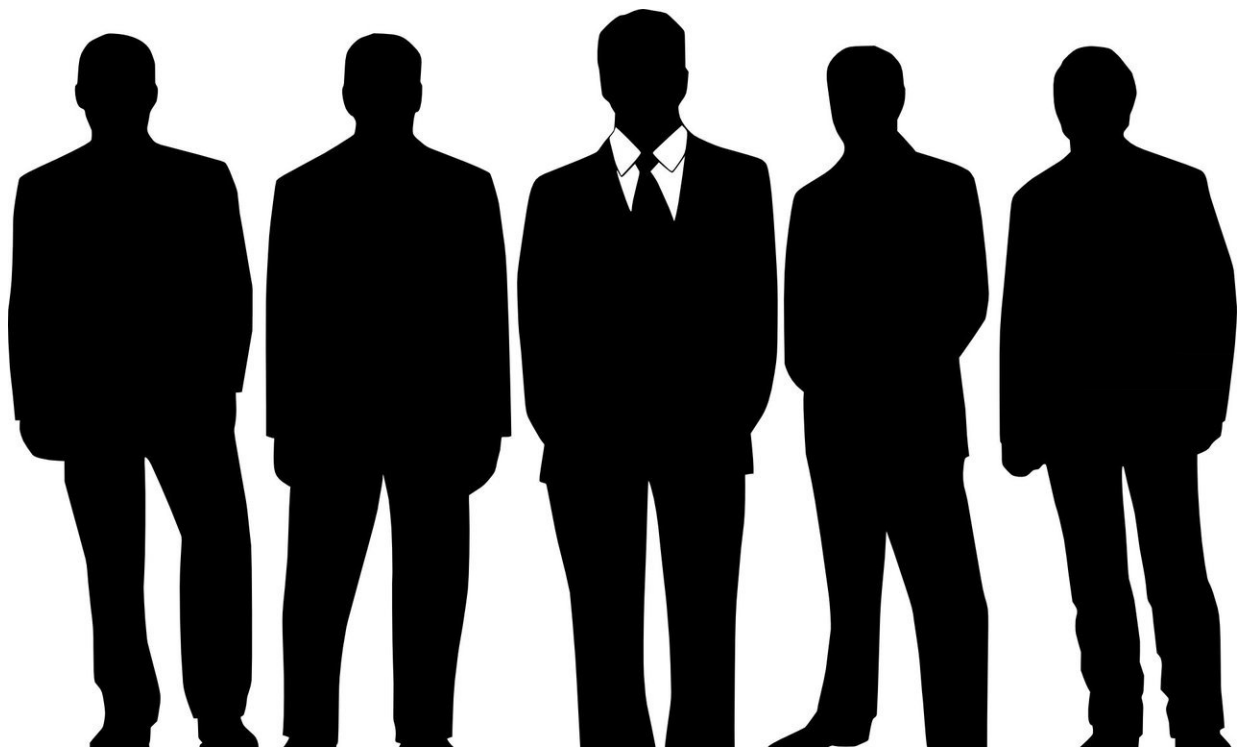


# Employment and wellbeing often don't correlate in India, Ethiopia, Vietnam and Peru

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Not all jobs are 'good jobs', and new research from the Universities of East Anglia (UEA) and Birmingham finds such work can have a negative impact on wellbeing.

The team examined how [employment status](#) and job attributes are linked to the wellbeing of young people in India, Ethiopia, Peru and Vietnam. The analysis also examined how [childhood experiences](#) and family circumstances impact on adult outcomes, and the association between wellbeing and access to wealth, specifically in the form of consumer durables such as phones, televisions, bicycles or cars.

The research, 'Is work enough? Well-being and employment of young people in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam', is published today in the journal *Development Policy Review*.

Particularly in countries where [jobs](#) in the formal sector are in short supply, and people are often employed in jobs for which they are over-educated, employment does not have an unqualified positive effect on wellbeing. Job attributes matter, specifically, who employs the individual, their pay, the [work environment](#) and the pride they take in their work.

