

Measuring National Well-being in the UK

Why are we doing this?

- To provide information to monitor and understand the wellbeing of the UK.
- Move beyond GDP as main measure of national progress.
- Provide policy makers information to take into account the impact on the well-being of people and the environment.
- Ultimately to make better decisions.

‘What we do’ – key points

- In April to September 2011, adults in the UK aged 16 and over who were unemployed reported lower well-being than those in employment.
- Some studies have found that life satisfaction rises as the number of hours worked increases, but this effect can be reversed if these hours are excessive.
- In 2009/10, 77.8 per cent of employed people in the UK reported being somewhat, mostly or completely satisfied with their job.
- Obtaining the correct balance between work and home can help increase and maintain levels of well-being.
- In April and June 2011, 48.4 per cent of adults aged 16 and over in Great Britain reported relatively low satisfaction with their work-life balance (between 0 and 6 on a scale of 0 to 10).

Regression results (1)

Holding other factors equal:

- People who are unemployed have significantly lower levels of 'life satisfaction', 'happy yesterday', and feelings that their activities are 'worthwhile' than those who are employed and most groups of economically inactive people.
- Unemployed people also have higher 'anxious yesterday' levels compared with people in other work situations.
- People who are employed but want a different or additional job have lower levels of personal well-being (including higher 'anxious yesterday' levels) on average than employed people who are not looking for another job.
- Retired people who said that they do not want to work and those who said they do not need to work have on average higher levels of well-being than people who are working and satisfied with their jobs.
- People who are economically inactive due to ill health or disability have particularly low ratings for personal well-being.

Regression results (2)

Holding other factors equal:

- People in higher managerial or professional occupations rate their life satisfaction higher on average than those in other occupational groups. They also give slightly higher ratings when asked if they think the things they do are 'worthwhile'.
- However, on average the difference in their ratings on these aspects of their well-being compared to those in other occupational groups was small or very small.
- People in higher managerial and professional occupations give higher scores for 'anxious yesterday' levels on average than those in lower supervisory and technical occupations.
- Among a sub-sample of employees only, those who earn higher wages from their job give higher ratings for 'life satisfaction' on average than those earning less, but ratings for 'worthwhile' and 'happy yesterday' and 'anxiety yesterday' were not related to earnings.

Policy implications

- Do we live to work or work to live?
- Considering subjective data over and above objective data gives more information and could potentially highlight issues that objective data alone could not provide.
- Work = Good for well-being is too simple. Also need to look at the quality of work and the balance between work and leisure time.
- Policy implication is that employers should be encouraged to foster choice and control over working hours and how people meet demands of the job - those employees who are more content with their hours and have autonomy on how to get the job done will be happier and therefore more productive workers
- Encourage businesses to use well-being questions in staff surveys.
- More research needs to be done to understand exact impact of productivity and happiness.