevention.

The NHS spends about 10% of the UK's GDP, broadly in line with other European nations – but compared to other OECD countries, has less than the average number of doctors, nurses, and hospital beds per head. The UK's performance on some health measures is also below average – survival rates for breast and cervical cancer, for example, and preventable deaths.

Research using *Understanding Society* combined with NHS data looked at over 2,300 adults who were apparently healthy in 2010/11, and had not been diagnosed with any long-lasting health condition. The data collected in this wave of the Study included blood-based biomarker data collected by nurses, which captures several measures of a person's physical health, such as cholesterol levels and blood pressure. Brought together, these allow researchers to calculate a person's 'allostatic load' – the wear and tear on the body due to chronic stress.

Looking at the data five years later, the researchers were able to see how many times people had seen their GP, and been a hospital inpatient or outpatient each year in that time. This meant they could assess how useful biomarker data could be for predicting health service use and what it cost the public.

It is believed to be the first analysis of its kind, and found that biomarkers were a powerful predictor of future health care costs, which impose a significant burden on the health care system.

If each of the people with elevated biomarker levels reduced their allostatic load to average levels, this would mean an 18% reduction in predicted healthcare costs. The largest saving would be for hospital inpatient treatment.

The research also found systematic gender difference, with women experiencing about 20% higher health care costs than comparable men – mainly because women visit the GP and use outpatient services more than men do. There is also a strong education gradient in health care costs. For example, the five-year-ahead costs are about 16% higher for those with no educational qualifications compared to those with intermediate qualifications.

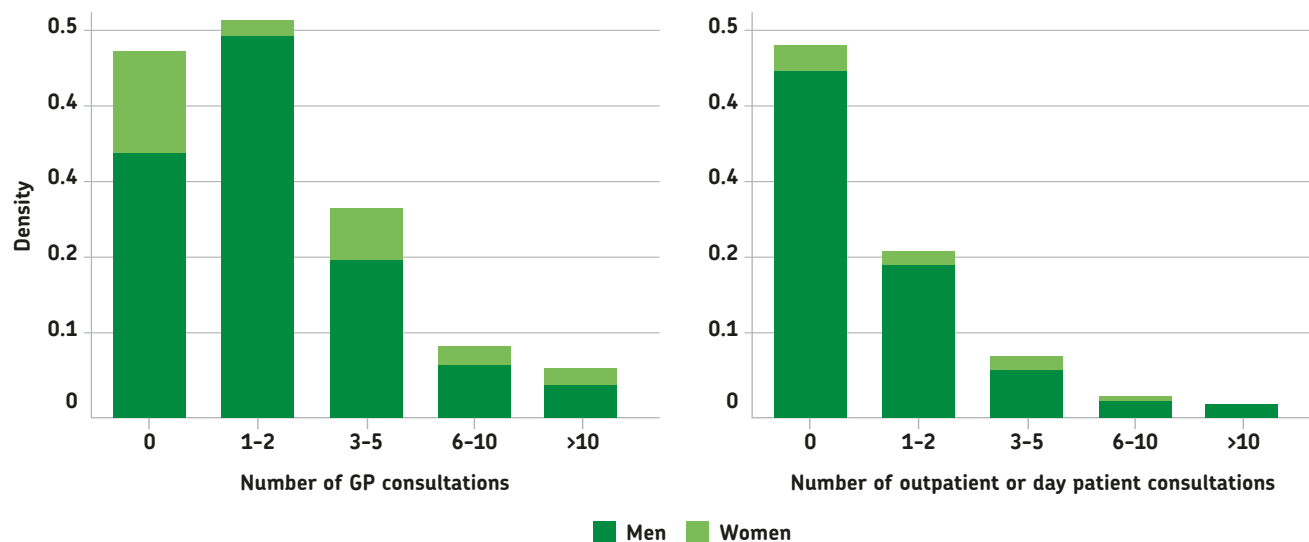
These results have potential implications for health policy in the UK and beyond. They can be used to indicate priority areas for interventions, such as screening programmes and health education initiatives. This could control future treatment costs for those who have not yet reached the stage of being diagnosed, but who are at risk of generating higher future healthcare costs.

For example, the NHS Health Check programme is currently available to everyone aged between 40 and 74. If these checks were targeted more precisely to make sure people at risk take them up, the programme could better identify the parts of the population which have the highest potential future healthcare needs and costs.

Biomarkers can be a powerful predictor of people's future healthcare costs.

This research also has implications for GPs' budgets. In England, these are currently allocated using capitation payments – giving practices a set amount for each person enrolled with them, per period of time, irrespective of an individual's actual use of the health service. If the capitation formula was more tailored to patients' morbidity data and other characteristics, this could mean better allocation of resources and better health outcomes.

Distribution of the numbers of GP and OP consultations in the preceeding 12 months by gender.



KEY POINTS

Health care costs have risen faster than economic growth in many developed countries.

The NHS spends about 10% of the UK's GDP, in line with other European nations.

It has fewer doctors, nurses and hospital beds per head and below average survival rates for breast and cervical cancer.

People with elevated biomarker levels will add about 18% to NHS costs after five years, compared to those with normal levels.

These results could help to target screening programmes and health education initiatives, and control future treatment costs.

DATA USED

Understanding Society Waves 2 and 7

CITATION

Apostolos Davillas, Stephen Pudney, Using biomarkers to predict healthcare costs: Evidence from a UK household panel, *Journal of Health Economics*, 2020.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhealeco.2020.102356>

‘Epigenetic clocks’ and measuring how well we age

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JONATHAN MIL | UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

Some people seem surprisingly young or old for their age, and scientists believe it may be possible to distinguish between your chronological and biological age – that is your age in years, compared to how well your body functions. A team of researchers has used DNA data from *Understanding Society* to understand how well epigenetics can help us to understand the link between the two, and ageing in general.

Epigenetics is the science of how environmental factors influence our genes, and one aspect of it, DNA methylation, allowed scientists to create an epigenetic clock, a method which is now widely used to determine biological age.

DNA methylation is a mechanism cells use to control gene expression – that is, whether (and when) a gene is turned on or off. This differs across cells and tissues and has been shown to change gradually as we age. The epigenetic clock was developed by charting how age affects DNA methylation levels throughout life – and it’s been suggested that the epigenetic clock reflects our ‘true’ cellular age, which can be altered by our health or the environment we live in.

Many studies have explored age acceleration – how our clocks might be sped up by illness or the environment, and even how this might relate to the risk of death. Essentially, researchers can calculate the difference between chronological and biological age for a set of people, and then take this difference and test whether it correlates with the profile of people suffering from a certain disease.

This could allow them to look at developmental changes, cumulative environmental effects and cellular ageing. Knowing more about how our bodies age makes the epigenetic clock of great interest, and raises the possibility of developing drugs which slow down the process.

However, this research using *Understanding Society*’s DNA data suggests the epigenetic clock model isn’t as reliable as previously thought. The original samples used in developing the clock were predominantly taken from younger people and didn’t include many from elderly people. Given what we already know about the biological changes that take place as we age, the researchers wanted to test the clock’s accuracy, particularly at the older end of the age spectrum.

By bringing together data on elderly people from two large studies, one performed in about 90 elderly post-mortem brains and the other in blood samples from nearly 1,200 people of all ages from *Understanding Society*, they compared two epigenetic clock models against DNA methylation results.

The analysis shows that epigenetic age doesn’t move at a steady pace throughout life, and performs differently in different tissues. In fact, the clock slows as we age, particularly as we enter old age. There was clear evidence, for example, that the epigenetic clock systematically underestimated people’s ages once they were over about 60. At the moment, the researchers don’t know why DNA methylation change slows down in this way, or what mechanisms are behind it.

The epigenetic clock is useful, but taking it at face value could lead to misleading results.

It was already known that DNA methylation changes are not linear over the lifespan. The clock has been updated to account for the big changes taking place in childhood and adolescence, for example. With the amount of data now available, it may be possible to create more detailed and accurate clocks for specific tissues and age ranges. For example, this research shows that, while there appears to be age acceleration in Alzheimer's disease, this is a statistical illusion produced by the slowing clock and the fact that Alzheimer's disease is progressive.

If it is possible to whittle away the discrepancy between DNA methylation and chronological age, that could add to our understanding of age acceleration. If it is different for different parts of the body, that might mean it's related to some central ageing mechanism.

