

21 Employment

Employment is a socioeconomic contributor to good health. Youth suicide has been associated with unemployment as have a range of other health conditions, including mental health and blood pressure. Unemployed youth also experience higher lifestyle risk factors, (such as cannabis use, tobacco use and alcohol consumption) than employed youth (Morrell et al. 1998).

This chapter provides information on the employment status of young people and the relationship with health and wellbeing. Data presented include the reported health status of students, employed youth, unemployed youth and other youth aged between 18 and 24 years. Average scores from the Medical Outcomes Study 36-item Short-Form Health Survey (SF-36) by labour force status from the National Health Survey (NHS) are also included. The ABS Labour Force Survey is used to provide detail on the distribution of youth by labour force status. Finally information from the NHS is presented on young people's access to a constant supply of food.

Throughout this chapter ABS categories for the 'usual major activity' of young people are combined as follows:

- 'students' include full-time students and part-time students who are not employed (ABS 1996:88)
- 'employed' young people had, during the preceding week, worked in a job, business or farm for 1 hour or more or who had a job but were absent during that week (ABS 1996:88).
- 'unemployed' young people were not employed during the reference week and actively looked for work at some time during the previous 4 weeks and were available to start, or waiting to start within the following 4 weeks(ABS 1996:88).
- 'other' includes all young people who were not in the three previous categories. For example this category would include young people undertaking home duties, those on sickness benefits, pregnant young women or new mothers not on maternity leave and unemployed young people who were not actively seeking employment.

Self-assessed health status

In the 1995 NHS, respondents were asked to rate their health status as either excellent, very good, good, fair or poor. Information on usual major activity was derived from employment and education details.

Table 21.1: Self-assessed health status by usual major activity, 18–24 year olds, 1995 (per cent)

Usual major activity	Self-assessed health status					Proportion of youth population
	Excellent	Very good	Good	Fair	Poor	
Student	26.0	41.7	24.3	7.5	0.6	30.7
Employed	20.2	42.0	28.8	8.2	0.7	52.4
Unemployed	20.4	26.7	33.0	17.2	2.8	6.9
Other	15.6	34.6	36.4	10.7	2.8	10.0

Source: AIHW, from ABS NHS, 1995.

- Higher proportions of unemployed youth reported health status in the lower groups than did students, employed youth and other. In 1995, 20% of unemployed youth assessed their health as being fair or poor, compared with 9% of employed youth and 8% of students.
- Unemployed youth were least likely to report health status in the excellent or very good categories. Whereas 68% of students and 62% of employed youth reported excellent or very good health, the corresponding figure for unemployed youth was only 47%. However 80% of unemployed youth still reported good to excellent health.

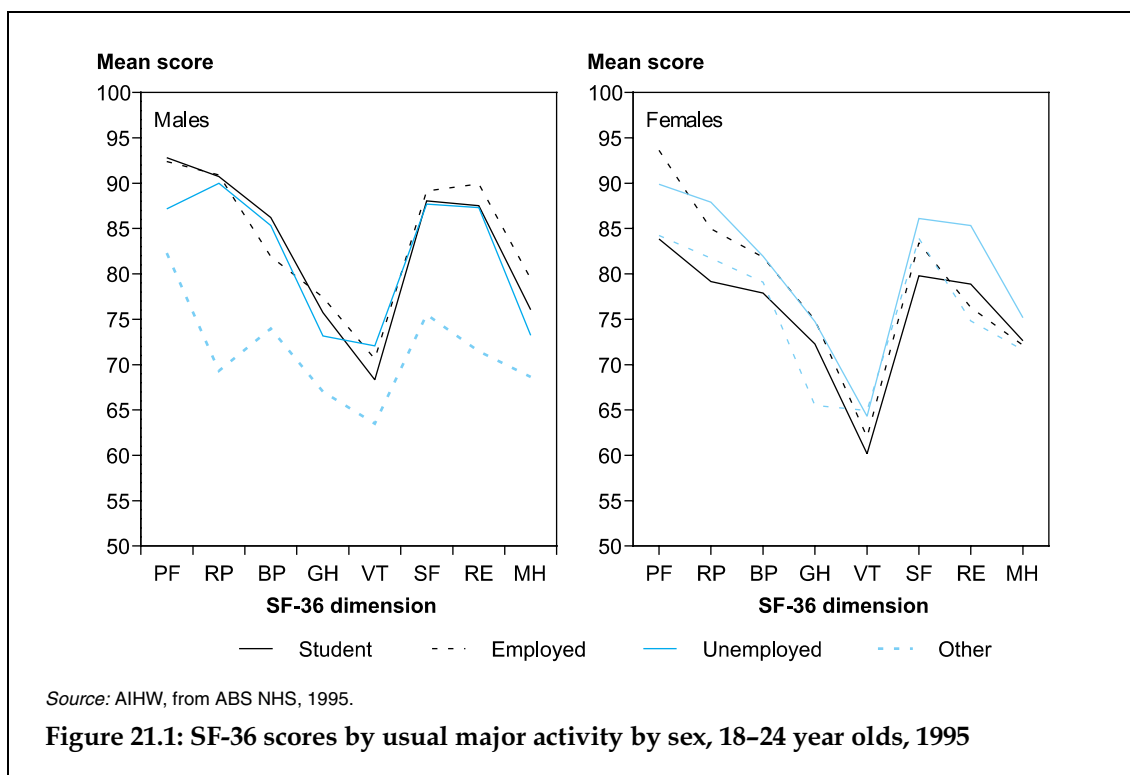
The relative health status of the groups is examined further in the next section.

