



Measuring job satisfaction in surveys: United Kingdom

Comparative analytical report

Questionnaire

Editorial disclaimer

This report has not been subjected to the standard Foundation editorial procedures

This UK national report is part of a comparative overview ([EF/06/55/EN](#)) of how job satisfaction is measured in national working conditions surveys based on 16 national contributions for the European Working Conditions Observatory ([EWCO](#)).

1. Aim and structure of the comparative analytical report questionnaire

The main objective of this comparative analytical report is to assess if and how the job satisfaction issue is dealt in the national surveys and to bring forward some data and trends on job satisfaction. This comparative analytical report shall reveal how national surveys produce data on job satisfaction, focusing on the methodologies used and shall present available data on job satisfaction.

Thus, the questionnaire is divided into three main sections. The first section is mainly focused on the national surveys dealing with job satisfaction (priority given to the national working conditions surveys) and the methodological frame used. In this section, the national correspondents are basically asked to identify which surveys deal with job satisfaction, what questions are made, how questions are made and what definitions are used in those questions.

The second section is addressed to gather available data on general job satisfaction and job satisfaction broken down by some of its determinants. Whenever it is possible, trends should be identified.

Finally, the last section is focused on the analytical aspects of job satisfaction. In this section, national correspondents are asked to identify correlations between job satisfaction and other variables related to organisational practices that may be present in national surveys data reports and to identify interesting pieces of conceptual or meta analysis of job satisfaction.

Section 1: Survey sources and questions

1 – Is job satisfaction an issue addressed in your national working conditions surveys? Do other national surveys include any questions on job satisfaction?

Please identify sources and survey methodology (also mention first year of implementation, regularity (periodicity), time frame (e.g. over the last twelve months), population, sample size and frame, data collection methodology, etc.).

A. In Autumn 1991, the [British Household Panel Survey](#) (BHPS) interviewed a representative sample of 5,500 households, and 10,300 persons. The same individuals are re-interviewed each successive year, and if they leave their original household to form new households, all adult members of these new households are also interviewed. Similarly, children in the original households go through the main individual interviews when they reach the age of 16. Members leave through death and through sample attrition. The panel is also periodically refreshed with new samples. Thus the overall sample remains broadly representative of the population of Britain as it changes over time.

Although BHPS is essentially a survey of households, a module of its individual-respondent questionnaire asks a number of questions about individual work and employment experience each year. The employee sample has steadily risen from just under 5,000 in 1991-1992 to around 8,000 in the early 2000s. Throughout the 13 annual waves the survey has asked about job satisfaction with four job facets: total pay, job security, the work itself and hours worked. It also asks at least one single-item question on overall job satisfaction, and from Wave 6 onwards has asked a second question in most data collection waves. Data from this sample forms the basis for most secondary analysis of job satisfaction in the UK. Survey results are not published on an annual basis, but are made available to academic researchers through a data archive.

B. The Employment in Britain Survey (EIBS) 1992 and the Working in Britain Survey (WIBS) 2000 are two largely comparable specialized employee surveys. They have been used to provide much of the evidence relating to job satisfaction in the UK, especially recently in support of the thesis of the so-called ‘despondency thesis’ where policy commentators have found a mood of deepening employee dejection among British employees over the last decade.

The EIBS research programme comprised two surveys, one of employed people, the other of unemployed people, living in Britain in 1992 and aged between 20 and 60 years. The survey of employed people yielded a sample of 3,869 individuals. Stratified random sampling was used to select households from sectors drawn from the [Royal Mail](#)’s Postal Address File. One person was interviewed per household, chosen randomly from those who were found and eligible at each address. Interviews were face to face, and involved three parts: the respondent’s work history, the main interview concerning the current and recent experiences of work, and a short self-completion interview, completed in the presence of, but without intervention by, the interviewer (Gallie *et al.* 1998).

Working in Britain 2000 surveyed individuals in employment aged between 20 and 60 years. The face to face interviews, which took place between June 2000 and January 2001, focused on employment relations and employment contracts, and were designed as part of a larger research programme entitled ‘The Future of Work’. Some questions were designed to replicate identically those in EIBS. Sampling was carried out as described in relation to EIBS above, with the sample comprising 2,466 cases ([White *et al.* 2000](#)).