The work shows that researchers need to be careful when using the epigenetic clock to estimate how old people are. It's a useful tool, but given the limited DNA methylation profile that it is based on, taking it at face value could lead to misleading results.



KEY POINTS

Scientists believe it may be possible to distinguish between your chronological and biological age – that is your age in years, compared to how well your body functions.

Epigenetics, the science of how environmental factors influence our genes, allowed scientists to create a method to determine biological age.

This research suggests the epigenetic clock model isn't as reliable as previously thought.

The epigenetic clock systematically underestimated people's ages once they were over about 60.

DATA USED

Understanding Society Waves 2-3, brain samples from MRC London Neurodegenerative Disease Brain Bank and Mount Sinai Alzheimer's disease and Schizophrenia Brain Bank

CITATION

Louis Y. El Khoury, Tyler Gorrie-Stone, Melissa Smart, Amanda Hughes, Yanchun Bao, Alexandria Andrayas, Joe Burrage, Eilis Hannon, Meena Kumari, Jonathan Mill & Leonard C. Schalkwyk
Systematic underestimation of the epigenetic clock and age acceleration in older subjects, *Genome Biology*, 2019.
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s13059-019-1810-4>

This article was adapted from *The Conversation*:
<https://theconversation.com/ageing-how-our-epigenetic-clocks-slow-down-as-we-get-older-129345>

How does our wellbeing respond to a recession?

DAVID BAYLISS AND WENDY OLSEN | UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER
PIERRE WALTHERY | UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

It's important to understand the effect of recessions on people's wellbeing to help shape social and economic policy. Earlier research has shown that, on average, people are happier when inflation and unemployment are low, with unemployment having the largest effect. Falls in wellbeing could be due to changes in our living conditions, caused by financial pressure, losing one's job, declines in public services or welfare. Alternatively, it could be a more cognitive response from thinking about the effects on other people. Previous research also found there was a decline in wellbeing at the time of the UK's recession in the early 1990s. Some research looking at the 2007-08 economic crisis suggests that wellbeing remained stable – but that was an average, which may not represent everyone's experiences.

With the 2007-08 crisis, people may have started becoming aware of it in 2007 with bankruptcies in the US and the collapse of Northern Rock in the UK, or with the bailout of the banks in 2008 and stock market falls in October that year. One theory is that people's wellbeing tracks the stock market, and that people's fears for the economy and the future are fuelled by media coverage. If this is the case, we would expect to see wellbeing fall around the time of the crisis and recover by 2010. However, data from the World Database of Happiness (from 2002 to 2011) shows life satisfaction averaging

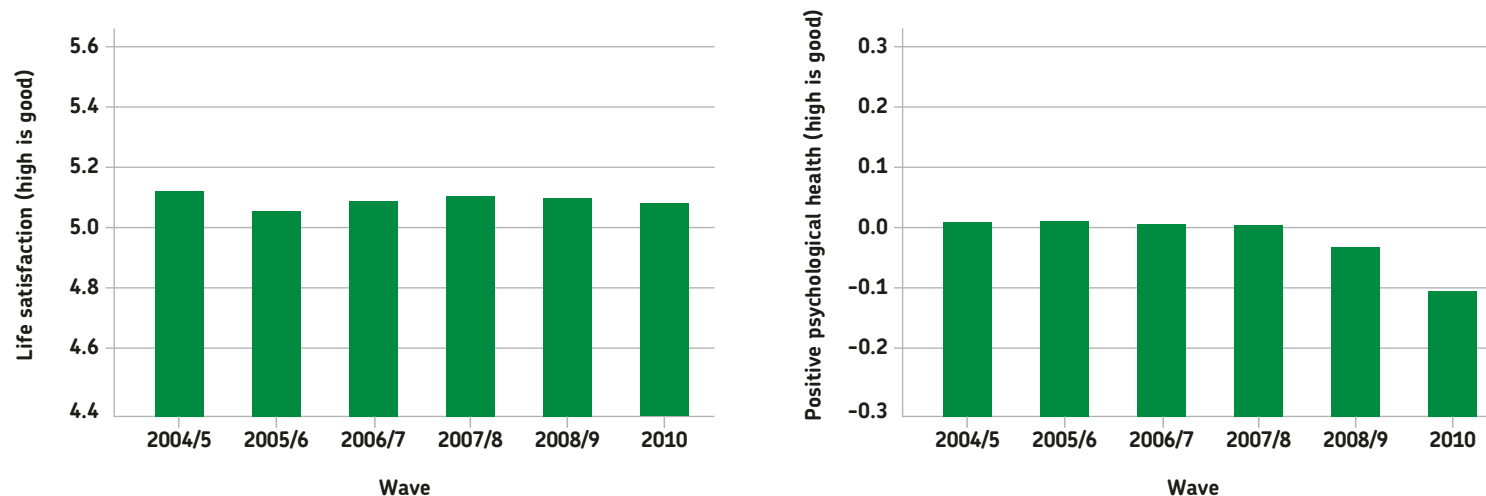
around 7 (out of 10) throughout the decade, and the European Quality of Life Survey also shows life satisfaction in the UK unchanged from 2007-11, in contrast to other European countries.

However, the question a survey asks can affect the answers, and to measure wellbeing, one might ask how satisfied someone is with their life now, or how they feel about their life compared to an imagined 'best possible life'. These could give us very different answers. It's also important to consider how many people were directly affected.

Although the 2008 recession was severe, the number of people who were made unemployed was relatively small. So, although job insecurity rose, if most people were still in their jobs, this may also explain why wellbeing remained relatively stable on average.

This paper compared two measures of wellbeing: self-reported life satisfaction and a measure of psychological health from the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12). It used *Understanding Society* and British Household Panel Survey data from 2004-10 – three waves from before the financial crisis

Wave-by-wave estimates of life satisfaction and positive psychological health



There was a significant decline in people's psychological health during and after the 2007-08 recession.

and three from after it. It looked at people of working age, and took account of sex, age, employment status, marital status, having children living at home, educational attainment, homeownership, disability, and household income.

The results showed that there was no clear trend in life satisfaction, but that there was a significant decline in people's psychological health during the recession. This was true, in particular, of women, people in older age bands (35-49 and 50+), people with disabilities, and those with lower average household income. One surprising result was that young people – who had reportedly been hit hard by the crisis – did not experience a greater average decline than other age groups.

People who were economically inactive, or in and out of employment, also had lower levels of positive psychological health than those who were employed the whole time – but those who were consistently unemployed did not. The findings also suggest that the fall in wellbeing around the time of a recession is experienced not only by the people who experience negative events such as unemployment, but also by the majority who remain employed.

Only 23% of the sample had improving positive psychological health over the recession period, compared to 44% before the crisis, and only about 1% showed no change in either period. Around 3.6% of respondents saw their psychological health fall by more than one standard deviation, compared to around 1% in whom it improved.

The researchers say that, although some research has suggested wellbeing remained stable, measures such as happiness and life satisfaction can mask the complexity of wellbeing and risk overlooking the impact of events such as recessions. There is strong evidence that people's psychological health varied substantially from the mean over the study period, and the researchers advocate a more nuanced definition of wellbeing, which includes happiness and life satisfaction, but recognises that they are not the only important elements.



KEY POINTS

It's important to understand the effect of recessions on people's wellbeing to help shape social and economic policy.

There was no clear trend in life satisfaction, but a significant decline in people's psychological health during the recession.

Psychological health declined for women, people over 35, people with disabilities, and those with lower average household income, but not for young people.

DATA USED

British Household Panel Survey and *Understanding Society* 2004-10

CITATION

David Bayliss, Wendy Olsen, Pierre Walthery, *Well-Being During Recession in the UK*. Applied Research in Quality of Life, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-016-9465-8>

Is urban regeneration good for our health?

GRETТА MOHAN, ALBERTO LONGO AND FRANK KEE | QUEENS UNIVERSITY BELFAST

Since the 1990s, there has been considerable research into the effects of urban regeneration on people's health, but without finding clear evidence that initiatives focused on specific areas have been effective. This research looked at 36 deprived communities in Northern Ireland, characterised by a legacy of sectarian conflict, and assessed the health impact of a major urban regeneration policy, Neighbourhood Renewal (NR).