SF-36 Health Survey

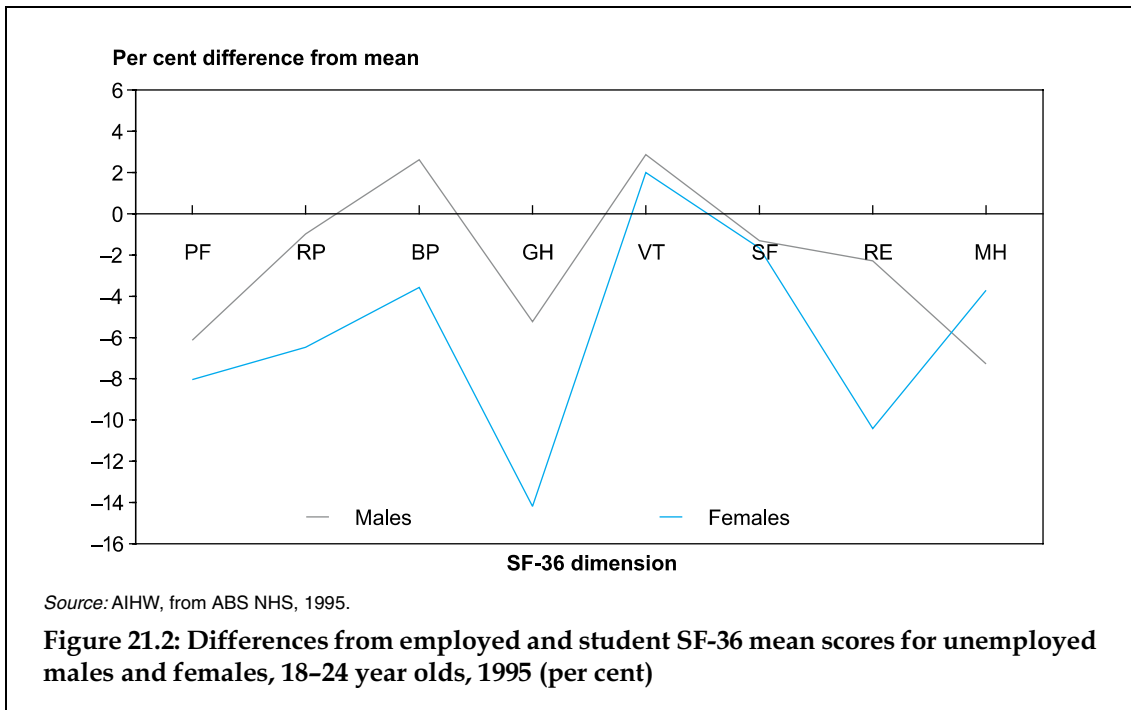
The SF-36 (Short-Form, 36 questions) is a survey designed to provide information on general health and wellbeing (see Chapter 3 for more detail). In 1995, the SF-36 questionnaire was administered to approximately half of the NHS respondents aged 18 years and over. The SF-36 provides indicators across eight dimensions of health and wellbeing: physical functioning (PF), role limitations due to physical problems (RP), bodily pain (BP), general health perceptions (GH), vitality (VT), social functioning (SF), role limitations due to emotional problems (RE), and mental health (MH). A score is derived for each of the eight dimensions and is expressed as a value between zero and 100 (ABS 1995).

