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To link to this article DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/sjpe.12366

Publisher: Wiley

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Scottish Journal of Political Economy **WILEY**

Life satisfaction and unemployment—The role of gender attitudes and work identity

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Abstract

Unemployment has a strong negative effect on subjective well-being, but the effect varies across groups. Using an event study approach, we explore the sources of heterogeneity in the effect of the transition into unemployment on life satisfaction, focusing on work identity and gender role attitudes. All experience a loss of life satisfaction when they become unemployed, but we find greater heterogeneity of experience among men: the losses in life satisfaction are greater if they hold egalitarian rather than traditional gender role attitudes, and if they have strong rather than weak work identity. Among women, those holding traditional gender role attitudes experience larger losses. We discuss possible reasons for these results.

KEYWORDS
gender role attitudes, life satisfaction, unemployment, well-being, women, work identity

JEL CLASSIFICATION
I31, J16, J64

1 | INTRODUCTION

There is a well-established literature on the non-pecuniary costs associated with unemployment which investigates how it relates to people's subjective well-being. In general, studies suggest that men are more adversely

affected by unemployment than women, though the extent varies across countries and the gender gap in the well-being outcomes appears to have become less pronounced over the years (see Carroll, 2007; Gedikli et al., 2023; Strandh et al., 2013). While the existing evidence notes the gender differences and evokes the possible influences of commitment to work and gender roles, there is little direct evidence of the role they might play. This article contributes to this literature by exploring the extent to which any heterogeneity in the relationship between unemployment and well-being might be explained by differences in gender role attitudes and work identity.[1]

We analyse men and women separately as this could provide valuable insights into the potential variation in their experiences of unemployment and the associated well-being outcomes. We use a longitudinal survey for the UK (Understanding Society, 2009–2018) and an event study approach to estimate the effect of unemployment on life satisfaction, distinguishing between individuals holding different attitudes. Attitudes towards work and division of labour by gender are likely to be important since the effect of the transition into unemployment may be larger for those with a higher attachment to the labour market; we use measures of work identity and gender role attitudes to reflect this.

While both men and women experience a loss of life satisfaction when they become unemployed, we find variation in the well-being cost of unemployment among both men and women. For men, the losses are greater if they have strong rather than weak work identity, and hold egalitarian rather than non-egalitarian views. The negative effects of unemployment on life satisfaction for men with gender egalitarian views are remarkably similar to those for men with a strong work identity. For women, the transition into unemployment is associated with losses in life satisfaction for those holding either non-egalitarian or egalitarian views. However, the loss appears to be greater for those who hold non-egalitarian views and it lasts longer. We find no evidence that the losses differ by women's work identity. As gender egalitarian attitudes become more prevalent among men and women's labour force participation continues to rise, our findings about the role of these attitudes imply that the aggregate well-being costs of unemployment may increase.

2 | BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE

Having a job is not only important in terms of meeting basic physical needs or earning an income, it also contributes to providing purpose in life and is an important element of social identity (Fryer, 1992; Jahoda, 1982; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Research also provides clear evidence that the effect of unemployment goes well beyond a loss in earnings (Winkelmann & Winkelmann, 1998): not only does unemployment have a detrimental impact on individuals' happiness and their satisfaction with life (see, e.g., Binder & Coad, 2015 for Britain; Blanchflower & Oswald, 2004 for the United States; Milner et al., 2016 for Australia; Powdthavee, 2007 for South Africa; Kassenboehmer & Haisken-DeNew, 2009 for Germany; Urbanos-Garrido & Lopez-Valcarcel, 2015 and Ferreira et al., 2015 for southern Europe), but also evidence suggests that people never fully adapt to unemployment (Clark et al., 2001, 2008; Hahn et al., 2015; Lucas et al., 2004). In addition, these studies show that the negative effect of unemployment on life satisfaction remains after controlling for income, the duration of unemployment, marital status, age, education and personality traits.

Several studies have shed light on the differences across groups in the impact of unemployment on life satisfaction. While some have found that the young suffer more, the importance of personality traits and the employability potential of the unemployed were also noted (Boyce et al., 2010; Green, 2011; Hahn et al., 2015; Winkelmann, 2009). Many studies have shown that there is a general tendency for men to be more adversely affected by unemployment when compared to women, however, the extent differed across countries, potentially

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[1]Our analysis focuses on life satisfaction, but we use other terms, such as well-being and happiness, when discussing previous work using measures different than life satisfaction.

due to the differences in legal and institutional frameworks affecting gender relations at home and in the labour market (Gedikli et al., 2023; Strandh et al., 2013). Although the negative effect of unemployment on well-being remains larger for men, the difference in the well-being outcomes of unemployment between men and women appears to become less pronounced in more recent years as work becomes an increasingly important element in women's identity as well (Carroll, 2007; Gedikli et al., 2023; Strandh et al., 2013).