NR was launched in 2003, and designed to last 7–10 years, helping neighbourhoods in the 10% most deprived urban wards in Northern Ireland. The scheme invested £194 million, or around £75 per head per year for each resident. It's not clear how much was spent specifically on health, but we do know that 27% of funds were allocated to social renewal, which had health as one of its objectives, and that some areas spent about 10–15% of their budgets on health schemes.

NR programmes encouraged physical activity and weight management, nutrition, mental wellbeing, social inclusion for people with disabilities and the elderly, and sexual health. They also sought to prevent suicide, raise drug and alcohol awareness, tackle food and fuel poverty, and encourage people to stop smoking. NR also looked at factors that determine health, such as employment, education, and the physical environment – so money was spent on skills, employability, crime prevention, improved housing and green space, too.

Northern Ireland is a unique place to study urban renewal and health, having experienced 30 years of conflict and psychological trauma, combined with chronic unemployment and too little investment. All of these are thought to have left a legacy of poor health in what the study calls “balkanised communities”.

The researchers looked at mental health, self-rated health, life satisfaction, smoking and exercise in NR areas before and after the scheme launched – and compared these areas to two groups of similarly deprived areas that didn't receive assistance and to the rest of Northern Ireland. They also looked for differences among men and women, people with different levels of education, the retired, the unemployed and homeowners.

The results showed that mental health stayed largely at the same level in NR areas, and declined slightly in the deprived places not included in the scheme. Over time, there was a gradual rise in the numbers reporting good or better physical health in both types of area over time. There was little change in life satisfaction in either.

Smoking rates were higher in NR areas, and these fell over time, but at a similar rate to the decline in other areas. The percentage of respondents exercising at least once a week steadily increased in both types of area.

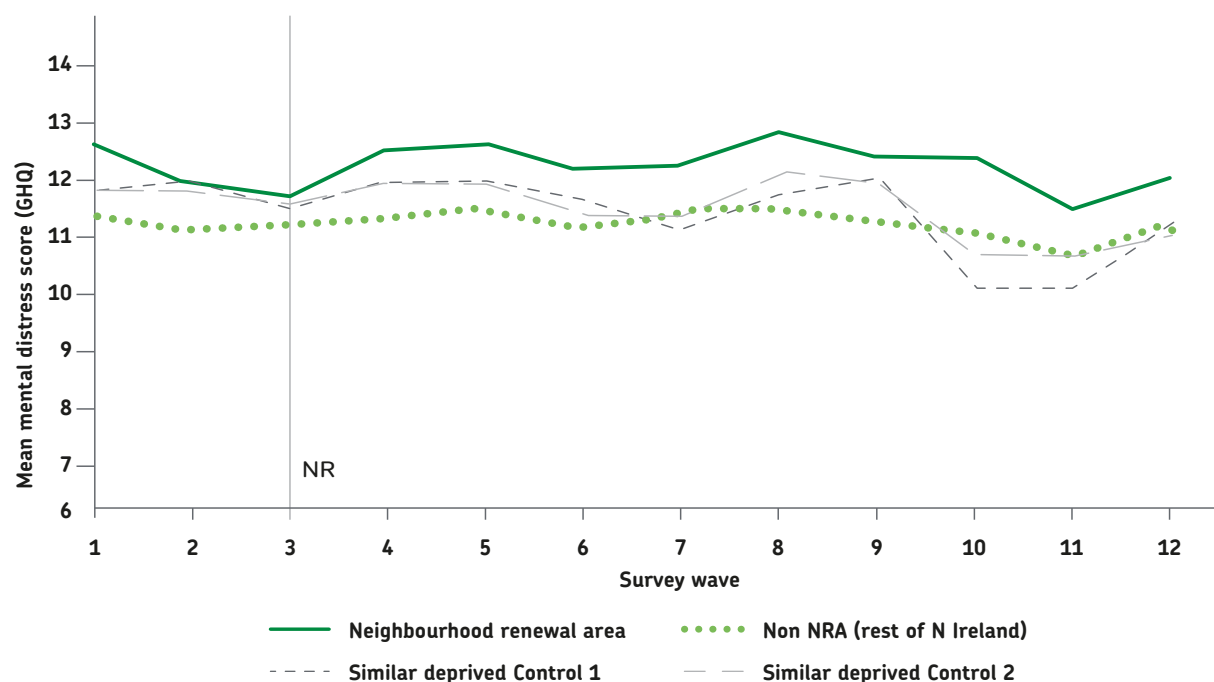
Neighbourhood Renewal did not appear to improve health, but may have prevented any widening of health inequalities.

Overall, then, the results did not show Neighbourhood Renewal raising the likelihood of good health. However, NR may have prevented any widening of health inequalities over the time the strategy was running, and it may have been beneficial for the health of some individual participants. It may be that the results were not better because the strategy did not reach people as well as was hoped, or often enough.

NR may also have had different effects in each area. Decision making was devolved to local partnerships, and for some health was a top priority. If the results were different in these areas, analysing average figures across all NR areas together (which is necessary for sample size) may mask that. Another consideration is that many factors that affect people's health and wellbeing accumulate during our lives, and experiences in childhood affect our later behaviours and health. Having greater access to healthy lifestyle classes might not be enough to change lifelong diet and physical activity habits.

It's possible that without Neighbourhood Renewal, health inequalities might have increased further, and more research may be needed to see what effect phasing out the scheme will have.

Mental health trends, 2001-12



KEY POINTS

Neighbourhood Renewal invested £194 million in 36 deprived communities in Northern Ireland.

Chronic unemployment, under-investment, and sectarian conflict have left a legacy of poor health in the region.

The programme set out to tackle poverty and poor health, encouraging physical activity, nutrition, mental wellbeing, and social inclusion.

The results did not show that Neighbourhood Renewal increased the likelihood of good health any more than in areas where it was not running, but it may have benefitted individuals, and prevented any widening of health inequalities.

DATA USED

Northern Ireland Household Panel Survey and *Understanding Society* 2001-12

CITATION

Gretta Mohan, Alberto Longo and Frank Kee, Evaluation of the health impact of an urban regeneration policy: Neighbourhood Renewal in Northern Ireland, *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*, 2017. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/jech-2017-209087>

The effect of Universal Credit on mental health

SOPHIE WICKHAM | UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL

An estimated 63,674 people experienced psychological distress between 2013 and 2018 due to the introduction of Universal Credit, and of these, over a third – 21,760 people – may have become clinically depressed, according to research using *Understanding Society*.

Previous research has suggested that mental health in the UK has deteriorated since 2000, and that welfare changes have played a part in this. Universal Credit replaced six different benefits designed to cover housing and living costs for people facing unemployment, disabilities, and low pay. It was designed to provide greater incentives for claimants to enter employment and mimic work responsibilities and receipt of a monthly salary. It was first introduced in the North West of England in 2013 and then rolled out in other areas, until, by the end of 2018, 1.6 million unemployed people were receiving it across the UK.

Universal Credit has been criticised for having less frequent payments than the benefits it replaced, as well as longer waits for initial payments and stricter requirements over claimants preparing for work. It has also seen more use of sanctions, which involve recipients losing some or all of their benefits if they don't meet requirements such as looking for work. As well as anecdotal reports of increased mental health difficulties and food bank use among claimants, qualitative research has shown negative effects on financial security, poverty and food insecurity, physical and mental health, and social and family lives and employment prospects.

This 2020 research used *Understanding Society*, linked to administrative data, and took advantage of Universal Credit's phased roll-out to look at changes in unemployed people's psychological distress as it was introduced in their area. The researchers measured mental health by using the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) and the Short Form Health Survey (SF-12). The mental health of unemployed people (i.e. intervention group) was compared to that of people who were working and/or not eligible for the benefit (comparison group).

Whichever measure of mental health was considered, the results showed that the mental health of those exposed to the benefit deteriorated compared to that of people who were not exposed to Universal Credit. Among the benefit recipients, the number reporting psychological distress rose by 21% compared to the period before the new benefit was introduced. The number of people not on Universal Credit who reported psychological distress remained stable.

