

# Community Learning and Wellbeing: What is the Evidence?

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[www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-12566965](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-12566965)

### **ONS Happiness Survey Questions Revealed**

After becoming Conservative leader in 2005, David Cameron said gauging people's feelings was one of the "central political issues of our time". "It's time we admitted that there's more to life than money and it's time we focused not just on GDP but on GWB - general well-being," he said.

The ONS will add the subjective questions to its next annual Integrated Household Survey

The questions will include:

*Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?*

*Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?*

*Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?*

*Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?*

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# 26%

British adults reported a diagnosed mental health issue; 1/4 in treatment (2012)

# 1 in 6 under 16s

- 5-16 yr olds diagnosed with emotional or learning disorders (2004)
- Upward trend for treatment referral for 16-19 yrs olds (2014)



- Unemployment >= impact of bereavement
- **20% of the fall in mental well-being is due to the decline in income**
- **80% is due to non-pecuniary things (loss of self-esteem, status..).**

## Why wellbeing?

### Childhood matters

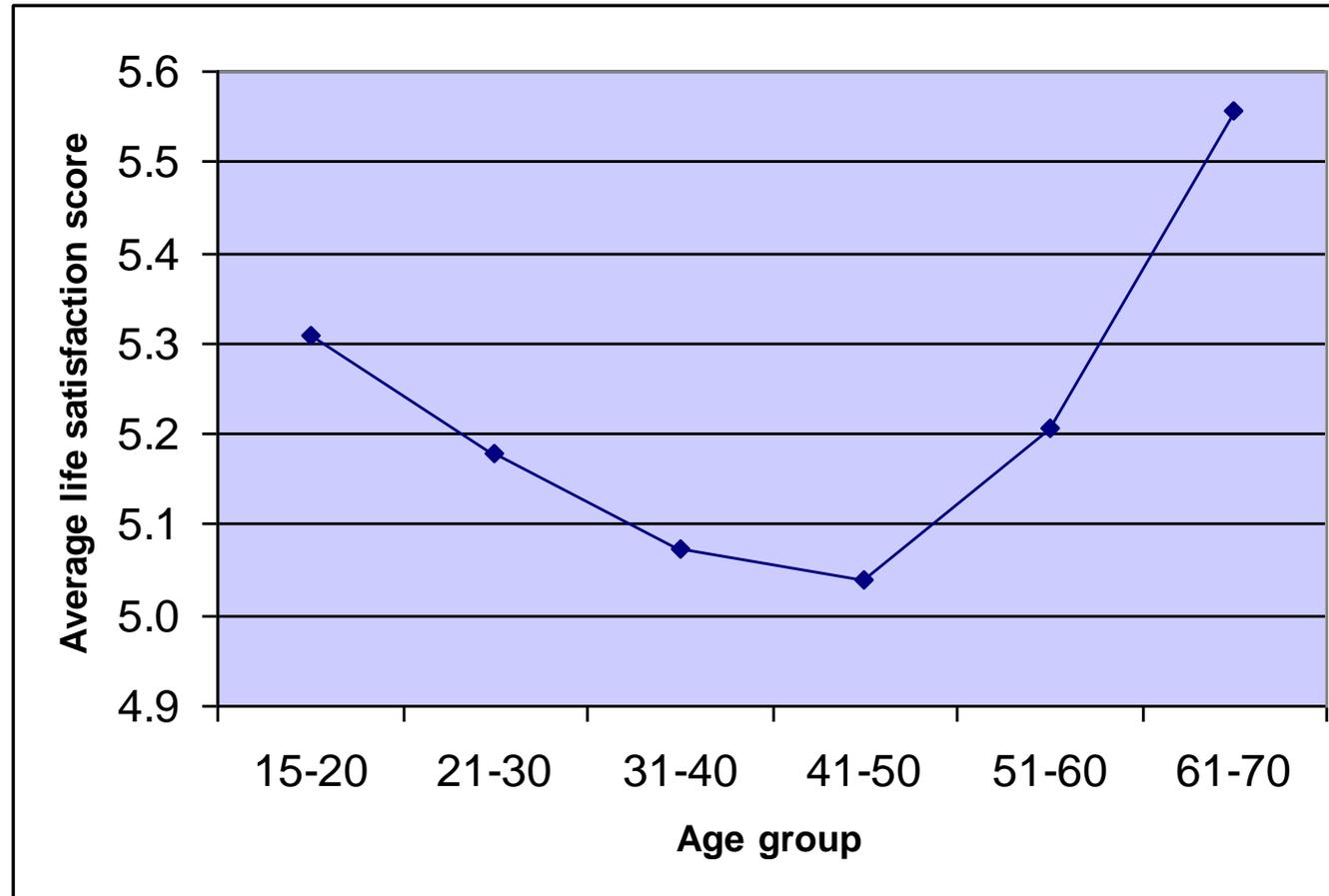
Emotional health measured at ages 5, 10, and 16 is the strongest predictor of perceived health and emotional health at 26

### At Risk groups:

- **Young men high risk;**
- **transitioning adults into and out of worklessness**

# The pattern of a typical person's happiness through life

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***“Taken all together, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your life overall? 1.very dissatisfied, ..., 7.very satisfied?”***

# Typical GHQ mental-strain questions



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## Have you recently:

**Lost much sleep over worry?**

**Felt constantly under strain?**

**Felt you could not overcome your difficulties?**

**Been feeling unhappy and depressed?**

**Been losing confidence in yourself?**

**Been thinking of yourself as a worthless person?**

**Been able to enjoy your normal day-to-day activities?**

# ONS Questionnaires



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**Happiness – “Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?”**

