



Are people with lower wellbeing more likely to lose their jobs, or move into long-term sick-leave, care or early retirement? Are they less likely to get back into work if unemployed?

finding and keeping jobs: impact of low wellbeing

the big picture

There is good evidence that transitions into and out of work affect wellbeing. But the evidence base is much sparser when it comes to the impact of our wellbeing on how likely we are to become unemployed or (re)employed.

This review found international evidence to show that those with poor mental health are at greater risk of being out of work (for example, on sick leave) or unemployed, and therefore more likely to receive disability or unemployment welfare support. The evidence also shows that poor mental health may be particularly damaging for the employment prospects of young adults.

A larger evidence base is needed on whether targeting wellbeing itself is better than targeting other, more directly related factors, such as employability skills.

We recommend more detailed trials looking at the different mechanisms aimed at boosting wellbeing (possibly Cognitive Behavioural Therapy or other therapies), interventions intended to address skills and those aimed at enhancing effective job search. Studies investigating the effect of political and legal actions - for example, the Equality Act - on the employment levels of those with mental health problems could be valuable.

“

...Are you going to be up to do the job, or will you just be out of your comfort zone?

”

Public dialogue participant, Falkirk

We sifted through 5,797 studies

and 22 were included

In partnership with:



Work and Learning Evidence Programme
What Works for Wellbeing
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You can read the full report for this briefing, and related findings on work and wellbeing at: whatworkswellbeing.org



what evidence did we find?

One minute digest: key findings



Mental health issues may decrease the likelihood of employment for working age adults.
references [1], [2], [4], [8], [12], [16] [19], [21]



Mental health issues in young individuals may adversely affect their employment trajectories in the future.
references [13], ([20], [22], [24]



Experiencing mental health issues might lead to early retirement.
references [9], [23]



Mental health issues are associated with an increased likelihood entry into receipt of welfare payments.
references [6], [14], [17]



Low levels of life satisfaction may lead to unemployment. But, once unemployed, people with low life satisfaction are more likely to search actively for jobs.
references [5], [11], [12]

This last key finding needs a little unpicking. We would usually expect greater job search activities to be associated with higher likelihood of employment. One study from Germany shows that, even though those with lower life satisfaction were more likely to search actively for jobs, this did not always lead to increased likelihood of employment. This meant that those with lower wellbeing were less successful than average at translating job-seeking into employment.

While this evidence on the suggested employment prospects is based only on a single study, there could be scope for improving support given to job seekers, in order to prevent those who are searching hard becoming disheartened by the lack of positive outcomes.



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We are an independent organisation set up to produce robust, relevant and accessible evidence on wellbeing. We work with individuals, communities, businesses and government, to enable them to use this evidence make decisions and take action to improve wellbeing.

The Centre is supported by the ESRC and partners to produce evidence on wellbeing in four areas: work and learning; culture and sport; community; and cross-cutting capabilities in definitions, evaluation, determinants and effects.

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