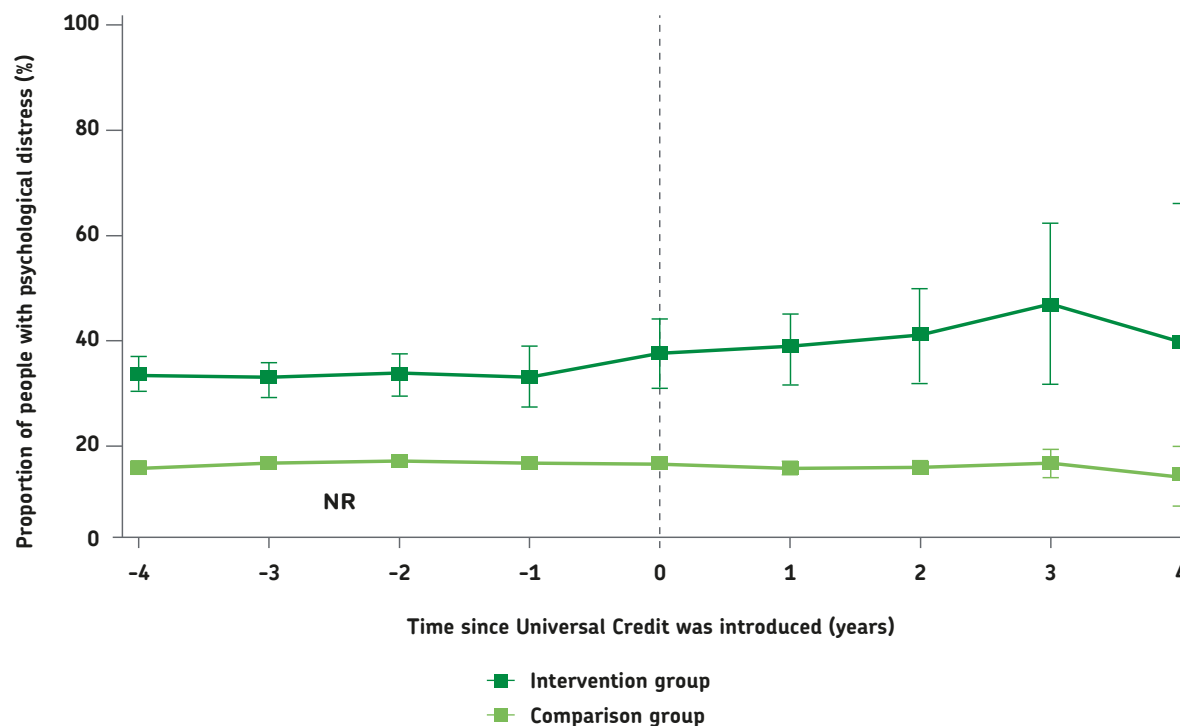
When the researchers compared the groups, the number of unemployed people reporting psychological distress rose by 6.6% relative to the group who were employed. In other words, 7 in every 100 unemployed people affected by Universal Credit experienced worse mental health. This could mean that over 63,000 more unemployed people were experiencing psychological distress following its introduction. Previous research has suggested that around a third of people reporting this could reach the diagnostic threshold for depression. In this study, that would represent over 21,000 people. The researchers suggest that, while the effect sizes in the study are moderate, the national impact of the new benefit could be far more significant.

An estimated 63,674 people experienced psychological distress due to the introduction of Universal Credit.

Overall, the findings add to what the researchers describe as a growing body of evidence showing that restricting access to and reducing the level of welfare benefits has a negative impact on health. Given that 64% of households in the UK receive some kind of benefit, even if changes to the welfare system have small effects by themselves, the implications could be substantial.

The research did not find any effects on physical health, but worsening mental health has the potential to increase costs for the NHS, social care, and welfare. The researchers noted that the government has commissioned an evaluation of Universal Credit, but that it would only be looking at labour market outcomes. The study found no evidence that being on Universal Credit was associated with moving into employment, despite this being one of the key goals, and the researchers say it is crucial that any assessment of welfare changes should measure the effect on health and wellbeing.

Psychological distress before and after Universal Credit



KEY POINTS

Mental health in the UK has deteriorated since 2000, and welfare changes may have played a part.

More than 63,000 people experienced psychological distress due to the introduction of Universal Credit.

Of these, more than 21,000 people may have become clinically depressed.

This could increase costs for the NHS, social care, and welfare.

The study found no evidence that Universal Credit was succeeding in moving people off benefits and into work.

DATA USED

Understanding Society Waves 1-8

CITATION

Sophie Wickham, Lee Bentley, Tanith Rose, Margaret Whitehead, David Taylor-Robinson, and Ben Barr, Effects on mental health of a UK welfare reform, Universal Credit: a longitudinal controlled study. *The Lancet Public Health*, 2020. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667\(20\)30026-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(20)30026-8)

Genes and hip dysplasia

Developmental dysplasia of the hip (DDH) is the most common skeletal developmental disease. Most people who have it are born with it, and it means their hip socket doesn't fully cover the ball at the top of their thighbone – allowing the hip joint to dislocate.

This study – the largest of DDH to date – used *Understanding Society's* biomarker data and created a complete picture of the condition's 'genetic architecture'. It has shown a link to a gene called GDF5, which is needed for normal bone and joint development (GDF stands for growth differentiation factor). Two variants of it, rs143383 and rs143384, have been associated with DDH in previous studies.

The new research confirms the link, and indicates that rs143384 is more strongly associated with DDH. It significantly increases our understanding of the condition, and proves the usefulness of large-scale datasets and genomics studies for learning about complex diseases.

DATA USED

Understanding Society Wave 2

CITATION

Hatzikotoulas, K., Roposch, A., Wainwright, A. et al. Genome-wide association study of developmental dysplasia of the hip identifies an association with GDF5. *Communications Biology*, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s42003-018-0052-4>

How can governments encourage active travel?

Many countries promote active travel – commuting by foot, bike, or public transport – and research using *Understanding Society* has found patterns of travel which can help to shape governments' policies. It found that young people (16–34) are more likely to take up active travel than middle-aged or older people – but also more likely to stop.

How we commute seems to become more stable with age – that is, the older we get, the more likely we are to stick with the methods of travel we're used to. Younger people may be more likely to try different forms of transport, and to cycle if there is infrastructure in place (such as cycle lanes). Older people are more likely to have health conditions which prevent them walking, cycling or using public transport – but those who started to do so when younger may have better physical health as a result, and not feel the need to give up.

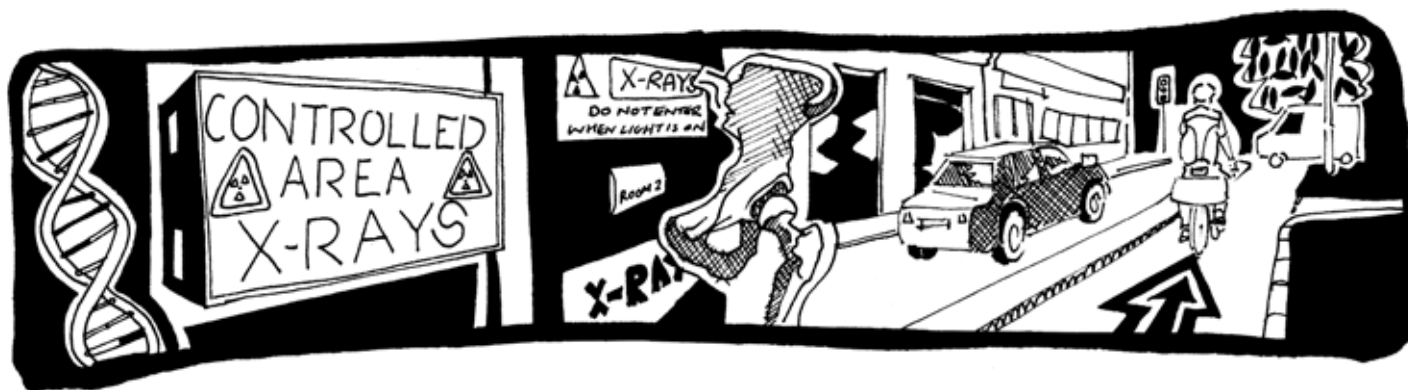
The research suggests there are critical age periods when governments can intervene to encourage active commuting through tax relief or health promotion programmes.

DATA USED

Understanding Society Waves 2 and 6

CITATION

Chance Pistoll and Steven Cummins, Exploring changes in active travel uptake and cessation across the lifespan: Longitudinal evidence from the UK Household Longitudinal Survey, *Preventive Medicine Reports*, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pmedr.2018.11.008>



The Marmot review 10 years on

The 2010's Marmot review, *Fair Society Healthy Lives*, proposed a series of strategies for reducing health inequalities, including giving children the best start in life, and ensuring a healthy standard of living for all.