The lower scores experienced by youth for GH, VT and MH (Figure 21.1) follow the normal SF-36 pattern as mid-range scores reflect no unfavourable evaluations of health in general – not feeling tired or worn out and no symptoms of psychological distress. To record high scores for VT, a respondent would have to report feeling full of pep and energy all of the time, and for MH report frequently feeling happy, calm and peaceful. High scores for the remaining five variables indicate the absence of limitations or disabilities (ABS 1995).

Employment



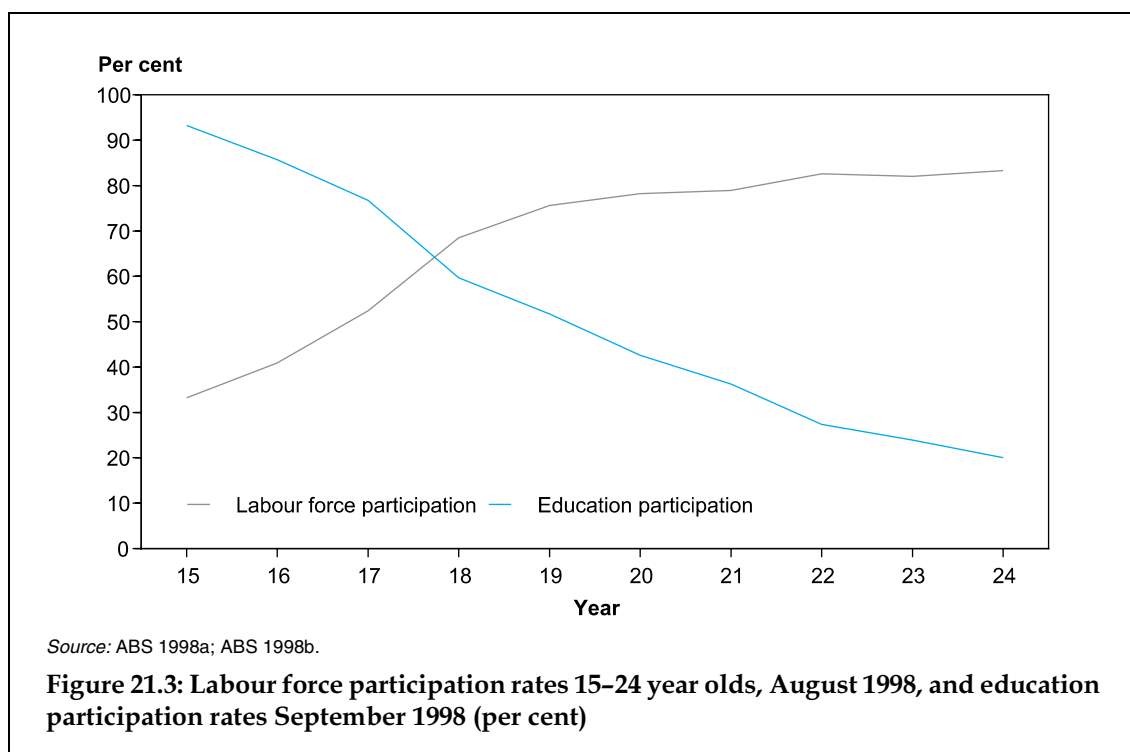
- Male mean scores for each of the groups of usual major activity, except 'other', were higher than the corresponding mean scores of young females.
- For males, the mean scores for 'other' (those who are neither in the labour force nor studying) were the lowest on all of the health and wellbeing indicators. Similarly, for females, 'other' scored the lowest on the majority of the health and wellbeing indicators. Therefore, this group exhibited the poorest state of health and wellbeing. An analysis of the distribution of scores shows that 'other' was frequently the most diverse. Some young people within the 'other' group scored very high while others scored very low.
- For young males the mean scores for employed, unemployed and students varied as the top ranking three, whereas employed scored the highest for females on most dimensions, followed by students and then unemployed.
- For both males and females, unemployed mean scores for 'physical functioning' were lower than employed persons and students. Unemployed young people's performance of physical activities was more limited due to health than students and employed persons.
- On average, unemployed females' evaluation of their personal health was significantly lower than employed females, students and 'other'. Unemployed females also reported a significantly greater interference with daily activities resulting from emotional problems than employed females.
- Young unemployed males reported a significantly lower level of mental health than their employed counterparts, but for females, all groups recorded similar levels of mental health.



