

## **Evidence for: The impact of lifelong learning on happiness and well-being.**

**The following evidence is extracted from:**

**Searle B A (2008) *Well-being: In search of a good life?* Policy Press, Bristol.**

*[Whilst the book reports on the wider findings of the analysis conducted, the following evidence has been extracted to show how lifelong learning impacts on high well-being. Below is a summary of results, table and figure numbers reflect those in the book, full tables for the logistic regression are available upon request. The book is due for release in January and so page numbers are not available at present, but can be provided on request].*

This book reports on research conducted using the first nine waves (1991-1999) of the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS). The sample profile includes all adults aged 25 and over. The research starts from the premise that money does not buy happiness and asks if money is not the answer then what is? As such the analysis considers many aspects of life that may, a priori, contribute to a sense of well-being: demographic, socio-economic, social, health, spatial and satisfaction with different life domains.

In contrast to traditional studies of psychological well-being which tend to focus on those who deviated away from an acceptable 'normal' level and experienced poor mental health, the research focuses on those who experience positive subjective well-being (swb). Well-being is measured using the GHQ12. Scores from the twelve questions are summed for each year and for the purpose of the research the polarity of the scores have been reversed whereby low subjective well-being is represented by a score of 0 and high subjective well-being by a score of 36.

At the aggregate level average subjective well-being scores fall in the range of 25–27 each year between 1991 and 1999. However, it can be seen in Table 3.3 that those who are students (which includes those on Government Training Schemes) fall into the top end of this range, consistently scoring 27 between 1991 and 1999.

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	<i>n=min-max</i>
<b>INCOME<sup>a</sup> QUINTILES AFTER HOUSING COSTS</b>										
Top 20%	27	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	1556-2096
4	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	1478-1842
3	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	1476-1753
2	26	26	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	1478-1783
Bottom 20%	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	1399-1664
<b>SOCIAL CLASS</b>										
I	27	26	27	26	26	27	27	27	26	265-307
II	27	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	1445-1569
III non-manual	26	26	26	26	26	26	25	26	25	920-1332
III manual	27	27	27	27	26	27	27	26	27	856-1221
IV	27	26	26	26	26	26	26	27	27	563-779
V	26	26	26	26	26	25	26	26	26	187-250
<b>HOUSING TENURE</b>										
Own outright	27	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	2057-2257
Mortgage	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	3342-4335
LA/HA rented	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	1358-1968
Private rented	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	25	428-668
<b>EDUCATION STATUS</b>										
Higher Degree	27	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	2233-2729
A Levels	27	26	26	26	26	26	26	25	26	629-881
CSE/O Levels	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	1246-1801
Lower quals	26	26	25	25	25	25	25	26	26	695-982
None of these	26	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	2092-3191
<b>EMPLOYMENT STATUS</b>										
Employed	27	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	4283-5447
Unemployed	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	26	155-466
Retired	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	1650-2051
Family Care	25	25	25	25	25	24	24	25	25	542-1066
Student/Govt										
Training	27	27	27	27	27	27	27	27	27	49-227
LT Sick/ Disabled	22	23	22	22	22	22	22	22	22	256-306

<sup>a</sup> Household income has been equivalised using the McClements Scale to take account of the number and type of people in a household (McClements, 1978), and has been deflated to 1991 prices.

