

## 3. Health and wellbeing

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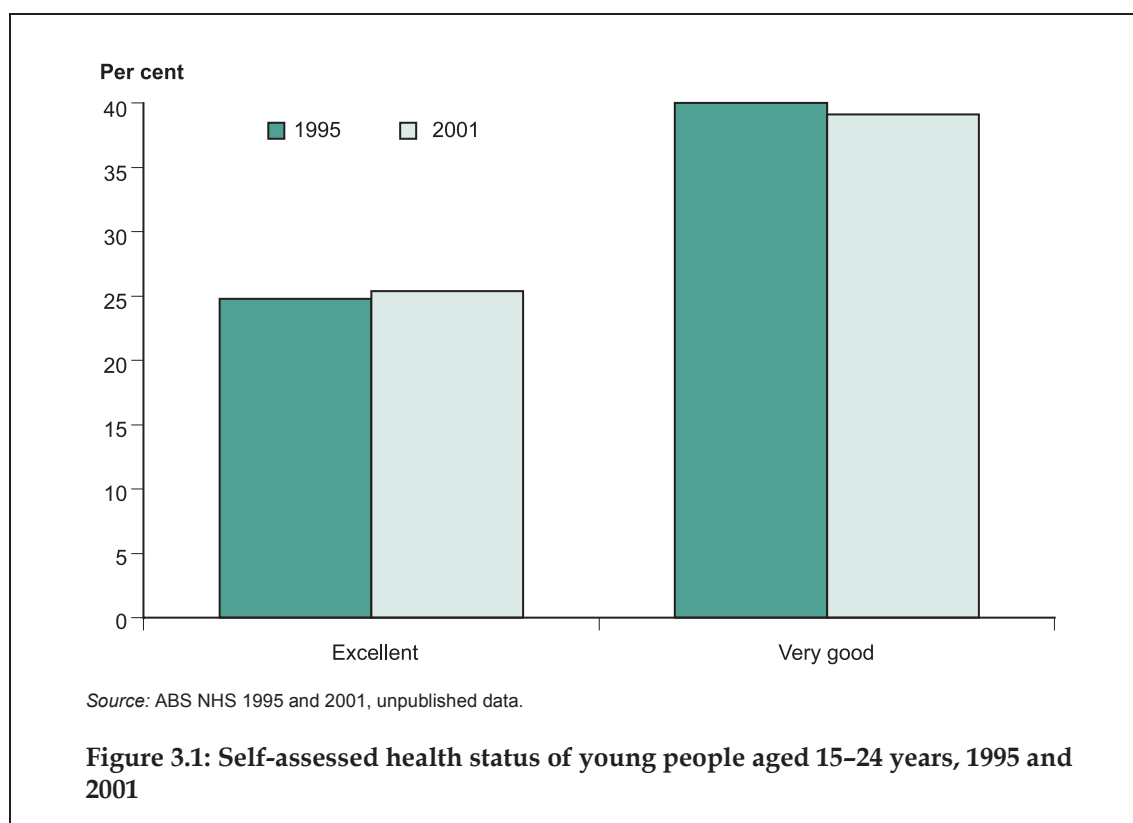
Self-reported health status is often a good indication of the actual health of a person. People's perceptions of their own health have been shown to be good, independent predictors of their future health care use and their long-term survival (Idler & Benyamini 1997). For example, a consistent inverse relationship has been observed between self-reported health status and the number of visits to a doctor in a year, and between perceived physical fitness and death (Miilunpalo et al. 1997).

Although the use of personal assessment of self-assessed health and wellbeing to predict health outcomes among young people has not been formally tested, its usefulness among adults makes it worthwhile to use in this age group.

This chapter provides an overview of the health and wellbeing of young people, using data collected as part of the ABS National Health Survey. Unlike the other chapters in this part of the report, which measure departures from health (such as mortality and morbidity rates), this chapter covers both positive and negative aspects of health, based on young people's own assessment of their health and their quality of life.