C. The Workplace Employment Relations Surveys (WERS) 1998 and 2004 are representative surveys of establishments in Great Britain. WERS 2004 covered most sectors, with the exception of agriculture, forestry and fishing; mining and quarrying; private households with employed persons; and overseas organisations. It included all workplaces employing five or more persons, and was the first in the series to include small workplaces employing between five and nine

persons (the 1998 survey covered establishments with 10 or more employees). A workplace was defined as comprising 'the activities of a single employer at a single set of premises [i.e. location]'. As in the [WERS 1998](#), one element of this was the distribution of a self-complete questionnaire to a random sample of (up to) 25 employees. The WERS 2004 sample was drawn, on a stratified random basis, from the official register of business and employing organisations. Fieldwork took place from February 2004 until April 2005, and resulted in the completion of 22,451 employee questionnaires (61% response rate) as well as interviews with managers and employee representatives. All findings were weighted to adjust for the effects of stratification of the sample and non-response bias. There are three cross-sectional elements to the survey: a face to face interview with a manager, a face to face interview with a worker representative (where available) and a self completion questionnaire distributed to a random selection of employees. The questions on job satisfaction are included in the self-completion questionnaire.

2 – The questions regarding job satisfaction in national surveys are single-item questions? Or multi-facet questions? Are there 'indirect' job satisfaction questions in the survey, e.g. scale questions of the type 'Your job gives you the feeling of work well done'?

- **Please specify how questions are formulated (i.e. the text of the questions used in the surveys) and, if applicable, identify different facets used.**
- **If possible, briefly mention the evolution in questions used in national surveys: which questions were added, which questions were removed, etc.**

Is there a scale being used? What kind of scale?

A. The BHPS uses a show card in administering the questionnaire. The wording on the card is as follows:

a) "I'm going to read out a list of various aspects of jobs, and for each one I'd like you to tell me from this card which number best describes how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with that particular aspect of your own present job". The verbal anchors are 1=completely dissatisfied, 7= completely satisfied' 4= neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. 0= doesn't apply to me, 8= don't know. Job facets are: The total pay, including any overtime or bonuses; Your job security; The actual work itself; and The hours of work.

b) All things considered, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your present overall job using the same 1-7 scale?

B. The question asked in both the EIBS and WIBS is a multi-faceted question covering satisfaction with the following factors: job security, use of abilities, opportunities to show initiative, ability/efficiency of management, hours worked, fringe benefits, work itself, amount of work, training provided and friendliness of co-workers. Seven ratings are used and scoring runs from 1 for the highest rank to 7 for the lowest. However, there is a problem with direct comparison between the two surveys because the verbal anchors used in the two surveys are not the same. For the middle values, EIBS used 'fairly satisfied' and 'fairly dissatisfied', but in WIBS they appeared as 'satisfied' and 'dissatisfied'. The two surveys do not therefore provide the basis for reliable comparison and the apparent decline in job satisfaction recorded across the two surveys may simply have been the result of an unfortunate abbreviation of a single-response anchor rather than any real decline.

C. In WERS 1998 the question on job satisfaction appeared as 'How satisfied are you with the following aspects of your job?'. There are five verbal anchors: very satisfied, satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, dissatisfied, very dissatisfied (and don't know).

The job facets covered are: the amount of influence you have over your job; the amount of pay you receive; the sense of achievement you get from your work; and the respect you get from

supervisors/line managers. The survey was criticised for having job satisfaction measures that were focused on too narrow a range of aspects of satisfaction, most of which were biased towards intrinsic or quality of working life factors and the question on job satisfaction was revised to cover the following job facets for the 2004 survey: the sense of achievement you get from your work; the scope of using your own initiative; the amount of influence you have over your job; the training you receive; the amount of pay you receive; your job security; **and** the work itself. The five point scale was retained which makes it difficult to compare the findings with the BHPS.

3 – If definitions of overall job satisfaction/job satisfaction facets are used in questions in national surveys, please give them.

There are no definitions of job satisfaction given in the surveys. The exact wording of the questions used has been given in Question 2.

Section 2: Survey data and trends

4 – Provide data, including trends if possible, on general job satisfaction.

