



Who are most vulnerable to employment changes during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Key findings from a national survey

Benjamin J Gray, Richard G Kyle, Jiao Song, Alisha R Davies



COVID-19 employment recovery strategies should place an emphasis on creating secure job opportunities and supporting the most vulnerable

This evidence briefing identifies the characteristics of those more likely to have not been able to work (either through furlough or unemployment) in the first few months of the pandemic. Such individuals could suffer future job losses as those placed on furlough are at a greater risk of losing their jobs once the furlough scheme comes to an end (30 September 2021 at present).

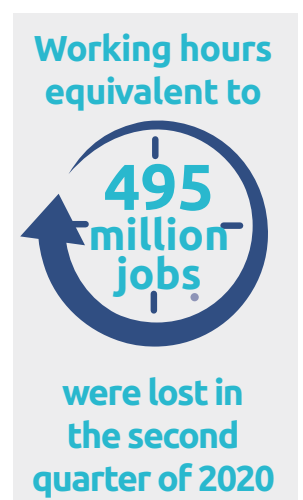
What's the issue?

The relationships between good health and good employment are well established. This is emphasised within *The Welsh Health Equity Status report (WHESRI)* which places both 'health and employment and working conditions' and 'health and income security and social protection' as two of the five essential conditions for prosperous lives.

Global estimates suggest that up to 25 million jobs could be lost because of the COVID-19 pandemic and working hours equivalent to 495 million jobs were lost in the second quarter of 2020.



Source: International Labour Organization



Source: International Labour Organization and The World Bank

In the United Kingdom (UK), the unemployment rate reached 5.1% - a three year high between October-December 2020, and in Wales as of 1 March 2021 the unemployment rate is 4.4%.

The aim of this briefing is to present findings from a national survey of employment and health in

Wales in May/June 2020 to better understand the indirect socioeconomic and other society harms of the COVID-19 pandemic and to help inform future recovery as outlined in The Welsh Government **Leading Wales out of the coronavirus pandemic** framework.



Source: Office for National Statistics

Key findings

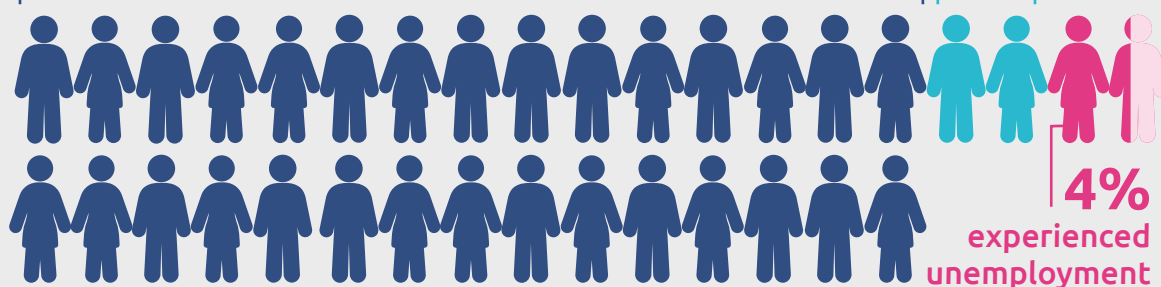
Our findings suggest that of the Welsh working age population (as of May/June 2020):

90%

were in the same job as they were in February 2020

6%

changed jobs



Our Approach

The findings contained within this briefing are derived from responses collected from the **Covid-19 Employment and Health in Wales Study**, a nationally representative cross-sectional push-to-web survey of 1379 households undertaken between 25 May 2020 and 22 June 2020.

Employment contracts were defined as (1) permanent; (2) fixed-term (of any length); (3) atypical contracts included zero-hours, temporary contracts with no fixed term, and working but holding no formal contract; and (4) self-employed.

Job Skill was calculated using the Standard Occupation Classifications 2020 (SOC 2020); Job Skill 4 (Highest) through to Job Skill 1 (Lowest).

Data is presented as weighted proportions based on mid-year 2018 population estimates and odds ratios adjusted for age group, gender, deprivation quintile, job skill level, employment contract, household finances, pre-existing health condition, general health and mental wellbeing.

Further details of our survey methodology can be found [here](#).