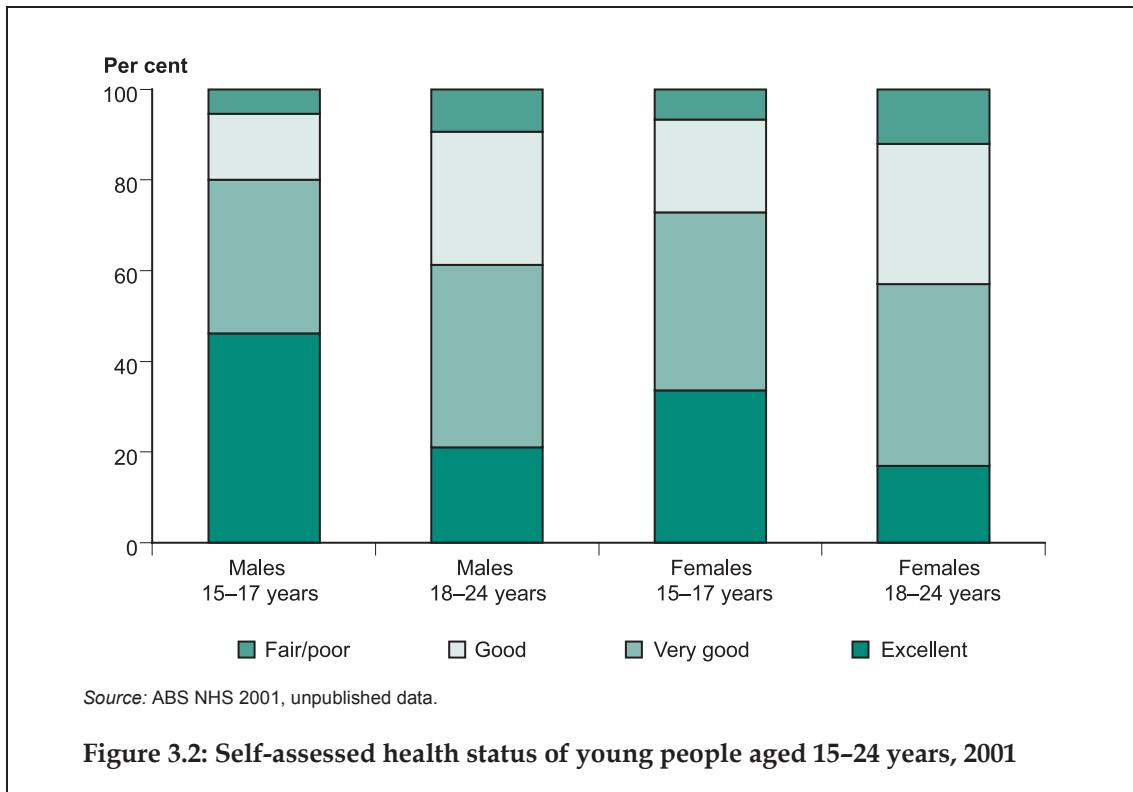
## Self-assessed health status

This section presents results from the ABS NHS on 'self-assessed health status' which is defined as the 'respondent's perception of their general health' (ABS 1997: 75). The scale used in the 1995 and 2001 surveys asked young people to rate their health on a five-point scale as 'excellent', 'very good', 'good', 'fair' or 'poor'. Results from the 1995 and 2001 surveys are shown in Figure 3.1.



- In 2001, about 65% of young Australians aged 15–24 years rated their health as 'excellent' or 'very good'. A further 26% reported that their health was 'good'.
- The remaining 9% reported their health as either 'fair' or 'poor'. These proportions remained almost unchanged between 1995 and 2001 for all young people aged 15–24 years, although there were differences in self-assessed health status by age and sex in both years.