Please also provide the latest data available on the following possible job satisfaction correlates:

- gender
- age (use, if possible, the Labour Force Survey age classes: 15 to 24, 25 to 34, 35 to 44, 45 to 54, 55 to 64 and 65 years old or more)
- marital status
- parenting/number of children
- education
- job status (permanent/fixed-term, employee/self-employed, full/part-time)
- occupational background (current job)
- sector of employment/major industry (use, if possible, the standard NACE classification, 1 digit)

A. Satisfaction with the work itself and satisfaction with hours worked have fallen steadily across the 13 waves of the BHPS. The mean standardised scores falling from approximately 0.13 in 1992 to -0.10 in 2002 for 'work itself' and from 0.06 in 1992 to -0.03 in 2002 for 'hours worked'. In contrast satisfaction with 'total pay' (from -0.05 to 0.10) and with 'job security' (from -0.16 to 0.14) have both risen over the same period. Despite the fact that levels of satisfaction with some facets of the job (e.g. total pay and job security) had risen, this was not sufficient to offset a fall in overall job satisfaction as measured through the single item measure.

With regard to job satisfaction correlates, the data suggest a stark contrast once they are disaggregated for gender. For all employees the value of the BHPS un-standardized mean score for overall job satisfaction fell exactly 4.0 per cent between 1992 and 2001. However, the scores for women employees fell by 7.0%, while those for men actually showed a (non-significant) marginal rise of 0.5%. If this trend were to continue it would produce convergence between the sexes in the next 5-10 years. This finding is significant because historically, women in the UK have been found to be happier at work, a finding thought to have reflected their lower expectations. However, according to further analysis of the BHPS data by Rose (ESRC funded research yet to be published, but recently presented at the Social Policy Association Conference at [Bath University](#) (see [University of Bath Press release 27 June 2005](#)) in June 2005) the average score for overall job satisfaction amongst part-time women in the UK has fallen by 8% since the

early 1990s and among full time women by 3% (the fall among men is 0%) whereas measures of general well being outside the work place show a slight upward trend. Rose found that levels of job satisfaction for women had been falling for the last 15 years. One explanation for this, he suggests, is that women are increasingly driven out to work for economic survival rather than personal satisfaction. They are increasingly concerned with getting a good deal from their employer.

With respect to job status, other secondary analysis of the BHPS data looked at the results of job satisfaction for part-time workers ([Francesconi and Gosling 2005](#); see also the UK EWCO news feature 'Career Paths of Part-time Workers' ([UK0511NU03](#))). The analysis distinguished between those in 'half-time' jobs (those who work between 16 and 29 hours per week) and those in so-called 'mini-jobs' (that is they work between 1 and 15 hours per week). The researchers concluded that in overall terms part-time workers do not appear to be more or less satisfied 'with their jobs' than their full-time counterparts. However, when looking at particular facets of job satisfaction female part-time workers are on average *more* satisfied with 'pay' and 'hours' than their female full-time counterparts, but *less* satisfied with 'the work itself'. Among women, greater satisfaction of part-timers with 'hours worked' is shared by both women in mini-jobs and in half-time jobs. The lower satisfaction with 'work itself' is highest amongst women in half-time jobs. Women in mini-jobs report higher levels of satisfaction with 'job security' than women in full-time jobs.

Male part-time workers were also less satisfied with 'the work itself' than full-timers. However, men in part-time jobs do not show statistically different levels of job satisfaction in terms of 'pay', 'security' and 'hours worked' than male full-timers. Men in mini-jobs were generally more satisfied with their work than men in 30-48 hours per week jobs, the only notable exception being satisfaction with 'hours worked' (for which the effect is still positive, but statistically insignificant). Men in half-time jobs are, however, significantly less satisfied with 'job security', 'work itself' and 'hours worked'. This may have been explained by the fact that over 27% of men in part-time jobs would actually prefer a full-time job, compared with only 6% of female part-timers. Finally, men working long hours (more than 48 hours a week) are more satisfied with all aspects of their work, apart from being 45% less likely to be satisfied with their 'hours' than their full-time counterparts.