Previous studies have mainly focused on developed countries, where labour market conditions are very different and social protections are more widely available.

In low- and middle-income countries, large informal sectors are still responsible for generating a significant share of employment; but work is often precarious and can be risky, poorly rewarded and undertaken in poor conditions. Such work limits potential and may not contribute to overall wellbeing associated with health and longevity.

With finite 'good jobs' – those that are secure, well-paid and provide [social protection](#)—people need to create their own employment or accept jobs that offer limited satisfaction and financial insecurity, which can lead to worry, depression and lower overall life-satisfaction.

Unemployment insurance is also largely absent and individuals with limited access to resources cannot afford to remain unemployed while looking for a better job.

In the context of the four countries in the study, type of employment is relevant. Working for oneself or another individual or a household is associated with lower wellbeing than working for a private company, a cooperative or a public sector/government organisation. 'Irregular' employment with low pay often equates to misery, said one of the study's authors.

Dr. Nicholas Vasilakos, Associate Professor in Sustainable Business Economics and Public Policy in UEA's Norwich Business School, said investing in youth employment is central to development agendas, and would help countries meet the UN Sustainable Development Goal of decent work for all by 2030.

Dr. Vasilakos said: "Policy directed towards increasing employment rates among young people needs to consider the wellbeing implications of the different kinds of jobs they are able to access.

"Our research shows policy in less-developed countries must target inequalities in earlier life as well as labour market barriers and imperfections that restrict youth access to good jobs.

Prof Fiona Carmichael, Professor of Labour Economics at the University of Birmingham, said: "Employment policies aimed at young people need to target those who are marginalised by labour market structures that tend to reinforce the advantages of the more educated and those from wealthier backgrounds. Targeted employment and training programmes can help to provide young people with skills and experience that enhance their productivity and employability."

Dr. Christian Darko, a Lecturer in Applied Business and Labour Economics at the University of Birmingham, said: "Having a good job is fundamental to improving living standards and quality of life. Good jobs provide greater wellbeing to those that hold them and their value to society is higher. A good job can provide a sense of belonging that enhances social inclusion.

"In contrast, poor working conditions can lead to frustration, lowering wellbeing and potentially fuelling a sense of social injustice that weakens [social cohesion](#)."

Pride in work is positively and strongly significantly associated with wellbeing. A poorer quality physical working environment is significantly associated with lower wellbeing.

Perhaps not surprisingly, wellbeing is also higher in jobs with higher earnings, and where the physical working environment is more conducive to health and safety.

The study data came from the Young Lives project, a longitudinal cohort study of childhood poverty following the lives of 12,000 children from India, Ethiopia, Peru and Vietnam.

Young people in Peru scored highest on the wellbeing scale and those in India scored the lowest.

In total, 78 per cent of the young people were in employment when surveyed at age 22 (86 per cent of males and 71 per cent of females), with the highest employment participation in Vietnam and the lowest in India. The index of household wealth was higher for females, and highest in Vietnam.

Of the four countries, inequality was highest in India and Peru and

lowest in Vietnam and Ethiopia. World Bank estimates also indicated that distribution of income is most unequal in Peru and India, and more equal in Vietnam. The figures showed the distribution of income in Peru and India is more unequal than in the United States, by far the most unequal country in the global north.

Wellbeing is also predicted by current and childhood health and household wealth, with ownership of consumer durables associated more strongly with wellbeing than housing quality or access to services. Greater exposure to shocks – such as the death of a close relative, famine and conflict – from age eight is found to have lasting effects on [wellbeing](#) into young adulthood.

'Is work enough? Well-being and [employment](#) of young people in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam', is published 6 August 2021 in the journal *Development Policy Review*.

**More information:** Is work enough? Well-being and employment of young people in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam, *Development Policy Review*, 2021.

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