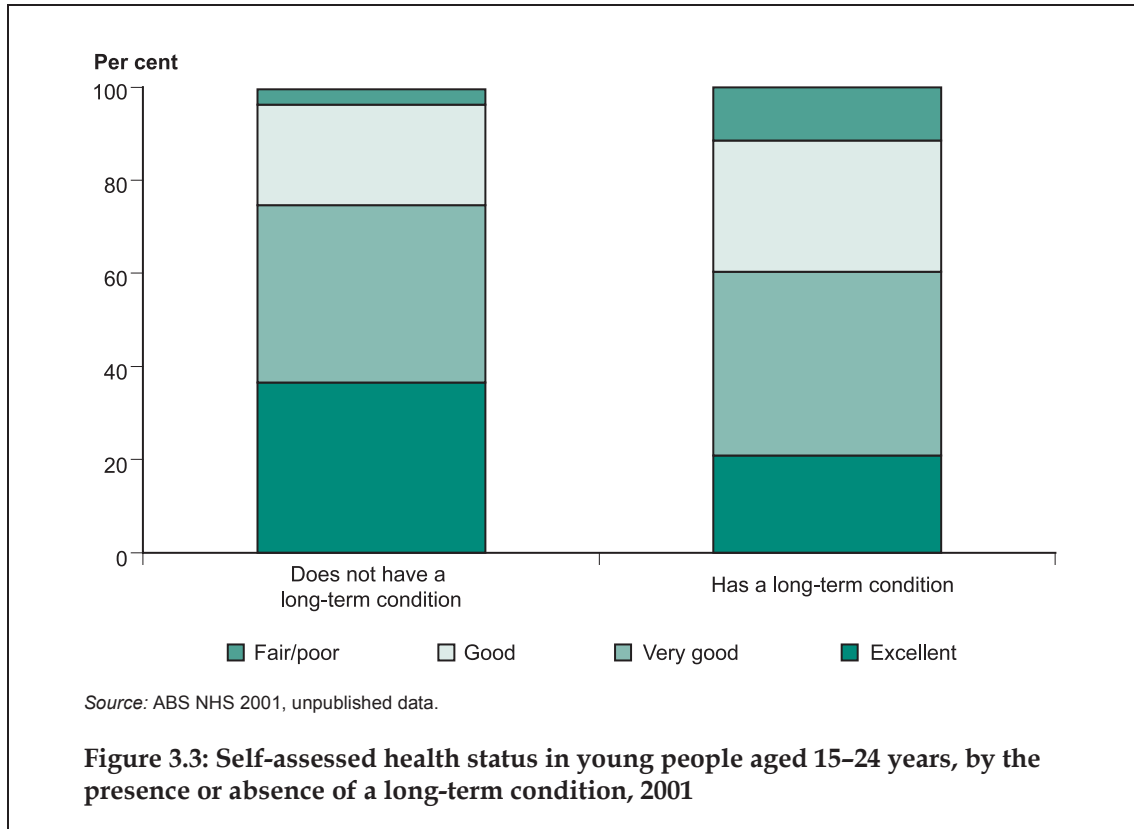
Differences in self-assessed health status by age and sex for 2001 are shown in Figure 3.2.