The Francesconi and Gosling research also sheds some light on differences between employed and self-employed women. The greater satisfaction of part-timers with 'hours worked' is shared by both women in mini-jobs and those in half-time jobs, but not by the self-employed. The greater satisfaction with 'pay' is also not shared by self-employed women. The lower satisfaction with 'work itself' is primarily driven by employees, not the self-employed. Both part- and full-time self-employed women show significantly lower levels of satisfaction with 'job security' than their full-time employed counterparts.

Data on occupational background appears below in relation to Question 5 on secondary analysis. There are no data available on age, marital status, parenting/number of children or education in any of the surveys examined here.

B. Data from EIBS and WIBS (see table below) indicate a decline in positive job satisfaction in two main ways: 1) there were percentage falls for 9 of the 14 job facets, and for the single-item summary question on overall job satisfaction; 2) only 4 of the 14 items show gains, and there is one tie. However, some of the changes shown are small and barely significant statistically and in 2000 well over four-fifths of employees expressed overall satisfaction with their jobs, as registered by a single-item question, only marginally fewer than in 1992.

Satisfaction with jobs in the UK in 1992 and 2000: EIBS and WIBS (%)

Job facet	All positively satisfied		Highly satisfied	
	EIBS (1992)	WIBS (2000)	EIBS (1992)	WIBS (2000)
	%	%	%	%
Promotion prospects	49	48	21	15
Total pay	67	59	24	13
Relations with supervisor	82	84	51	33
Security of job	74	80	44	39
Use of abilities	83	84	53	44
Opportunities to show initiative	85	86	56	49
Ability/efficiency of management	66	61	31	24
Hours worked	78	72	43	24
Fringed benefits	45	40	21	14
Work itself	87	85	53	41
Amount of work	77	71	39	23
Variety of work	81	76	49	37
Training provided	60	51	32	23
Friendliness of co-workers	92	92	70	61
Mean of job-facet proportion	72	69	44	32
Overall job satisfaction	86	84	51	45

Source: Source (Rose 2005:457-8)

EIBS n=3,445 WIBS n= 2,132 .

C. Full findings from WERS 2004 will be published in a major source book in spring 2006. The dataset will become publicly accessible in November 2005 (see [Inside the Workplace](#)), but the publication of any findings from the analysis undertaken by the wider research community is embargoed until after the launch of the source book. At the moment, only the first findings are available.

Employee satisfaction varied markedly across the eight items covered in the questionnaire. It was highest with respect to 'the work itself', 'scope for using own initiative' and 'sense of achievement'. It was lowest in respect of 'involvement in decision making' and 'pay'. Responses from individual employees on each of the eight items were positively correlated, but employees were not equally satisfied across the various items. 27% of employees were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' on seven or eight items, 23% were satisfied on less than three items, while 51% expressed a mixture of satisfaction and dissatisfaction across the eight measures.

An overall satisfaction measure was created from the different facets and was found to vary across workplaces, and between individuals within the same workplace. The mean score on this overall job satisfaction measure differed across workplaces to a statistically significant degree, confirming that employees' job satisfaction is partly determined by workplace factors, and is not attributable solely to their demographic or job-related characteristics. Whilst satisfaction with 'influence' and 'pay' has remained unchanged since the 1998 survey there has been an increase in the percentage of workers satisfied with the sense of achievement they get from work (64% in 1998 to 70% in 2004).

Section 3: Secondary analysis of survey data on job satisfaction

5 – Is there any assessment of the relationship between job satisfaction and other variables related to organisational practices/independent work-related practices in national surveys data analysis/reports? Briefly mention the main findings on the cross-tabulation between the following factors and job satisfaction: job autonomy, working time and WLB issues, and worker participation/involvement.

Note: In case you do not have any available information on the cross-tabulations referred to above, please try to provide data on the relationship between the following factors and job satisfaction: work-related stress and income/salary.

Several recent studies have conducted secondary analysis of the major surveys. These include Green *et al.* (2005) and Rose (2003).