- Figure 21.2 shows the per cent difference between unemployed mean scores and with employed persons and students combined, for young males and young females.
- Unemployed males were closer to the mean of students and employed males than unemployed females were to the mean of students and employed females. The health and wellbeing of unemployed females were generally poorer than that of employed females and students. In comparison, the health and wellbeing of unemployed males was better than employed males and students on two dimensions and worse on the others.

Labour force and education participation rates

The labour force participation rate for each age in Figure 21.3 below is the number of people in the labour force expressed as a percentage of the civilian population of that age. To be included in the labour force, individuals must be either employed (worked at least 1 hour during the reference week) or unemployed and have actively looked for work in the 4 weeks prior to the reference week and be available to start work during the reference week. The graph also shows the proportion of young people who are attending an educational institution. This education participation rate is the number of full-time students at each age expressed as a percentage of the estimated resident population of that age. The labour force and education participation rates are not mutually exclusive; for example, a full-time student with a casual job would be counted in the education participation rate as well as the labour force participation rate.

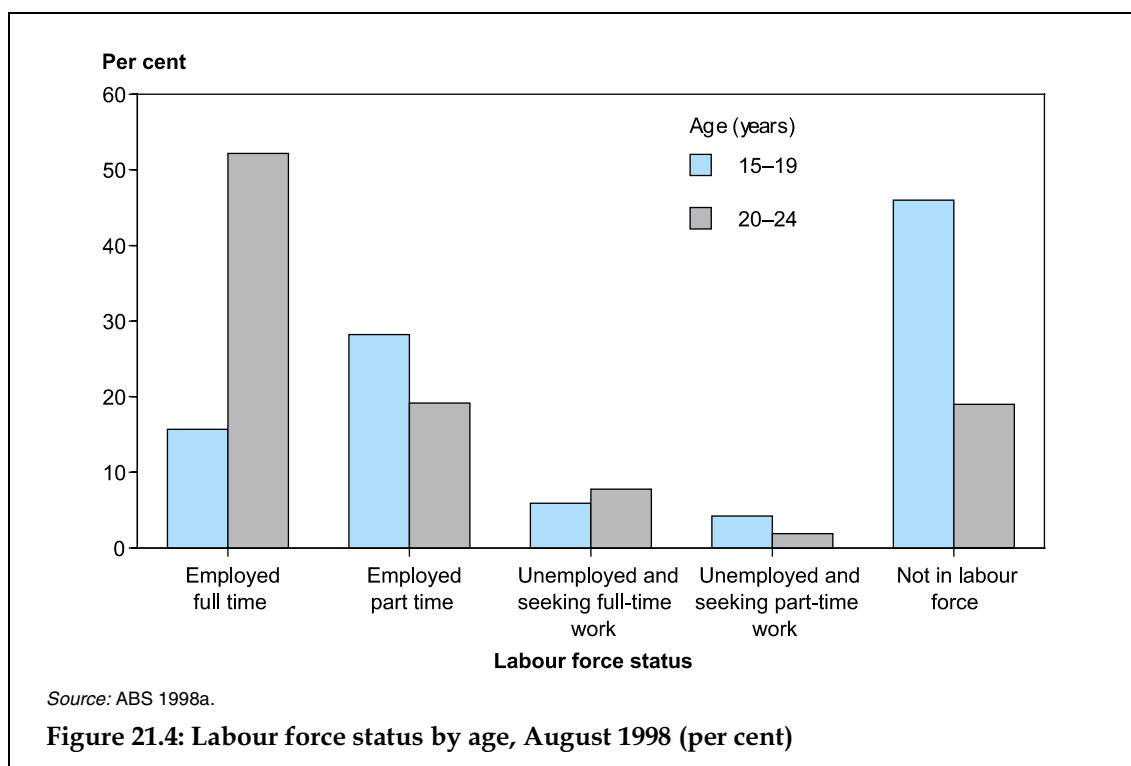


- As age increases, the proportion of young people in the labour force increases to a plateau of approximately 80% from age 20. Conversely, the proportion of young people attending educational institutions decreases with age.
- Some young people partake in some kind of paid employment (this could be merely 1 hour of work per week) while still attending educational institutions. The labour force participation rate for 15 year olds is 33% and the education participation rate is 93%. At the other end of the scale, the labour force participation rate for persons aged 24 years is 83% and the education participation rate is 20%.

Labour force status

This section presents information on the number of 15–19 year olds and 20–24 year olds employed full time and part time, unemployed and actively seeking part-time and full-time work, as well as those not in the labour force. The data are from the ABS Labour Force Survey.

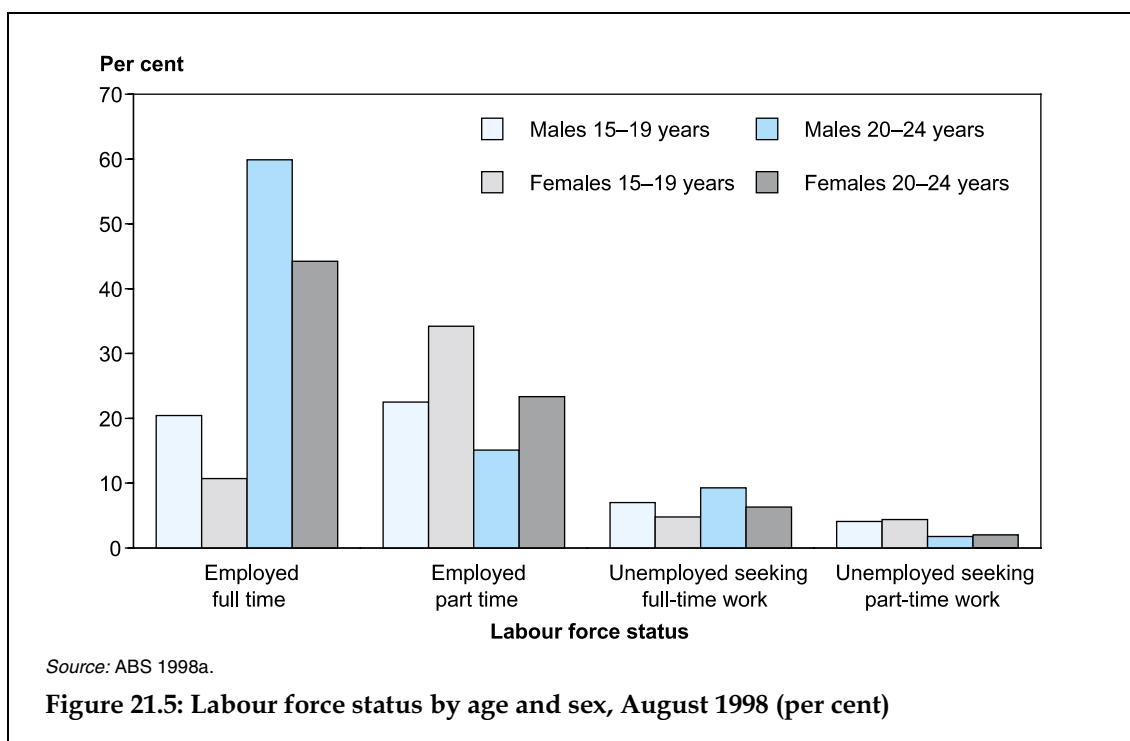
The ABS defines a part-time worker as a person who usually works less than 35 hours per week and did so during the reference week, and an unemployed person as someone who must be aged 15 and over, not employed during the reference week and actively seeking work (ABS 1998a).