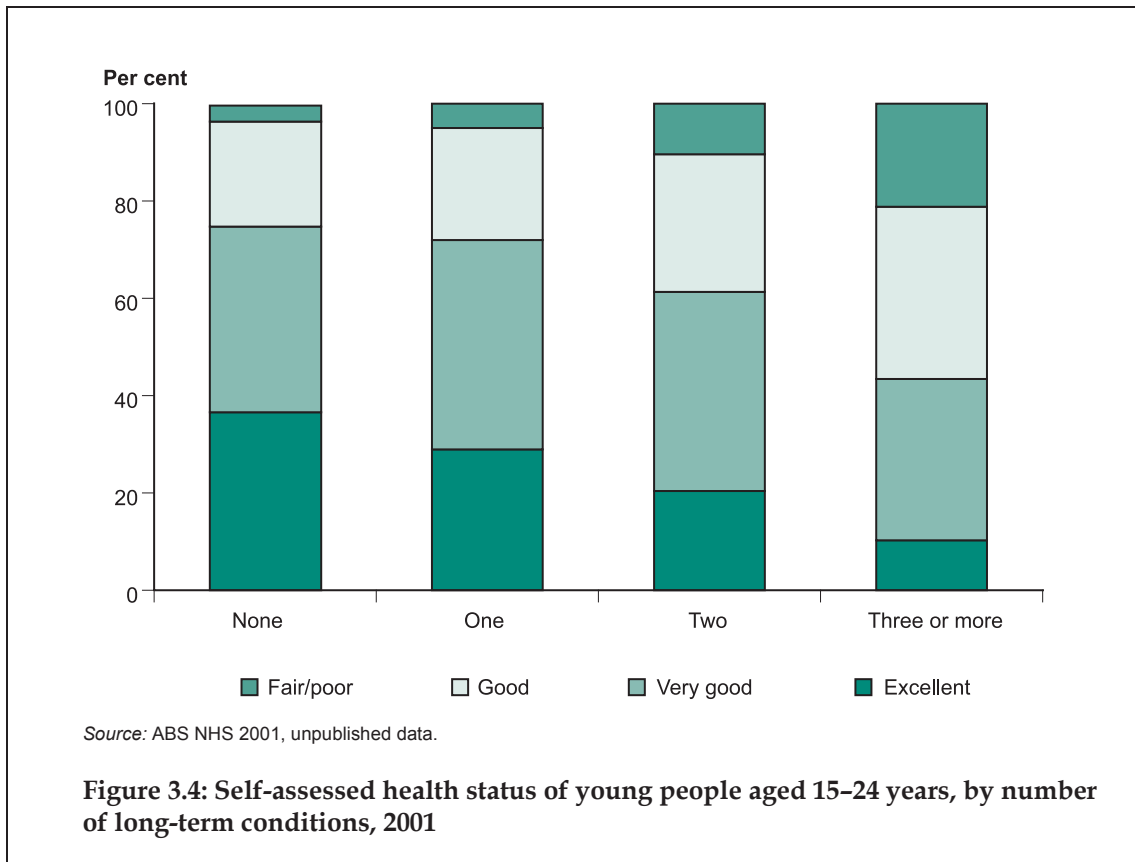
- There were clear differences in self-assessed health status by age and sex. A higher proportion of those aged 15-17 years reported their health as being 'excellent' or 'very good' than those aged 18-24 years – 76% compared with 59%. Just over one in ten (11%) young people aged 18-24 years rated their health as 'fair' or 'poor', compared with 6% of those aged 15-17 years.
- Irrespective of age, a higher proportion of males than females aged 15-24 years reported their health as 'excellent' or 'very good' – 67% of males, compared with 62% of females.

## Health status and long-term conditions

The relationship between reported health status and the presence or absence of a long-term condition – a condition that has lasted or is expected to last for 6 months or more – as reported in the ABS NHS is shown in Figures 3.3 and 3.4.



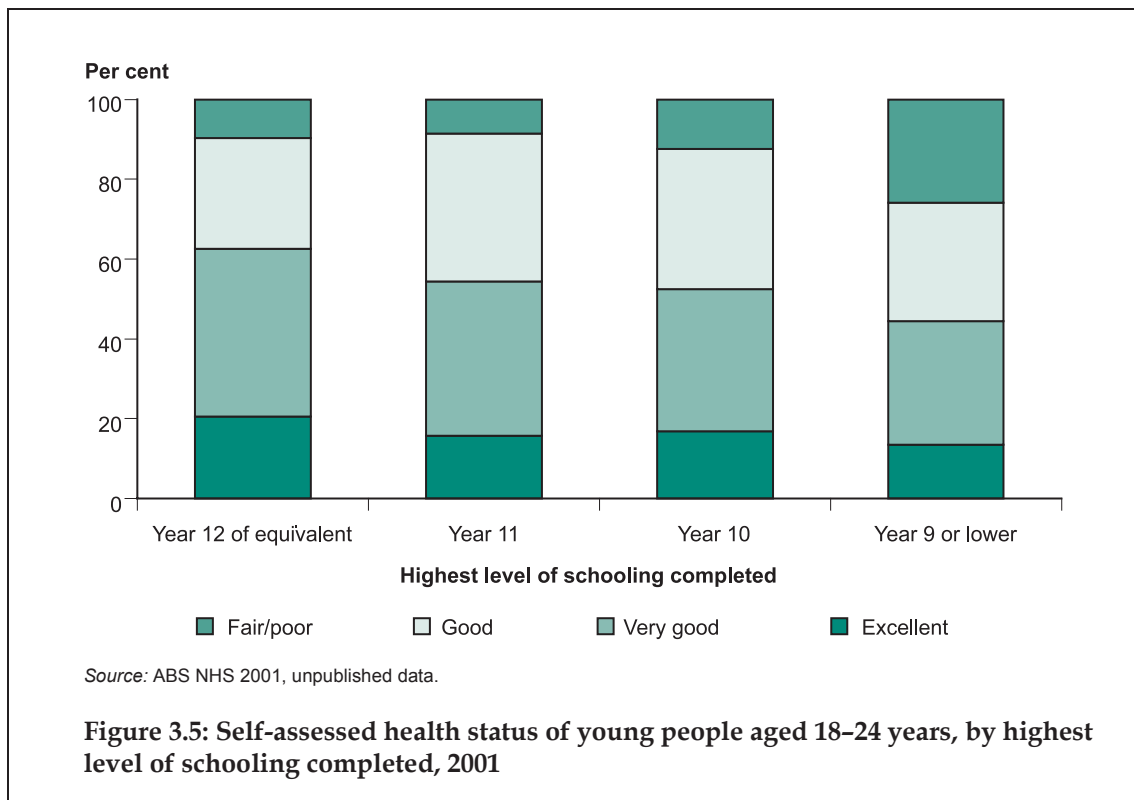
- Self-reported health status was affected by the presence or absence of a long-term condition. The proportion of young people aged 15–24 years who rated their health as 'fair' or 'poor' was 3 times as high for those who had a long-term condition (11%) compared with those who did not have any long-term condition (3%).