Professor Sir Michael Marmot followed it up in 2020, and found that health inequalities have widened overall, and the amount of time people spend in poor health has increased since 2010. For the first time in more than 100 years, life expectancy has failed to increase across the country, and has actually declined for the poorest 10% of women. The north/south health gap has increased, with the largest decreases in health happening in the most deprived 10% of neighbourhoods in the North East, and the largest increases in the least deprived 10% of neighbourhoods in London.

DATA USED

Understanding Society 2009-11

CITATION

Michael Marmot, Jessica Allen, Tammy Boyce, Peter Goldblatt and Joana Morrison, Health Equity in England – The Marmot Review 10 Years On, Institute of Health Equity, 2020. <http://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/the-marmot-review-10-years-on>

Mental health in a pandemic

Before Covid-19, 18.9% of the UK population had clinically significant signs of mental distress, and this had climbed to 27.3% a month into lockdown, according to research using *Understanding Society*. Looking at changes in people's general health questionnaire scores (GHQ-12, which measures mental health) and accounting for pre-pandemic trends, the greatest increases were found in 18-24-year-olds, women, and people living with young children.

In April 2020, mental health was poorer in people who were unemployed or economically inactive before lockdown, but the drop in mental health was greater among those who were employed before the pandemic. Some in this group will have lost their jobs, seen their income fall, been furloughed, or had to work in ways that exposed them to infection.

As the economic consequences develop, when furloughs turn to redundancies, mortgage holidays expire, and recession takes effect, sustained distress and deterioration in mental health is likely. Pre-existing mental health inequalities could become more entrenched, and tackling them even more challenging. Government policy will need to focus on factors such as access to outside and inside space, household crowding, lack of schooling and childcare, food insecurity, domestic violence, and addiction. They will need to provide adequately resourced services to mitigate and manage additional needs.

DATA USED

Understanding Society Waves 8-9, *Understanding Society* Covid-19 Survey April 2020

CITATION

Matthias Pierce, Holly Hope, Tamsin Ford, Stephani Hatch, Matthew Hotopf, Ann John, Evangelos Kontopantelis, Roger Webb, Simon Wessely, Sally McManus, and Kathryn M Abel, Mental health before and during the Covid-19 pandemic: a longitudinal probability sample survey of the UK population, *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 2020. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(20\)30308-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(20)30308-4)

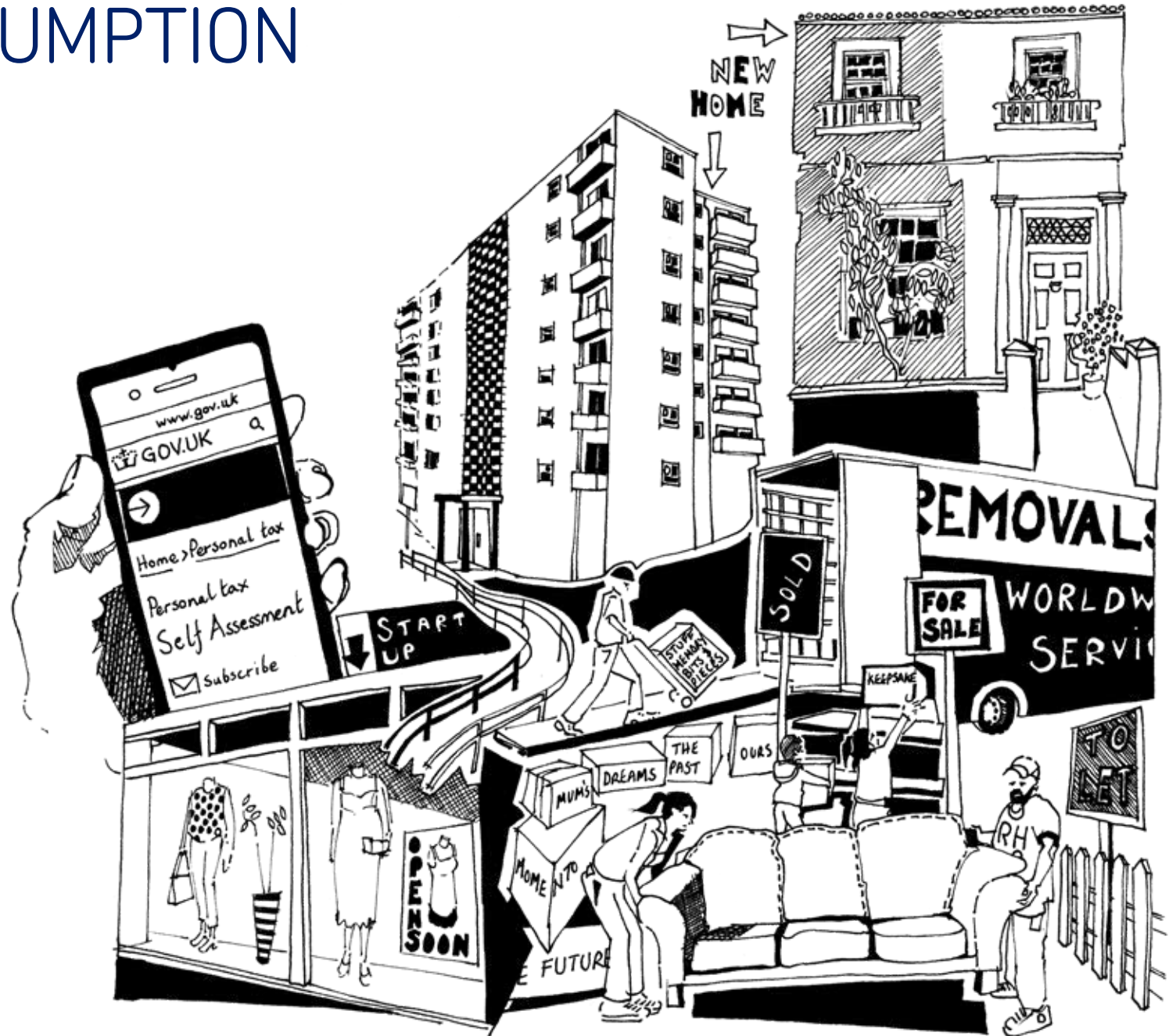
INCOME, CONSUMPTION AND WEALTH

Measuring poverty

Poverty was bad for
health before Covid-19

Did austerity cause Brexit?

What causes
'financial strain'?



Measuring poverty

SOCIAL METRICS COMMISSION

The Social Metrics Commission was founded in 2016 to develop a new approach to measuring poverty. The government had abolished the previous definition – which said that people earning below 60% of median income were poor – in England the year before. This measure had been criticised for producing paradoxical results, such as a fall in child poverty after the 2008 financial crisis, and for not taking into account causes of poverty, such as family breakdown and worklessness.

The Commission uses a range of data, including *Understanding Society*, to identify those least able to make ends meet and provide an understanding of the nature of poverty, including its depth and persistence, and an assessment of the lived experience of those living in poverty compared to those above the poverty line. It specifically uses *Understanding Society* to examine persistence and lived experience of poverty.

The Commission published its first report in 2018, and by design suggested that the same number of people were in poverty in the UK as previously thought. In its latest report, *Measuring Poverty 2020*, the Commission found that overall rates of poverty had changed little over the previous 20 years. Using data from 2018-19, the report highlighted a poverty rate of 22%, the same as in the previous year and only slightly lower than the 23% seen in 2000-01. This means that 14.4 million people in the UK are living in families in poverty – 33% of children and 22% of all working-age adults.

Poverty rates have fallen for some groups – from 62% to 48% for people in lone-parent families between 2000-01 and 2018-19, for example,

and from 18% to 11% for pension-age adults. However, more people are now in deep poverty – that is, living more than 50% below the poverty line. This number has increased from 2.8m people (5% of the population) in 2000-01 to 4.5m people (7% of the population). Levels of persistent poverty have largely not changed, standing at 11% of the population. This means that 7.1m people in the UK are in poverty, and have been for at least two of the last three years.

In the 2020 report, the Commission uses the data to define four types of poverty: deep and persistent; deep but not persistent; less than 50% below the poverty line, but persistent; and less than 50% below the poverty line, and not persistent. People in different types of family can be placed in each of these categories, allowing for an understanding of how poverty types vary.

For example, 26% of single people with no children who are in poverty are in the deep and persistent category, compared to 16% of people in lone-parent families in poverty, while 42% of people in lone-parent families in poverty are less than 50% below the poverty line and in persistent poverty.