**Satisfaction – “Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?”**

**Worthwhile – “Overall, to what extent do you feel that your life is worthwhile?”**

**Anxiety – “Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?”**

# What do we know so far?



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**Learn a lot from community health interventions:**

**Health literacy interventions have positive impact on health; numeracy skills less important to achieving significant health outcomes –**

**but less focus on wellbeing or mental health;**

**if you roll out literacy and numeracy learning embedded in a health concern will it still attract the target groups in literacy and numeracy who have less health problems or will it be able to reach to groups that have less health issues?**

**Motivation for taking a health literacy course may be a parental ‘role model’ for children; but the motivation for taking a health literacy course may be different for those with wellbeing concerns. So what are the motivational mechanisms?**

***See: Skilled for Health Programme; What Works Wellbeing - Communities***

# Participation patterns

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**Statistically significant effect for learning on wb in relation to LS and happiness, self-confidence, self-worth, self-report depression, satisfaction with social life and leisure time**

**But note effect size seems to be small**

**Counter intuitively (perhaps) the employed are much more likely to be participating in either informal or formal part-time education than the unemployed/retired.**

**Obtaining a formal qualification later than at the conventional age is worse for wb, but is also worse seemingly than not having obtained the qualification at all.**

**Could be argued it is better to receive a qualification at conventional age as opposed to later in life i.e. via 'lifelong learning' – needs further investigation.**

**Positive well-being effects of learning for people aged 50 and over, formal courses did not have an impact whereas leisure courses did.**

***Sources: Inquiry in the future for Lifelong Learning (IFLL). (2009). Dolan, P., & Metcalfe, R. (2012).***

# Wider benefits of learning

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- **Wider benefits of learning studies highlight positive relationship between life satisfaction and learning; but those engaged in life long learning tend to be higher skilled and have higher life satisfaction anyway – direction of causation unclear.**
- **Life Satisfaction decline in middle age may be offset by participation in learning.**
- **Learning said to increase earnings and employability; but the wrong type of learning - NVQs/vocational may reduce income or have no effect**
- **numeracy and literacy associated with higher earnings; literacy key in community health education initiatives.**

**But concern about hard to reach groups as much of evidence is based on broad cross-sectional comparisons.**

**Potentially negative effects of learning on depression – learning may actually be a trigger; can raise expectations only to disappoint**

*Field, J. (2012).*

# Men's Sheds and more..



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**Adult community learning for interest: Collaborative learning is critical learning design for older male learners – Men's sheds projects in Australia; also work in Belfast and Donegal:**

- **a way of making sense of a new identity outside of work or in a different health circumstance;**
- **learning concerned more with 'being' (ontological) than cognitive or about knowing.**

**Dolan and Metcalf (2012) - Positive well-being effects of learning for people aged 50 and over, formal courses did not have an impact whereas leisure courses did.**

# All Roads lead to Rome



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**Individual and transactional emphasis of adult education (i.e. a job or a qualification)**

**VS**

**transformative and collaborative emphasis of adult learning**

**these distinctions may underpin the causal paths between learning and wellbeing outcomes for different groups, at different points in the lifecourse.**

**Key mechanisms by which learning can influence well-being: Personal characteristics and skills; social interactions; qualifications.**

# Gaps



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**Economic returns for learning are much better understood than well-being benefits**

**Evidence to suggest a small but significant association between undertaking adult learning courses and well-being**

**Well-being benefits of learning have implications for cost-effectiveness/ cost savings.**

**Wellbeing benefits in terms of less isolation, improved self-confidence and enjoyment from group learning have been qualitatively observed but not measured.**

**Focus on particular groups may be especially beneficial - older and male learners and low income groups, unemployed, others?.**

**Wellbeing effect of learning is relatively marginal and complicated to understand why it has differential effects.**

**Research needs to think more explicitly about how learning influences wellbeing.**

***Sources: see also Dolan, P., & Metcalfe, R. (2012).***

# Questions



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**Have you got community learning projects ongoing that measure wellbeing?**

**What is your experience of tailoring the learning approach to the needs of specific groups of learners?**

**Tell us about your evaluation work on community learning and wellbeing.**

# Readings

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***Field, J. (2008) “Get Happy” Adults Learning***

***Inquiry in the future for Lifelong Learning (IFLL). (2009). Lifelong Learning and Well-being : An Analysis of the Relationship Between Adult Learning and Subjective Well-being.***

***Dolan, P., & Metcalfe, R. (2012). Review and Update of Research into the Wider Benefits of Adult Learning. BIS Research Paper, (90 ), 1–47.***

***Feinstein, L., Vorhaus, J., & Sabates, R. (2008). Learning through life : Future challenges, 71.***

***Findings, O. F., The, F., & For, C. (2006). Brief No : RCB05-06 THE WIDER BENEFITS OF LEARNING : A SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS FROM THE CENTRE FOR RESEARCH ON THE WIDER BENEFITS OF LEARNING 1999-2006 Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning. Learning***

**Jillian Cavanagh, Amie Southcombe & Tim Bartram (2014) The role of collaborative learning on training and development practices within the Australian Men’s Shed movement: a study of five Men’s Sheds. Journal of Vocational Education & Training. 66:3, 365-385, DOI: 10.1080/13636820.2014.922119**

**Tavistock Institute (2009). Evaluation of the Second Phase of the Skilled for Health Programme.**

# THANK YOU & QUESTIONS

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