- The proportion of young people who rated their health as ‘fair’ or ‘poor’ increased with the number of long-term conditions, from 3% of those without any long-term condition, to 21% of those with three long-term conditions or more.

## Health status and education

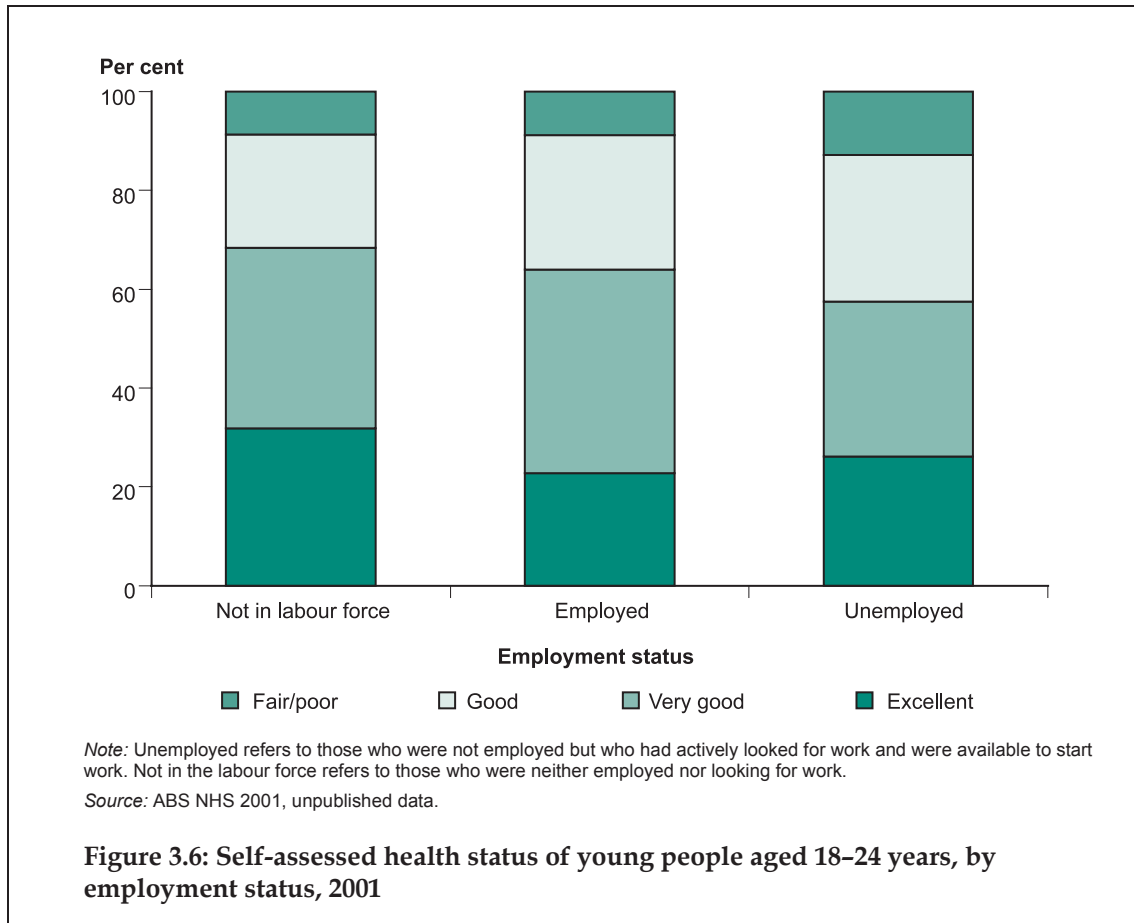
Young people surveyed in the NHS can be divided into four groups according to the highest level of schooling completed: Year 12, Year 11, Year 10 and Year 9 or lower. The association between self-assessed health status and the four educational level groups is shown in Figure 3.5.