In the first study the authors, drawing primarily on data from the BHPS, the EIBS and the 2001 Skills Survey (Felstead *et al.* 2002) concluded that intensification of work and decline in task discretion accounted for falling levels of job satisfaction. The (modest) rise in participation in organisational decision-making only mitigated the downward pressure on job satisfaction to a small extent. Job insecurity was also not found to be a plausible explanation of declining job satisfaction since job insecurity had remained relatively stable or decreased over the period in question. They found that whilst working too few or too many hours was a significant source of job dissatisfaction, the proportion of workers in Britain whose hours preferences were well matched with their jobs was stable and could not account for declining levels of satisfaction. These issues will be debated further in a forthcoming publication by Green, *Demanding Work* (2006).

In the second study Rose has used data from the BHPS and the 2001 Skills Survey to analyse differences in job satisfaction across occupations. He found regressions of individual scores for job satisfaction on dummy variables for occupation to be far more common and powerful than specific industry effects, and notes that they explain almost 10% of variance in the individual job satisfaction scores. His results revealed that there were 52 percentage points separating the highly satisfied child-care employees from the thoroughly dissatisfied bus and coach drivers. Assembly-line workers (vehicles and metal, and electrical and electronic) appear where sociologists might expect them to from the literature on employee alienation (i.e. sixth and eighth from the bottom respectively). However, professional and technical occupations (civil service administrative officers and assistants, solicitors (non-partner) and university teaching professionals for example) all figure in the lowest ranks and blue-collar occupations (such as farm workers and cleaners and domestics) are well represented in the top 20 ranks.

Reproduced below from Rose's findings are the top five and bottom five major UK occupations in terms of overall job satisfaction:

Overall job satisfaction in major UK occupations, percent scores above sample median

SOC90 3-digit code	N cases	Occupation	Percent
659	64	Misc. childcare related work	75
672	24	Caretakers	71
660	27	Hairdressers, barbers	70
652	49	Educational assistants	69

900	22	Farm workers	68
825	28	Plastics process operatives, moulders and extruders	32
940	56	Postal workers, mail sorters	32
553	31	Sewing machinists, menders, darners and embroiderers	32
621	33	Waiters and waitresses	24
873	31	Bus and coach drivers	23

Source: BHPS, Wave 9 (1999 – 2000).

BHPS n= 7,635 weighted cases.

6 – Please answer one of the following questions (6a, 6b or 6c - 500 words maximum):

6a – Are there any examples of interesting conceptual or meta-analysis of job satisfaction per se – interpretative approaches to job satisfaction? Please summarise the main findings.

6b – Are there any examples of interesting survey approaches to quantifying and measuring job satisfaction – methodological aspects of capturing job satisfaction data in surveys? Please summarise the main findings.

6c – Is there any interesting piece of analysis of job satisfaction and its correlations? Please summarise the main research findings (preferably in relation to one of the job satisfaction correlations identified in 5).

6c. Rose (2003) analysed a number of possible influences on job satisfaction including individual well-being, hours of work, work orientation, financial variables, the employment contract and market and job mobility. His findings fail to provide strong support for explanations of job satisfaction primarily in terms of socio-technical rewards of the job, although low influence in the work place did emerge as significant. All but one of the indirect measures developed to represent qualitative features of the workplace remained non-significant. Much more important were factors related to the contractual features of the job. Having the ‘right package’- contractually assured promotion opportunities, annual pay increments, bonuses, and above all a job that the employer was believed to regard as permanent - significantly boosted the job satisfaction score, with a marginal increment for not having to work unpaid overtime. There was also little support for the view that job satisfaction rises in a closely linear association with earnings; rather jobs enabling financial expectations, at whatever level these were set to be met, were more important. Having a recognized career path was also a highly significant factor. High levels of work stress and a desire to work fewer hours, an aspiration held by one-third of the sample, together accounted for well over one-half of a standard deviation in job satisfaction scores.

The key point that Rose makes (echoed in his more recent publication) is that his conclusions are not intended to demonstrate that affectivity and intrinsic rewards do not matter in analysing job satisfaction; rather, they may matter significantly less than is sometimes assumed once a greater range of influences is introduced. What is needed is an expansion of the range of causality. Differences in job satisfaction between groups and individuals are extremely complex and urgently require more research, especially in relation to the measures used to gauge job satisfaction. In the UK the need to control for work place influences and to gather more reliable survey data on quality of work life issues are seen to be the two critical issues to address.

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