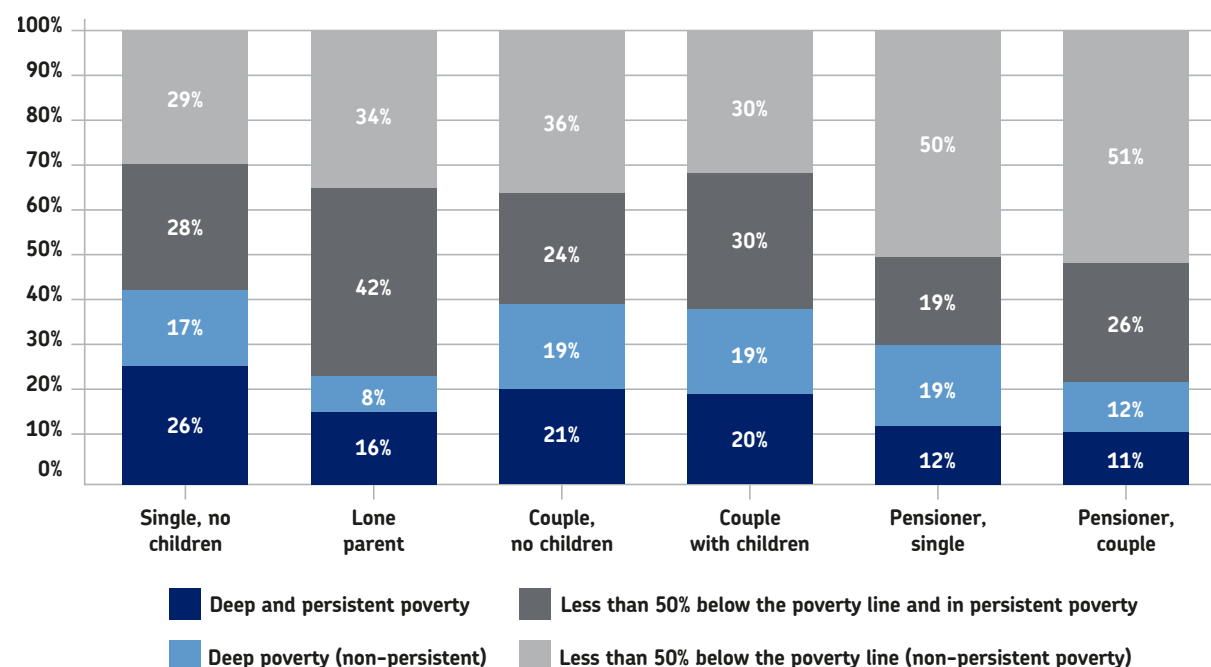
The report says this shows “the importance of not regarding the 22% of the UK population in poverty as a single homogenous group”. Some families are more likely than others to experience poverty, but the type of poverty they experience can vary significantly. For some, it will be severe, but short-lived; for others, less severe, but long-lasting. For some, it will be both deep and long term.

Overall rates of poverty have changed little in 20 years.

When highlighting the lived experience of poverty, the Commission considers aspects of people's lives such as health, education and family finances. For example, the 2020 report shows that one in five (20%) people in poverty live in a family where no one has any formal qualifications, compared to less than one in ten (8%) of those in families not in poverty. Half of people in poverty live in a family that includes a disabled person, compared to 36% of people who are not in poverty.

Since 2019, the Commission has been working with the Department for Work and Pensions to use its new measures to develop experimental statistics on poverty, the first step towards National Statistics on the subject. The report suggests that a sustainable approach to tackling poverty will require action on all the different types of poverty, which, given their varied causes and implications, will require different short- and long- term policy responses.

Type of poverty, by family type, 2017/18



KEY POINTS

In 2020, the Social Metrics Commission found that overall rates of poverty had changed little over the previous 20 years.

Over 7 million people in the UK (11% of the population) are in persistent poverty – meaning they are poor, and have been for at least two of the last three years.

Since 2019, the Department for Work and Pensions has begun to develop Experimental Statistics based on the Commission's approach.

DATA USED

Understanding Society Waves 1-9, and Family Resources Survey and DWP Households Below Average Income data

CITATION

Philippa Stroud, Matthew Oakley, Emily Harris, Jessica van Wijgerden and Jo Nussbaum, *Measuring Poverty 2020*, Social Metrics Commission. <https://socialmetricscommission.org.uk/measuring-poverty-2020/>

Poverty was bad for health before Covid-19

ADAM TINSON | THE HEALTH FOUNDATION

The fatality rate for Covid-19 was far higher among people from more socio-economically deprived areas, but the unequal impact should not have come as a surprise, according to a report from The Health Foundation which uses *Understanding Society* data.

It says that income is already known to affect health: for example, people in the bottom 40% of the income distribution are almost twice as likely to report poor health than those in the top 20%. We also know that income and health can affect each other. As well as lower income being associated with more 'stressors' which can harm health, poor health can also limit opportunities to find good, stable employment and thus affect income.

Persistent poverty – defined as having an income below 60% of the median for three of the last four years of data – is a particular problem, because it is associated with worse health than contemporary poverty (in poverty in the current year of data, but not three of the previous four years). Using *Understanding Society*, The Health Foundation found that in 2017/18, 30% of people in persistent poverty were in poor health, compared to 25% of those in contemporary poverty, and 15% of those not in poverty.

The research also used *Understanding Society's* Covid-19 survey to examine which groups suffered most from the pandemic's impact on employment. It found that unemployment has been greatest for those who have in the past been on the lowest incomes. The number of people (both employees and the self-employed) who lost their jobs between January/February and April was twice as high for those in the bottom income quintile as for those any other quintile (7.2% compared to 3.2-3.5%). Employees in lower income

quintiles are also more likely to have been furloughed: around 28%, compared to 17% in the top quintile.

The Health Foundation also suggests that people were not ready for an economic shock. The pandemic arrived at a time of high employment, but the recovery in jobs after the 2008 crash was not matched by an increase in the quality of employment. Many of the gains since the financial crisis had been largely in part-time, self-employed, or temporary work, and incomes, particularly for working-age families, had stagnated.

Although the impact of employment and earnings loss on household income is lessened by the Job Retention Scheme and Self-Employment Income Support Scheme, hardship is expected across the income distribution, and the consequences are likely to be more severe for lower-income families. They tend to spend more of their incomes on essentials, giving them less room to manoeuvre, and to have fewer, or no, savings to fall back on.

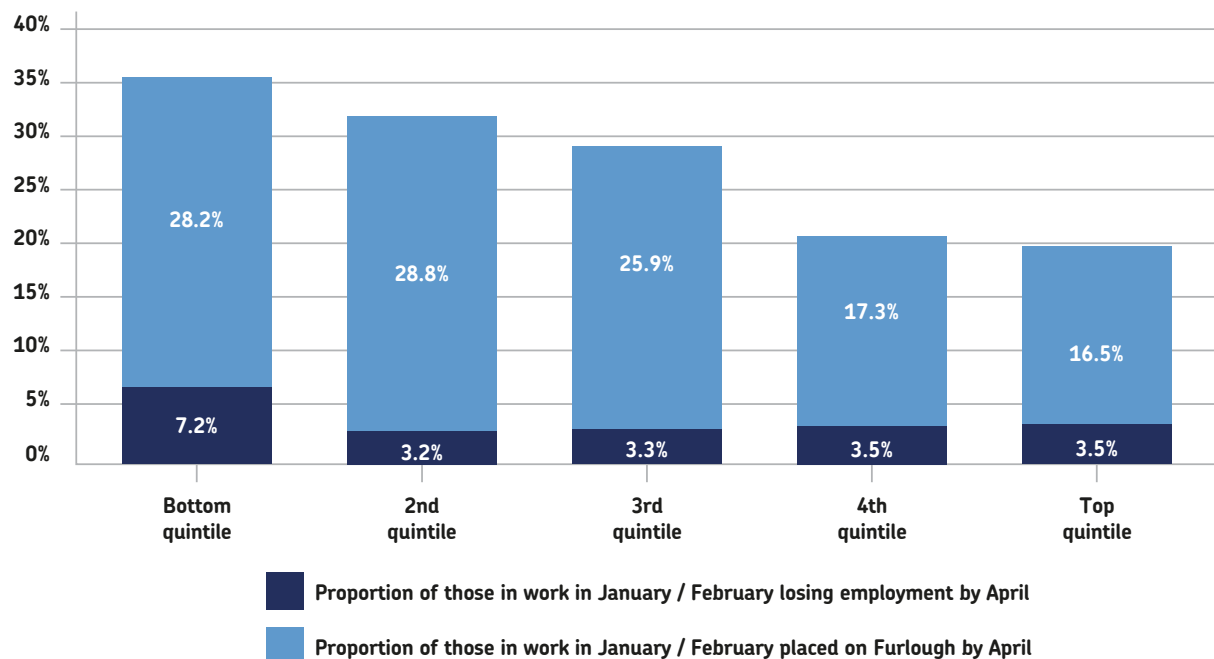
The Health Foundation makes a number of recommendations, including thinking of public health and economic growth as linked, rather than things which the government has to choose between. Economic policies can create incentives to protect health. Statutory sick pay, for example, is currently low, but could increase to help people who have to self-isolate. The government could also encourage practical support for people who need to retrain to find a new job – and financial support for those who rent privately and face eviction. Because there will be more people wanting jobs than opportunities available, the Health Foundation suggests benefit conditions should be less harsh than they have been in recent years.