- The proportion of young people who reported their health as 'excellent' or 'very good' was highest among young people who had completed Year 12 – 63% compared with 54%, 52% and 44% of those who completed Year 11, Year 10 and Year 9 or below, respectively.
- Just over 25% of young people who completed Year 9 or lower reported their health status as 'poor' or 'fair', compared with less than 10% of those who completed Year 12.

## Health status and employment

The association between self-assessed health status and labour force status is shown in Figure 3.6.



- A higher proportion of young people who were employed rated their health as 'excellent' or 'very good' than those who were unemployed – 64%, compared with 58%.
- A higher proportion of young people who were unemployed reported their health as 'poor' or 'fair' than those who were employed – 13%, compared with 9%.
- Young people who were not in the labour force rated their health as better than either those who were employed or unemployed.

It is important to note an overlap exists between the education and employment status of young people. Many of those who are not in the labour force are in full-time education, and some of those who are employed are in full-time education.

## Health transition

In addition to information on current health status, the ABS NHS collects information on self-perceived changes in health over time – in this case, whether young people perceived their health to have improved or worsened compared to 1 year ago. Results are shown in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1: Current health status among young people aged 15–24 years compared with health status 1 year ago, 2001 (per cent)**

Health status	Males			Females			Persons		
	15–17 years	18–24 years	15–24 years	15–17 years	18–24 years	15–24 years	15–17 years	18–24 years	15–24 years
Much better	5.6	11.5	9.7	4.6	11.1	9.1	5.1	11.3	9.4
Somewhat better	11.1	17.5	15.6	12.8	23.2	20.0	11.9	20.3	17.7
About the same	78.8	58.0	64.3	73.8	55.4	61.1	76.3	56.8	62.7
Somewhat worse/much worse	4.5	13.0	10.4	8.8	10.3	9.8	6.6	11.7	10.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: ABS NHS 2001, unpublished data.

- Approximately two-thirds (63%) of young people aged 15–24 years reported that their health was 'about the same' as 1 year ago, but more than 25% reported that their health was 'much better' or 'somewhat better'. Around 9% reported that their health was worse than 1 year ago, and 1% reported that it was much worse.
- The perceived health of young people over time became less stable with age. A greater proportion of young people aged 15–17 years than young people aged 18–24 years reported that their health was about the same as the previous year. In the older age group, a higher proportion than in the younger age group thought that their health had either improved, or had deteriorated, since the previous year. Of those aged 18–24 years, 12% reported their health as 'somewhat worse' or 'much worse', compared with 7% of those aged 15–17 years.
- Overall, the proportion of young people aged 15–24 years who reported their health as 'worse' or 'much worse' was similar for both males and females.

## Quality of life

In the 2001 ABS NHS, a quality-of-life measure was included for persons aged 18 years and over. The respondents were asked to rate their overall feelings about their life, taking into account what happened in the last year and what they expect to happen in the future. They were asked to rate themselves as 'delighted', 'pleased', 'mostly satisfied', 'mixed', 'mostly dissatisfied', 'unhappy' or 'terrible'. Results are shown in Table 3.2.