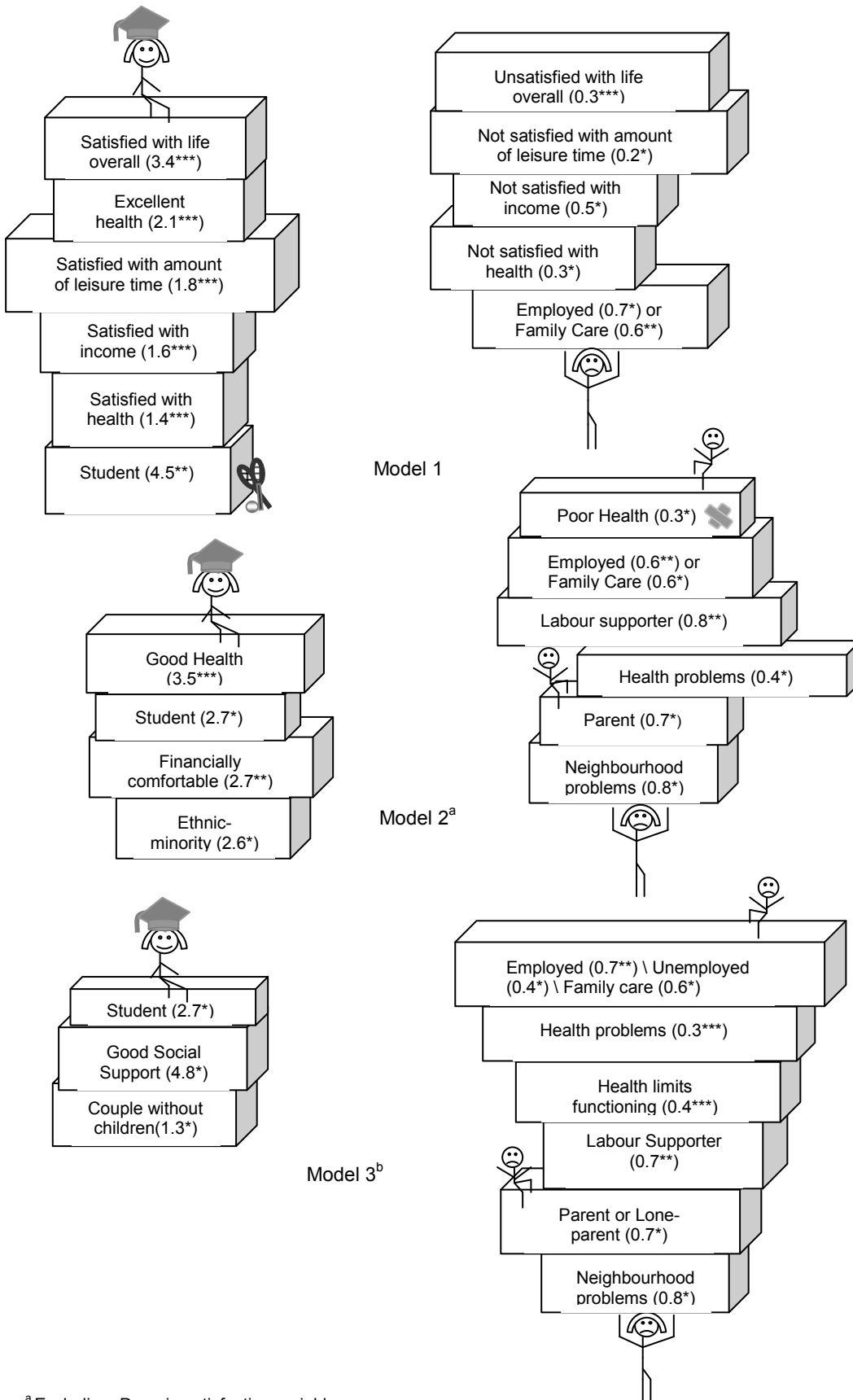
Another way of examining the variations in the experience of subjective well-being is to look at the tendency for different socio-economic groups to be represented among those experiencing high subjective well-being and low subjective well-being in the population. Although various measures could be used to represent the extremes of well-being, for the purposes of this research those whose scores put them in the top 20% of the positive subjective well-being measure (scores of 29 or more) are categorised as 'high subjective well-being', and those whose scores put them in the bottom 20% (scores of 21 or less) are categorised as 'low subjective well-being'. Table 3.6 lends support to the findings at the aggregate level, with around one-third of those who embrace lifelong learning reporting high swb; ranging from 28% to 39% between 1991-1999. This is a higher proportion than for any other form of economic status.