The pandemic arrived at a time of high employment, but the recovery in jobs after the 2008 crash was not matched by an increase in the quality of employment.

In the longer term, reducing the burden of poverty would also reduce the future burden on the nation's health. For example, more affordable housing would decrease the pressures on family incomes from housing costs; more investment in early years services and childcare would support children in poverty; and better quality, higher paid work, and better local welfare provision would protect the most vulnerable.

Finally, the Health Foundation says, a cross-government health inequalities strategy could include action to boost incomes as part of the government's aim to 'level-up' opportunity across the country.

Changes to employment earnings by income quintile, UK



KEY POINTS

The fatality rate for Covid-19 was far higher among people from more socioeconomically deprived areas.

In 2017-18, 30% of people in persistent poverty were in poor health, compared to 15% of those not in poverty.

Since the pandemic began, unemployment has been highest for those who have historically been on the lowest incomes.

A health inequalities strategy should boost incomes to help the government's aim to 'level-up' opportunity across the country.

DATA USED

Understanding Society Waves 5-8 and Covid-19 survey

CITATION

Adam Tinson, Living in poverty was bad for your health long before Covid-19, 2020. <https://www.health.org.uk/publications/long-reads/living-in-poverty-was-bad-for-your-health-long-before-Covid-19>

Did austerity cause Brexit?

THIEMO FETZER | UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

Research has shown that parts of the UK which voted to leave the European Union in the 2016 referendum tended to be more deprived, and have lower income levels and fewer high-status jobs. However, research using different kinds of election data and *Understanding Society* shows that these factors alone did not make a Leave vote a foregone conclusion. Instead, the UK government's austerity measures and welfare reforms after 2010 may have boosted Leave support by as much as 10%.

Across the UK, local authority spending per person fell by about 23% in real terms between 2010 and 2015, but the poorest areas were the hardest hit. These places tended to have a larger share of people in routine jobs, and with lower levels of education, and more people working in retail and manufacturing. Drops in some of them reached 46%. Research in 2013 estimated that the 2012 Welfare Reform Act would cost every working-age Briton, on average, around £440 per year. Average household disposable income in the UK is around £27,300, so for many, this would represent a significant drop – and, again, the cost varied across the UK, from around £914 in Blackpool to just above £177 in the City of London.

To study the impact of the welfare cuts on political leanings, the research studies to what extent people likely to have been exposed to specific welfare cuts shifted their political support to UKIP between 2010 and 2015, and to what extent this translates into a higher proclivity to support Leave in 2016. The paper considered all types of UK election that took place since

2000, and found that poorer areas, with more routine jobs and lower levels of education, all saw an increase in UKIP support, but only after most of the welfare cuts due to the austerity program were implemented. In the areas most affected by austerity, UKIP's vote share went up 3.6% in the 2014 European elections, and by 11.6% in the last local elections before the referendum. The research also looked at jobs in retail and manufacturing, where the former offer relatively low-quality work, and the latter have been reduced by globalisation. Both sectors are disproportionately affected by the contraction in local incomes caused by austerity. In areas with a larger share of retail and manufacturing jobs, again there are significant increases in electoral support for UKIP, but only after 2010.

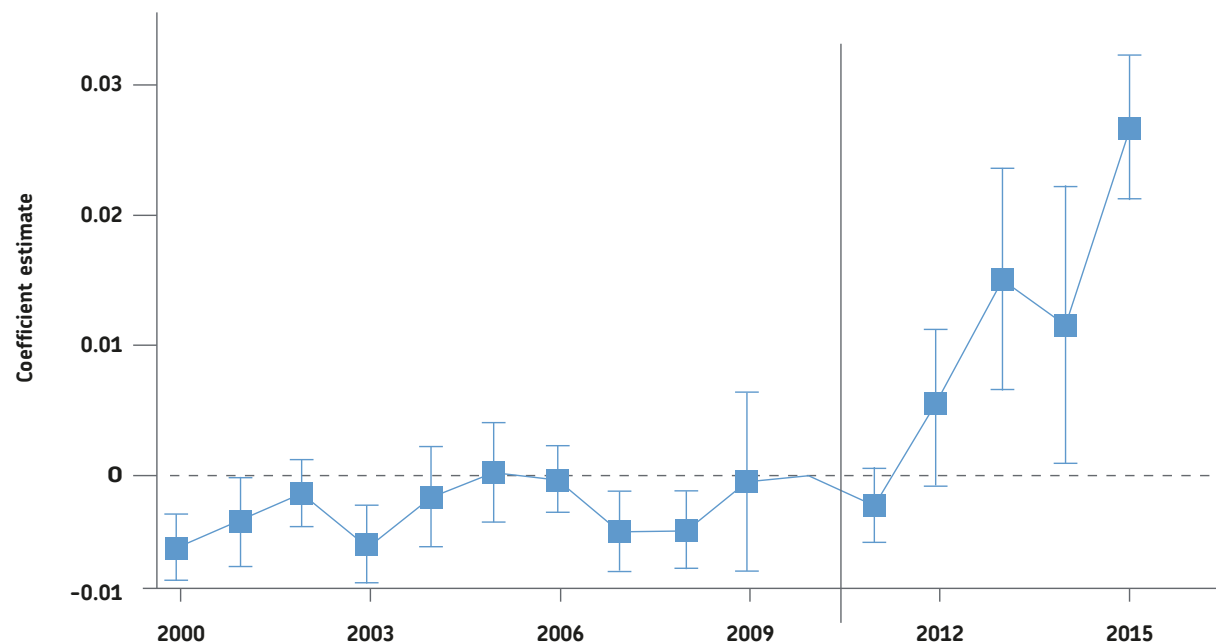
People affected by a council tax benefit cut from April 2013 saw notable rises in support for UKIP, but only after April 2013 – and were also more likely to report being under financial strain, and falling behind with council tax payments. Similarly, people in households hit by changes to Housing Benefit covering spare rooms, which became known as the 'bedroom tax', saw a dramatic rise in support for UKIP after the housing benefit cuts were implemented, compared to people in unaffected households. Rent arrears increased for those affected, and some opted to move to smaller homes. People affected by these changes show an increased propensity to support UKIP of between 2.6 and 5.1%, and an increased likelihood of voting Leave of 6.8%.

The welfare state had been evening income inequalities out, but that came to an end with the advent of austerity.

They also became significantly more likely to agree with the statements that they “Don’t have a say in what government does,” that “Public officials do not care,” and that “Your vote is unlikely to make a difference.” These perceptions of having no political voice were a significant factor in the EU referendum campaign.

The research highlighted the importance of welfare cuts in a context of growing income inequality. Income for lower-skilled work has declined significantly over time, while income for those in highly skilled work has increased markedly. The welfare state had been evening these inequalities out up to around 2010 – but that came to an end with the advent of austerity, which is the key to understanding Brexit. Welfare reforms were a driving factor behind anti-establishment feeling, and support for UKIP and Leave. The results suggest that, had it not been for austerity, the EU referendum either may not have taken place, or Remain could have won.

Percentage of votes for UKIP in English and Welsh local council elections from 2000–2015



KEY POINTS

Parts of the UK which voted Leave in 2016 were likely to be deprived, have lower income levels and have fewer high-status jobs.

