










A deeper dive into the life satisfaction determinants review








In the determinants review the research question was:

- What are the **long-term determinants** of life satisfaction?

Our rapid review of the UK literature identified 49 studies looking at a variety of factors and their relationship with life satisfaction. These observational studies used high quality longitudinal survey data and provide strong associational evidence between the different factors and life satisfaction. They typically follow-up with research participants regularly and over many years and as such can provide us with long-term insights into the determinants of life satisfaction over time.

We sorted all the factors into six themes. Below we list all the factors we found to have significant associations with life satisfaction. For some factors we found studies with conflicting results - we have marked these as (mixed) in the table for ease of identification. All factors are positively correlated with life satisfaction unless otherwise stated in the commentary.

Theme/Sub-theme	Factors*	Direction of Association	Commentary
Economic & Financial	Total income (n=3)		Higher income associated with higher life satisfaction and vice versa. Replicated in more than one study.
	Changes in income (n=3)		Increased income associated with higher life satisfaction unless income is very high. Replicated in more than one study.
	Changes in partner pay gap (n=1)		Men have increased life satisfaction following increases in their earnings relative to their wives' earnings; for women, changes had no effect on life satisfaction.
	Future financial expectations (n=3)		Unexpected positive changes in subjective household income are associated with increased life satisfaction (and vice versa).
	Fuel poverty (n=1)		Fuel poverty is strongly associated with lower life satisfaction
	Intergenerational social mobility (n=4)		Intergenerational social mobility predicted increased life satisfaction from age 30–42 years in one study and ages 42 to 50 in a second.
	Resource ownership (mixed) (n=2)		Home ownership is associated with increased life satisfaction but owning a car is associated with reduced life satisfaction for the first 5 years of ownership.

Theme/Sub-theme	Factors*	Direction of Association	Commentary	
Education & Employment	Employment	Unemployment (n=4)		Unemployment is associated with decreased life satisfaction. Individuals do not fully bounce back when they are re-employed. Replicated in more than one study.
		Job satisfaction (n=1)		Bidirectional relationship with life satisfaction. Life satisfaction a stronger predictor of future job satisfaction compared to job satisfaction as a future predictor of life satisfaction however.
		Working hours (n=1)		Decline in life satisfaction when individuals are working more or less hours than they would prefer to be working.
		Stability in retirement (n=1)		Stable economic resources over retirement are associated with increased life satisfaction.
		Return to work after pension age (n=1)		Increased life satisfaction associated with those who return to work between the ages of 65 and 75
	Education	Educational attainment (n=2)		Educational attainment as a child/young person is associated with increased life satisfaction. Replicated in more than one study.
		Additional training (mixed) (n=3)		Job-related training was associated with increased life satisfaction but there were strong confounding factors. Formal training later in life was not found to have an association with life satisfaction in one study but mid-career training found to have a positive association in another.

Theme/Sub-theme		Factors*	Direction of Association	Commentary
Social Capital	Community	Neighbour-hood perception (n=1)	↗	Poor neighbourhood satisfaction associated with decreased life satisfaction.
		Migration and moving (mixed) (n=2)	↗↘	Moving home is associated with increased life satisfaction, strongest in the initial year of moving. Gaining citizenship not associated with life satisfaction.
		Community engagement (mixed) (n=2)	↗↘	For older adults involvement in community organisations (like political parties, charities, or places of worship) is associated with a small increase in life satisfaction. Association not found for younger and working-age adults.
	Social Support	Social networks (n=1)	↗	Increased size and frequency of contact with social networks associated with life satisfaction. Diversity of social networks was not associated with life satisfaction.
		Informal care-giving (n=1)	↗	When entering into informal care-giving for someone who is not your child or your spouse it is associated with an increase in life satisfaction.
		Marriage/Cohabitation (n=3)	↗	Marriage and cohabitation improve life satisfaction initially but benefit declines over time. Replicated in more than one study.
		Parenthood (n=2)	↗	Small increase in life satisfaction in the year of childbirth that is not sustained. Women with one or more children had higher life satisfaction than those without children.
		Widowhood (n=2)	↘	Significant drop in life satisfaction in the first year following the death of a spouse. Life satisfaction recovers but remains lower for a prolonged period.

Theme/Sub-theme		Factors*	Direction of Association	Commentary
Health	Physical and Mental Health	Vision (n=1)	↗	A self reported improvement in vision is associated with increased life satisfaction.
		Oral health (n=1)	↗	Losing teeth is associated with lower life satisfaction
		Acquiring a disability (n=1)	↘	Acquiring a disability as an adult associated with decreased life satisfaction. Participation barriers to employment, education, travel etc. are strong confounding factors.
		Self reported health (n=3)	↗	High self reported health associated with increased life satisfaction over time.
		Mental health (mixed) (n=)	↗↘	In adults better mental health is linked to improved life satisfaction. Complex associations for young people.
	Health behaviours	Fruit and Vegetable consumption (n=1)	↗	Increased quantity and frequency of consumption linked to increased life satisfaction.
		Developing problem drinking (n=1)	↘	No association with levels of drinking but development of problem drinking is associated with decreased life satisfaction.
Environment		Public transport perception (n=1)	↗	Higher income associated with higher life satisfaction and vice versa. Replicated in more than one study.
		Commuting (mixed) (n=1)	↗↘	Increasing an individual's commute time by ten minutes was associated with lower life satisfaction but there were no significant differences between individuals based on length of commute time.
Arts and Culture		Community cultural engagement (n=2)	↗	Increased engagement in community cultural activities associated with increased life satisfaction regardless of where people live.
		Participation in the arts (n=4)	↗	Participation in music/arts/evening classes was associated with increased life satisfaction. Replicated in more than one study.

* Information on how these factors were conceptualised and measured can be found in the technical report and the appendices look-up tables

For a summary of both our life satisfaction rapid reviews see [our briefing](#).

For full details of the research methodology, findings, recommendations and limitations, read the [technical report](#).