<b>Table 3.6: Economic Variations in High and Low subjective well-being 1991-1999 (%)</b>										
		1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
<b>SOCIAL CLASS</b>										
<b>I</b>	<i>Low</i>	14	21	13	21	21	14	15	19	17
	<i>High</i>	30	25	26	22	29	33	29	28	26
<b>II</b>	<i>Low</i>	13	19	16	17	20	21	19	20	17
	<i>High</i>	27	25	27	26	24	24	24	25	27
<b>III non-manual</b>										
	<i>Low</i>	15	17	20	20	21	21	21	22	19
	<i>High</i>	26	23	23	24	22	24	24	25	21
<b>III Manual</b>										
	<i>Low</i>	12	16	13	13	16	13	13	15	14
	<i>High</i>	33	29	34	31	29	29	28	30	32
<b>IV</b>	<i>Low</i>	14	16	17	18	16	20	18	15	15
	<i>High</i>	30	28	25	28	28	27	28	31	31
<b>V</b>	<i>Low</i>	14	13	18	19	18	21	21	16	14
	<i>High</i>	26	25	25	20	26	25	27	26	33
<b>EMPLOYMENT STATUS</b>										
<b>Employed</b>										
	<i>Low</i>	14	17	16	17	18	19	18	18	16
	<i>High</i>	29	26	27	26	26	26	26	27	27
<b>Unemployed</b>										
	<i>Low</i>	34	32	30	26	27	33	29	31	31
	<i>High</i>	26	26	24	24	25	26	26	27	27
<b>Retired</b>										
	<i>Low</i>	17	18	20	19	20	20	19	19	20
	<i>High</i>	26	26	24	24	25	26	26	27	27
<b>Family Care</b>										
	<i>Low</i>	24	29	27	27	27	31	26	25	25
	<i>High</i>	20	18	16	16	15	16	18	20	21
<b>Student/Govt Training</b>										
	<i>Low</i>	16	12	15	13	17	17	18	26	18
	<i>High</i>	36	39	36	30	28	33	35	28	33
<b>LT sick/disabled</b>										
	<i>Low</i>	48	44	47	50	46	49	49	46	48
	<i>High</i>	9	9	11	11	12	10	9	12	10

As the focus on this research is to understand factors associated with sustaining or promoting well-being the next stage of the analysis turned to the longitudinal nature of the data. Firstly, in order to make the data manageable, annual subjective well-being scores were initially summed across three equal periods of three years: 1991–93, 1994–96, and 1997–99. The extremes of well-being experience were then identified creating a total of three groups: high subjective well-being is represented by those whose cumulative three-year score is 85 or above (20%); those whose three-year cumulative score is 65 or less represent low subjective well-being (20%); and for the purpose of clarity the remainder are labelled as 'moderate' subjective well-being (60%). A dichotomous variable was created identifying those reporting high well-being and those who did not (combining low and moderate well-being). Logistic regression was carried out on the variables selected, running two separate models for men and women. Secondly, changes in well-being status between periods were analysed. For this stage of the analysis a dichotomous variable was created identifying those whose well-being had improved; changing from low or moderate in 1991-3 to high in 1994-6; or changing from low/moderate in 1994-6 to high in 1997-9.

Taking the first stage of longitudinal analysis, figure 3.4 shows the results of logistic regression based on the model for women. The results (for 1994-6) again support the positive benefits of lifelong learning. Model 1 reports the results using all the variables in the model, even after accounting for the effects of life satisfaction and health this shows that among women being a student still has an independent effect on swb – being 4.5 times ( $p < 0.01$ ) more likely to report high well-being than the group average for economic status. In Model 2 (where satisfaction with life domains is removed) and Model 3 (where self-reported health status and financial situation are also removed) the effect of lifelong learning is reduced (2.7;  $p < 0.05$ ), but is nonetheless significant.

**Figure 3.4: Factors associated with high subjective well-being 1994-6: Females**



<sup>a</sup> Excluding, Domain satisfaction variables

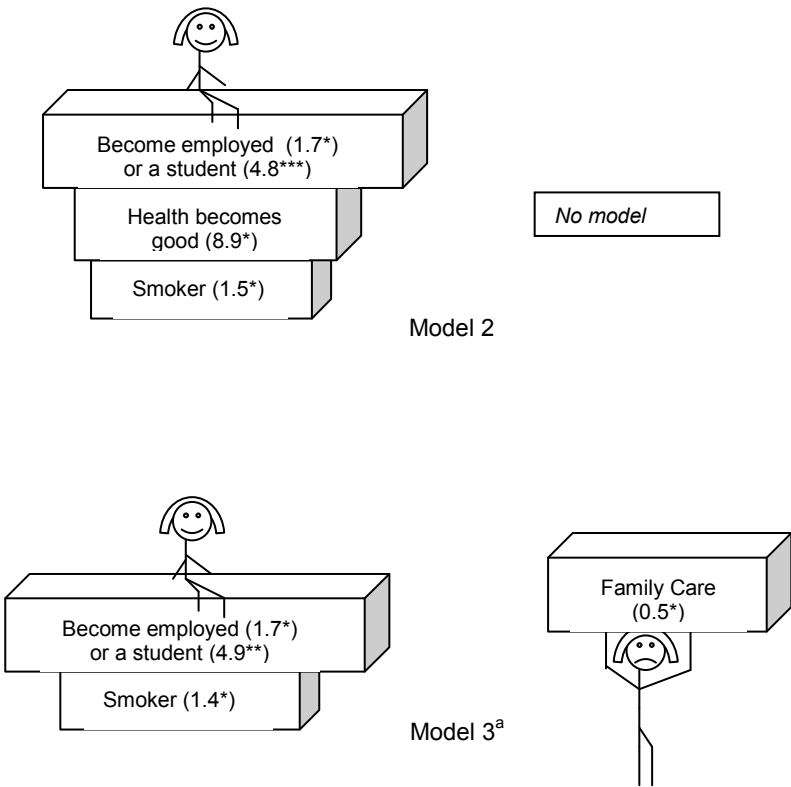
<sup>b</sup> Excluding, Domain satisfaction variables, financial situation and self-reported health status