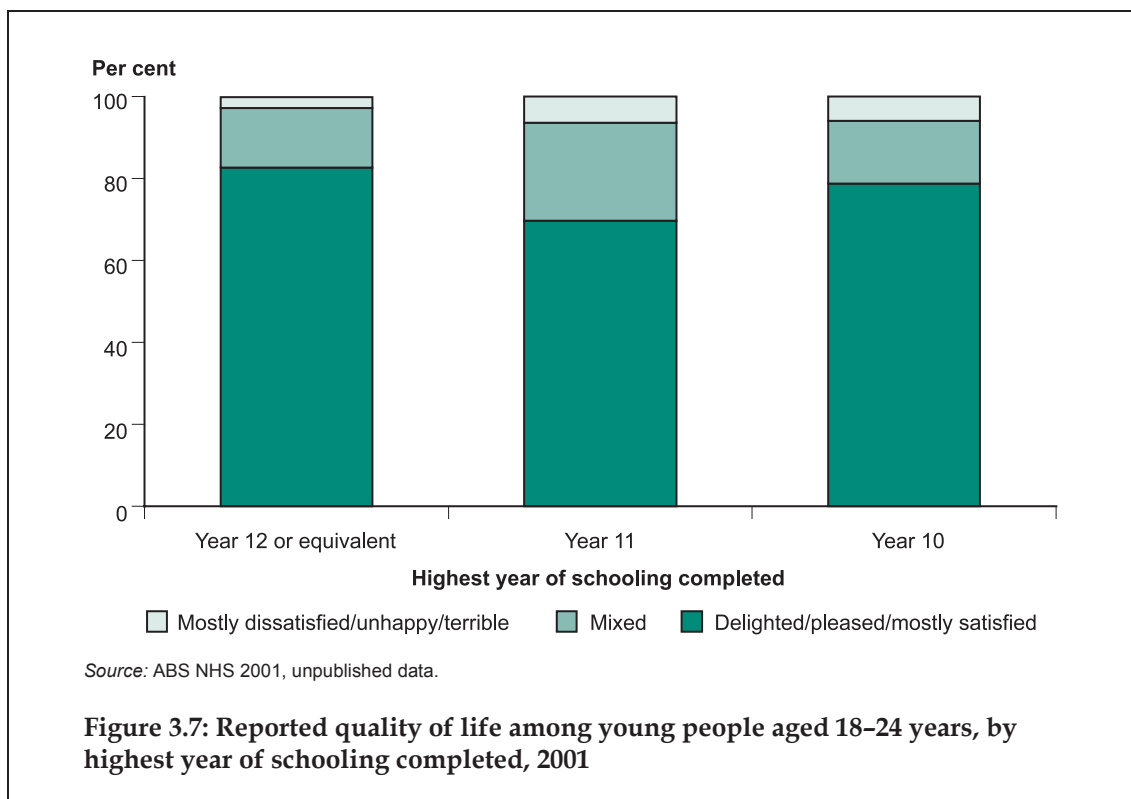
**Table 3.2: Reported quality of life among people aged 18–24 years, 2001 (per cent)**

Quality of life	Males	Females	Persons
Delighted/pleased/mostly satisfied	83.0	77.4	80.2
Mixed	13.1	18.6	15.8
Mostly dissatisfied/unhappy/terrible	3.9	4.0	3.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: ABS NHS 2001, unpublished data.

