

Additional information provided by the Australian Psychological Society for the Senate Inquiry into Intergenerational Welfare, December 2018

The APS would like to provide the following additional evidence in response to the questions we received during the hearing.

- Whether the experience of work is beneficial or detrimental depends on the quality of the work experience. Employment that is suitably remunerated, offers flexible work conditions, provides meaningful activity, has appropriate working conditions (and is sustainable) and contributes to a career path is associated with positive mental health outcomes (Winefield, 1995; Butterworth et al, 2011).
- But the claim that even bad jobs are better for psychological wellbeing than unemployment is not supported by research (e.g., Winefield, Tiggemann, Winefield, & Goldney, 1993). On the contrary, there is now evidence that working in poor quality, unsatisfactory jobs may be worse for individual mental health than the experience of unemployment (Butterworth et al., 2011), and that this is particularly so for young people (Thomas, 2014).
- The experience of seeking and not obtaining work is typically detrimental. But the experience of unemployment, in one form or another, is currently all that is realistically available to a sizeable minority of our community. Whilst psychologically oriented active-labour-market-promoting interventions may well reduce unemployment in some target groups, in a situation where the number of unemployed people vastly outnumbers the number of employment vacancies - as in Australia today - they cannot do anything more than reorder the queue of unemployed people looking for employment (e.g., Karren & Sherman, 2012).
- Research has also demonstrated how (individual) agency is undermined and restricted by structural factors such as unemployment (Fryer, 2014a & b). For example, beyond issues of attitude and emulation of parents, a range of structural factors are known to inhibit participation in work, including limited work experience, low levels of education, childcare costs and transport difficulties (Vinson, 2009), as well as discrimination practices in recruitment processes and in the workplace.
- We refer the committee to the Life Around Here Study, which along with other research has consistently found that when vulnerable families do access support services, they find their encounters with the service system to be stigmatising (Hand, Gray, Higgins, Lohar, & Deblaquiere, 2011)

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