Age

Younger Workers (18-29 years)

- **One in three younger workers (41%) were placed on furlough.**
- **Younger workers were 2.5 times more likely** to have been placed on furlough than 40-49 years age group.

Older Workers (60-64 years)

- **Almost one in three older workers (29%) reported being placed on furlough.**

Older workers were:

- **2 times more likely** to have been placed on furlough than 40-49 years age group.
- **Less likely to have changed jobs or secured a new job** compared to those aged 40-49 years.



Household Characteristics

Deprivation

- **The most deprived communities (31%) were home to the highest proportion of people on furlough** and the number of people furloughed declined as a gradient across deprivation quintiles to 18% in the least deprived areas.

Financial Difficulties

- **Individuals who reported household financial difficulties were 2 times more likely to have become unemployed or placed on furlough** than those reporting no household financial difficulties.



Job Characteristics

Contract Type

- **Those employed on atypical and fixed term contracts were 11 and 4 times more likely, respectively, to have experienced job losses compared to those on permanent contracts.**
- **A higher proportion of workers with atypical contracts (51%) were on furlough** compared to those on permanent (28%) or fixed term contracts (18%).
- **Those employed on atypical and fixed term contracts were 3 and 2 times more likely** to have changed jobs or secured a new job compared to those on permanent contracts.

Skill Level

- **A higher proportion of low skilled workers (43%) were on furlough, compared to high skilled workers (12%).**



Health and Wellbeing

- **Individuals who reported low mental wellbeing were 4 times more likely** to have experienced job losses.
- **Those who reported having 'not good' general health were less likely** to have been placed on furlough.

Comparisons to other data

Our findings are broadly consistent with evidence from other parts of the UK in relation to the working-age population furloughed during the same time period (21.5%-29.8%; *Office for National Statistics*). We also identify similar at-risk populations that have been furloughed or made redundant, notably, those in atypical working arrangements and the greater impact in the younger and older groups (*The Resolution Foundation*).

Considerations for action

- The Welsh Government has recognised that **fair work** can help achieve a stronger, modernised, more inclusive economy. Fair work accords with long-established, cultural traditions in Wales of social solidarity and community cohesion. It can assist in addressing inequality, reducing poverty and promoting well-being. Wales could lead the way on fair work towards national growth and prosperity.
- Furlough disproportionately impacted several population groups including the youngest (18-29 years) and oldest (60-64 years) age groups, people living in deprived communities, those employed in lower skilled job roles, and people struggling financially; whereas initial job losses impacted those people who reported low mental wellbeing or who were struggling financially. Interventions to support economic recovery need to target the groups identified here as most susceptible to the emerging harms of the pandemic.
- Our findings also demonstrate that those people in non-permanent employment are more susceptible to job losses in the event of an economic shock. One important consideration is that new employment opportunities created during the Covid-19 pandemic offer more employment security and follow the principles of fair work.

You may be interested to read (Related reports)

Gray B, Grey C, Hookway A, Homolova L, Davies A. *Differences in the impact of precarious employment on health across population subgroups: a scoping review*. Perspectives in Public Health. 2021;141(1):37-49.

Davies AR, Homolova L, Grey C, Bellis MA (2017). *Mass Unemployment Events (MUEs) – Prevention and Response from a Public Health Perspective*. Public Health Wales, Cardiff ISBN 978-1-910768-42-6.

Public Health Wales

As the national public health institute, Public Health Wales (PHW) is a systems leader in population health research and evaluation. Working to achieve a healthier future for Wales through unique access to data and expertise in systematic and rigorous research methods that enable credible insights.

© 2021 Public Health Wales. Material contained in this document may be reproduced under the terms of the Open Government Licence (OGL) www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/ provided it is done so accurately and is not used in a misleading context.

Acknowledgement to Public Health Wales to be stated.

Copyright in the typographical arrangement, design and layout belongs to Public Health Wales.

ISBN 978-1-78986-154-363

Research and Evaluation Division
Knowledge Directorate
Public Health Wales
Number 2 Capital Quarter
Tyndall Street, Cardiff CF10 4BZ

Tel: +44 (0)29 2022 7744

Email: PHW.Research@wales.nhs.uk

 @PublicHealthW @PHREWales

 /PublicHealthWales

phw.nhs.wales