Research estimates that welfare reforms cost working-age people in Britain around £440 a year each.

Austerity measures and welfare reforms after 2010 may have boosted Leave support by as much as 10%.

Without austerity, the EU referendum either may not have taken place, or Remain might have won.

DATA USED

Understanding Society Waves 1–8, with Westminster, European, and local council election data 2000–15

CITATION

Thiemo Fetzer, Did Austerity Cause Brexit?, *American Economic Review* 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.20181164>

What causes 'financial strain'?

DECLAN FRENCH | QUEENS UNIVERSITY BELFAST

Times of economic uncertainty can cause people significant financial strain. Research using *Understanding Society* and British Household Panel Survey data from 2001-15 explored the economic crisis of 2008 and austerity after 2010 to ask what causes financial strain, and the role of unexpected events.

Previous research has shown that objective measures of debt or arrears are not the best way to assess the impact financial difficulties can have on mental health. Instead, it's the subjective feeling of not being able to cope financially that affects people. This research therefore used a subjective measure of financial strain which people give in answer to the question 'How well would you say you yourself are managing financially these days?' There are five possible responses – 'living comfortably', 'doing all right', 'just about getting by', 'finding it quite difficult', and 'finding it very difficult', and this research defined a household as being under financial strain if the head of it said they were in one of the last two categories. It also looked at the scores people gave for their mental health in the general health questionnaire (GHQ-12), where a score of 4 or more is a sign of poor mental health.

The findings showed that if someone's secured debt (a mortgage, for example) increases 10% in relation to their annual household income, that only increases the likelihood of them having a GHQ-12 score of 4 or more by 0.03%. However, being under financial strain increases the probability of poor mental health by 14.6%. Looking at unsecured debt (such as credit cards and utility bills), the researcher found that an increase in the ratio of unsecured debt to annual household income had no effect, but financial strain increased the likelihood of poor mental health by 19.5%.

There was also an effect on physical health, although this was smaller. Heads of financially strained households were 5% more likely to report poor health. Again, the effects of debt (both secured and unsecured) were much smaller, showing that it is not how much money people owe which is the main problem, but their perception of how difficult their financial situation is. The researcher considered whether instead of financial difficulties causing poor health, it was actually the other way around, and that poor health – by preventing someone working, for example – could cause financial difficulties. However, even when he eliminated households where any adult was not working in any wave of data, financial strain still increased the probability of reporting poor health by 3.6%.

The research then turned to disability welfare reform, after October 2010, which saw a number of benefits, such as Incapacity Benefit, replaced. Recipients were reassessed to see if they were eligible for the new Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). This was designed to tighten eligibility criteria and help able-bodied claimants return to work. The government made a commitment that no-one would lose money by moving to ESA at the point when they switched, but moving from Incapacity Benefit or Severe Disablement Allowance onto ESA made financial strain worse – by 5.6% in the short term, and 8% in the long term. If they were not losing money, this suggests that financial strain was caused by the uncertainty of a process seen as arbitrary and subject to long delays.

Unexpected changes in the household's financial situation (income shocks) are more important for subjective financial wellbeing than the level of income or not being able to borrow.

Overall, the results show that income shocks are more important for subjective financial wellbeing than the level of income or not being able to borrow, which is line with previous research findings. This helps explain the increase in financial strain for people facing benefit reforms, even if they were not worse off.

Other research has shown that the roll-out of the reassessment process across the UK was associated with increased suicides, mental health problems, and higher prescribing rates for antidepressants. This research echoes that, and suggests that – whatever the savings from the move to ESA – the increase in mental and physical health problems will increase the UK's healthcare costs.



KEY POINTS

Subjective reports of financial strain increase the probability of poor mental health by 14.6% and poor physical health by 5%.

Income shocks are more important for subjective financial wellbeing than the level of income or not being able to borrow.

Moving from disability benefits onto Employment and Support Allowance made financial strain worse – by 5.6% in the short term, and 8% in the long term.

It appears that the uncertainty of the reassessment process caused increased financial strain.

DATA USED

British Household Panel Survey Waves 11-18 and
Understanding Society Waves 2-5

CITATION

Declan French, Financial strain in the United Kingdom, Oxford
Economic Papers, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oep/gpx030>

A new approach to local tax

Research using *Understanding Society* formed part of a 2015 cross-party report for the Scottish government. It linked the longitudinal data to different administrative datasets, and worked out the rate at which a flat rate property tax, calculated as a proportion of property value, would have to be levied to replace the revenues from the current Council Tax – and examined the impact on households.

The analysis found that a flat rate property tax of around 0.7% of property values would be needed to maintain tax neutrality. This would be a similar system's to Denmark's, where a flat-rate domestic dwellings property tax is set at 1% of property value (or 3% for properties taxed at the country's higher rate). It also showed that a flat rate tax would have more winners than losers, and be fairer, because it would reduce the Gini coefficient – a key measure of inequality.

The final report suggested that Council Tax should be discontinued, but did not advocate any single alternative. However, proposals for a flat rate property tax did feature in the 2016 manifestos of the Scottish Green Party and the Scottish Labour Party.

DATA USED

Understanding Society Waves 1-3

CITATION

Just Change: A New Approach to Local Taxation, The Commission on Local Tax Reform, 2015. <http://localtaxcommission.scot/download-our-final-report/>

Covid-19's impact on incomes

The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and Self-Employment Income Support Scheme have reduced the income losses for working households by up to two-thirds, according to analysis from the Treasury using *Understanding Society* data.

The monthly, and later bi-monthly, Covid-19 survey from the UK Household Longitudinal Study asked questions about the effects of the pandemic on changing finances and employment, health, and family life. HM Treasury has used the data – and the Office for National Statistics' Living Costs and Food Survey – to calculate the probability of people at different earnings levels losing their job, being furloughed, or seeing a drop in earnings. It has done this by comparing their reported employment status and average change in take-home pay in May with February.

The analysis shows that the government's response to the pandemic's economic impact has supported the poorest working households the most (as a proportion of February income), and been worth, on average, around a fifth of incomes for working households.

DATA USED

Understanding Society Covid-19 survey Waves 1-2

CITATION

Impact of Covid-19 on working household incomes: distributional analysis as of May 2020, HM Treasury, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/impact-of-covid-19-on-working-household-incomes-distributional-analysis-as-of-may-2020>



Income Dynamics statistics

The Department for Work and Pensions uses *Understanding Society* to compile its Income Dynamics statistics, which track the position of individuals in the income distribution over time, and provide estimates of persistent low income. Persistent low income is defined as being under 60% of median income for at least three out of four consecutive annual interviews.

The fourth annual publication came out in March 2020 and covered the period 2010-18. It showed that 9% of individuals were in persistent low income before housing costs, and 13% after housing costs. Children and pensioners had higher rates of persistent low income than working-age adults before housing costs. After housing costs, rates for children were considerably higher than rates for working-age adults and pensioners. Over time, there has been less movement across the income distribution for those at the top and bottom of the income distribution than among those nearer the middle of the distribution. The numbers of people moving into and out of low-income across any two-year period are roughly equal, and rates of low income entry and exit have been relatively stable over time.

DATA USED

Understanding Society Waves 1-9 and British Household Panel Survey Waves 1-18

CITATION

Income Dynamics, 2010 to 2018, Department for Work and Pensions, 2020.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/income-dynamics-statistics>

Learning to save in childhood

Saving money as a child makes you 12% more likely to save in adulthood, according to research using *Understanding Society* and the British Household Panel Survey. However, there was no evidence that having parents who save makes children more likely to do the same – but parents' financial expectations can influence their children's saving behaviour. Having an optimistic parent reduces the likelihood of a child saving by around 2%.

A child's view of their own future will also determine whether they save. If they intend to go to college, for example, that will influence their behaviour on savings more than whether their parents save. How children acquire money has an important effect, though. Getting an allowance, or pocket money, makes them less likely to save, but earning money makes saving more likely.

Ultimately, the researchers suggest that parents can encourage saving by linking pocket money to, for example, helping with chores – and may be able to develop their children's financial literacy by talking to them about finances and savings.

DATA USED

Understanding Society Waves 1-4 and British Household Panel Survey Waves 1-18

CITATION

Sarah Brown and Karl Taylor, Early influences on saving behaviour: Analysis of British panel data, *Journal of Banking & Finance*, 2016.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jbankfin.2015.09.011>





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