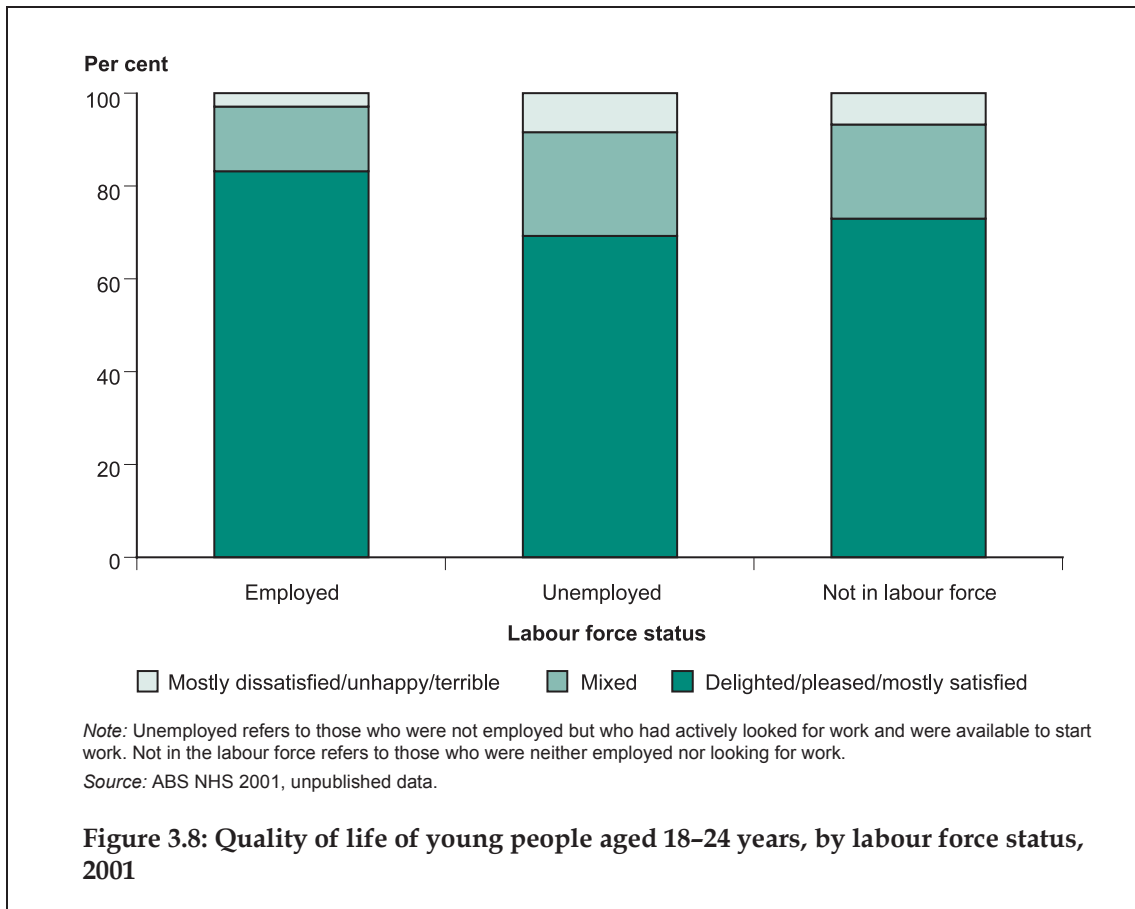
- Just over half of young people aged 18–24 years reported that they were 'delighted' or 'pleased' with their lives (52%). A further 28% were 'mostly satisfied' with their lives.
- Almost 16% had mixed feelings about their lives, and a minority (4%) saw their lives as unsatisfactory, unhappy or terrible.
- A higher proportion of males (83%) than females (77%) reported that they were either 'delighted', 'pleased' or 'mostly satisfied' with their lives.
- A slightly higher proportion of females (19%) than males (13%) had mixed feelings about their lives, but about the same proportion of males and females thought their lives were unsatisfactory, unhappy or terrible.

Quality of life and education



- The proportion of young people who were 'delighted', 'pleased' or 'mostly satisfied' with their quality of life was highest among those who had completed Year 12 or equivalent (83%), and lowest among those whose highest year of school completed was Year 11 (70%).
- The proportion of young people whose quality of life measure was 'mostly dissatisfied', 'unhappy' or 'terrible' was highest among those whose highest year of schooling completed was Year 9 or lower (10%), and lowest among those who completed Year 12 or equivalent (3%).

Quality of life and employment



- The highest proportion of young people who were ‘delighted’, ‘pleased’ or ‘mostly satisfied’ with their quality of life was employed (83%), and the lowest proportion was unemployed (69%).
- The highest proportion of young people aged 18–24 years who reported ‘mixed’ feelings about their quality of life was among the unemployed (22%), followed by those not in the labour force (16%) and employed persons (14%). The proportion of young people whose quality of life measure was ‘mostly dissatisfied’, ‘unhappy’ or ‘terrible’ followed a similar trend, with unemployed persons having the highest rate (8%), followed by those not in the labour force (4%) and employed people (3%).