- As shown in Figure 21.3, the proportion of young people still studying decreases with age, whereas the proportion in the labour force increases with age. Figure 21.4 above gives more information on the labour force status of 15–19 year olds compared with 20–24 year olds.
- Young people aged 15–19 years were more likely to work or seek part-time employment whereas those aged 20–24 were more likely to undertake or seek full-time work.
- A far greater proportion of 20–24 year olds were in full-time employment compared to 15–19 year olds (52% and 16% respectively).
- While 28% of 15–19 year olds were in part-time employment, the corresponding figure for young people aged 20–24 years was 19%.
- A greater proportion of young people aged 20–24 years were unemployed and actively seeking full-time employment compared with those aged 15–19 years. In contrast, a greater proportion of young people aged 15–19 years were unemployed and actively seeking part-time work.
- The proportion of young people aged 15–19 years who were not in the labour force was more than double that of 20–24 year olds.

Sex and labour force status

Labour force status is influenced not only by age, but also by sex. Whereas the previous section presented the differences in labour force status between young people aged 15–19 and 20–24 years, this section presents differences between the sexes within these age groups.



- Males aged 15–19 and 20–24 years were more likely than their female counterparts to be in full-time employment. At ages 15–19 years, the proportion of males in full-time employment was almost double that of females (20% and 11% respectively). At ages 20–24 years, 60% of males were employed full-time compared with 44% of females.
- Females aged 15–19 and 20–24 years were more likely to work part-time than males of the same ages.
- For each age group, the proportions of unemployed males seeking full-time work were slightly greater than the proportions of females. The proportions of unemployed males and females aged 15–19 and 20–24 years seeking part-time work were similar.

Youth unemployment and underemployment

Table 21.2: Unemployment rates, 15–24 years old, August 1998 (per cent)

	Sex and age (years)					
	Males		Females		Persons	
	15–19	20–24	15–19	20–24	15–19	20–24
Participation rate	54.0	86.0	54.0	75.9	54.0	81.0
Unemployment rate	20.6	12.8	16.9	10.9	18.8	11.9
Long-term unemployment rate (unemployed for 52 weeks or more)	3.5	3.6	3.0	3.1	3.2	3.4

Source: ABS 1998a.

- Participation rates measure the percentage of the civilian population who are in the labour force (employed or unemployed).
- The lower participation rates for females compared with males aged 20–24 years might be explained by females not entering the labour force due to pregnancy and child rearing.
- The unemployment rate is the percentage of the labour force that is not employed and actively seeking work (it does not include those who are unemployed and have given up searching for work or those who might have taken part-time employment while waiting for a full-time opportunity).
- Males aged 15–24 have higher unemployment rates than females at the same ages.
- Young males experienced a higher unemployment rate than females. They also had slightly higher long-term unemployment rates (around 3.5% compared to 3.0%).

A further measure of youth labour force status is the proportion of part-time workers who desired to work more hours. This can be measured as the percentage of workers who worked less than 35 hours (part-time workers) but wished to work more hours, or the percentage of part time workers who actively sought full-time work in the 4 weeks to the end of the reference week. Part-time workers aged 20–24 years were more likely to prefer to work more hours (40% compared with 26% of 15–19 year olds) and to have actively sought full-time work (18% compared with 9% of 15–19 year olds). Males aged 20–24 years were more likely than females to prefer to work more hours (45% of males and 37% of females), and to actively seek full-time work (21% of males and 15% of females). The proportions for those aged 15–19 years were similar for males and females (ABS 1998a).

Access to food supply

The 1995 National Nutrition Survey asked if respondents had ran out of food and had no money to buy more at any time in the last 12 months. Table 19.3 presents this information by usual major activity. Figure 15.2 in Chapter 15 shows the proportion of young people who ran out of food and had no money to buy more by age group and sex.

Table 21.3: Persons who ran out of food, by usual major activity, 16-24 year olds, 1995 (per cent)

Usual major activity	Ran out of food and had no money to buy more	Did not run out of food	Not applicable
Student	8.5	91.5	0.0
Employed	6.3	93.4	0.2
Unemployed	31.1	68.0	1.0
Other	10.2	84.5	5.4

Source: AIHW from NNS 1995.

- Unemployed young people were the most likely to run out of food and have no money to buy more. About 31% of unemployed people reported being in this situation, compared with 9% of students and 6% of employed young people.

References

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