Adjusted Odds are significant at \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Turning to the next stage of the analysis which considers the factors associated with changes in well-being status, notably circumstances which are associated with improved levels of well-being, further supports the positive effect of lifelong learning. Figure 4.3 again reports the results of logistic regression for women, showing that among those whose well-being improved between 1993 and 1996, economic status was the most influential factor, with being a student associated with well-being nearly 5 times (4.8;  $p < 0.001$ ) above the average for the group.

**Figure 4.3 Factors associated with improved Subjective Well-being 1993 to 1996: Females <sup>+</sup>**

*(Satisfaction with life domain variables are not available for 1991-1995 therefore Model 1 was not conducted)*



### ***Extract from the concluding chapter...***

This research has shown that promoting subjective well-being is linked with the fulfilling of basic needs (for example, shelter, in particular becoming an owner-occupier). It also shows that cognitive elements at the higher end of the hierarchy – the desire for knowledge and understanding (Maslow, 1954) – should also be accounted for. The acquisition of knowledge has been linked to the higher elements of well-being for some time. However, education provides a source of social as well as academic learning and experiences of the educational system have the potential to impinge upon as well as enhance subjective well-being.

The benefits of education during the early and compulsory years of life are well rehearsed, but not everyone's experience of the school system is positive or rewarding. Through lifelong learning, on the other hand, there is the capacity to address this problem (potentially reversing the detrimental effects of education experienced during compulsory years) given the right conditions in adult life. The research reported here shows that returning to education – for women at least – enhances their well-being state. This is consistent with research that reports that even among those whose early experiences of the education system were negative – having lasting and profound effects on confidence and attitudes towards learning – a return to education in later years was associated with indicators of enhanced well-being such as self-esteem, identity and purpose, motivation, confidence and hope. Within this same research by Schuller et al (2004) people also spoke of the social benefits, feelings of belonging to a community, building social networks and broadening experiences through engaging in new activities. This is not to say that all experiences with later learning are positive. Benefits may be dependent upon age, social class, ethnicity and previous life events (Hammond, 2004) among other things. What is key for the study of well-being, however, as Antikainen (1998) reports, is that education has its greatest potential to impact on people's lives during times of change. It has protective benefits during times of adversity and even in stable conditions is enriching, having value for the individual and the community (Hammond, 2004).

Where education becomes a function of well-being, particularly beyond compulsory educational years, this has implications for the changing educational needs of individuals throughout the life course. The positive association of returning to education discussed above suggests that this may be linked with the opportunity that learning provides to reach one's full potential – a fact that did not escape the attention of the government (DfEE, 1998). However, despite recognition of the benefits of education beyond its immediate knowledge-based and economic benefits, little progress has been made towards the creation of a coherent, engaging, accessible culture of lifelong learning (Hargreaves, 2004, foreword). For Hargreaves the foundations for such a culture need to be set in the formative school years and the policy developments this entails, and while this is a key aspect, the education of individuals needs to be considered as it relates to their opportunities across the life course – a point perhaps recognised by the recent separation of graduate and adult skills from school education, in a policy context. The pursuit of education beyond the formal school years may be associated with a need to fulfil one's potential and the pursuit of lifelong learning could provide a means of promoting subjective well-being.

## References

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