As noted in early theoretical contributions, alongside the economic need for employment, the negative association between unemployment and subjective well-being could be explained by the degree to which unemployment relates to the agency and social status or the identity of the individual (Fryer, 1992; Jahoda, 1982). Becoming unemployed represents an exclusion from the social institution of employment; deviation from the social category of 'employed' and breaking the social norm to work threaten social identity, cause the unemployed to suffer psychologically and reduce their life satisfaction (Howley & Knight, 2021; Knabe et al., 2016; McFadyen, 1995). Empirical research based on the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) showed that unemployment is less detrimental for an individual's subjective well-being when the unemployment rate in their reference group (usually captured by regional unemployment rates) is higher, particularly for men (Clark, 2003; Gathergood, 2013). Therefore, unemployment is less damaging for men if there are more unemployed around, implying a role for social comparison or norm effects. Similarly, the negative effect of unemployment on men's subjective well-being is smaller if their partners are also unemployed, whereas this is not statistically significant for women (Clark, 2003).

Different reactions to unemployment among men and women could reflect a social norm effect and could be explained by their different positions or roles in the family, labour market and society in general (Strandh et al., 2013; Winkelmann 2009). Gedikli et al. (2023) reported that the negative role of unemployment on well-being was particularly significant in countries with stronger societal expectations about work, and it is also possible that the impact of societal expectations and individual work identity are gendered. Female homemaker, male breadwinner household types and the associated 'provider' role for men can make unemployment a more stressful event for men, while for women it might be socially acceptable to be out of the labour market (Winkelmann & Winkelmann, 1998). The masculine identity that is strongly tied to having a job and employment being traditionally more attached to reputation and self-esteem for men can provide an explanation for the historically more pronounced negative well-being effect of unemployment for men (Carroll, 2007; Paul & Moser, 2009). Being able to engage in alternative social roles upon unemployment is an important coping mechanism and can limit the detrimental effect on well-being (Jahoda, 1982; McFadyen, 1995). In this regard, the greater range of non-employment roles for women could enable a more favourable self-concept and positive affective and cognitive appraisal of their conditions; for example, they can frame unemployment as returning to their traditional role as housewives and focusing on domestic work and caring activities (Waters & Moore, 2002).

However, given the increase in participation of women in the labour market and changing gender roles, work and career success have become increasingly important for women and more strongly linked to their identities and personal satisfaction (Goldin, 2006). This may provide an explanation for the evidence from Scandinavian countries which, contrary to the general findings, shows that women's well-being levels are influenced by unemployment to the same extent as for men (Hammarström et al., 2011; Strandh et al., 2013). This can also explain the decrease over time in the gender difference of the effect of unemployment on subjective well-being (Carroll, 2007; Strandh et al., 2013).[2]

Although the potential impact of traditional gender norms alongside role specialisation at home and in the labour market is acknowledged in the literature, there is lack of empirical evidence regarding the differential impact of unemployment on well-being by variation in gender role attitudes. Moreover, more evidence is needed on the potentially

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[2]While investigating the trend in the relationship between unemployment and well-being, Carroll (2007) finds that the effect of unemployment on life satisfaction has become rather similar for men and women in Australia, Germany, the United States and the United Kingdom.

heterogeneous effects of commitment to work or the value men and women attach to work in their lives on the ways in which the experience of unemployment is linked to their well-being. This article therefore aims to contribute to the literature on the effect of unemployment on well-being by directly investigating the role of gender norms and work identity and by shedding light on the mechanisms behind the effect of unemployment on life satisfaction. We expect both men and women with strong work identity to suffer more from job loss, but perhaps the effect could be less pronounced among women as there may be additional alternative socially accepted categories for them.

3 | METHOD

Our analysis proceeds in two steps. First, we estimate the impact that a transition from a paid job into unemployment has on life satisfaction irrespective of attitudes (Equation 1). We use an event study approach as presented in Clarke and Tapia-Schythe (2021):

$$LS_{gt} = \alpha + \sum_{j=1}^{j-1} \beta_j (\text{Lead } j)_{gt} + \sum_{K=0}^{K} \gamma_k (\text{Lag } k)_{gt} + \mu_g + \rho_t + X\prime_{gt}\Gamma + \epsilon_{gt} \tag{1}$$

The dependent or outcome variable is the level of life satisfaction (LS) at time period t of a 'group' g; μ_g and ρ_t are group and time fixed effects, while X_{gt} represents time-varying controls measured contemporaneously at time t. In our context, each 'group' is an individual and the terms Lead j and Lag k represent the jth lead and kth lag period to the transition to unemployment – these are 0–1 indicator variables identifying at each time period whether the group was in the jth lead (j periods away from the transition) or kth lag (k periods from the transition). The omitted (baseline) period is the Jth lead, allowing the model to capture trajectories in well-being over the longest period before the unemployment transition. The error term is ϵ_{gt}. We estimate the model using the Stata command **eventdd** written and documented by Clarke and Tapia-Schythe (2021).

The vector X_{gt} includes the standard controls known to have an impact on the current level of life satisfaction (Dolan et al., 2008), discussed in detail in the next section. These controls are included as contemporaneous, rather than the lagged values because they relate to life satisfaction before and after the transition into unemployment (time t). As is also standard in the unemployment and well-being literature, household income is included, so the impact that a job loss has on life satisfaction can be interpreted as the impact net of any drop in income (and other controls, including health). We cannot include job characteristics in X_{gt} because they are not defined if an individual is unemployed. However, recent research into the investigation of the role of job characteristics on life satisfaction loss has revealed that while they play a role in life satisfaction, they do not explain differential life satisfaction cost of job loss (Longhi et al., 2018).

The treated group includes all those individuals who experienced at least one paid employment to unemployment transition, and the control group comprises all those who never experienced this transition but had been in paid employment at least once during the survey. We consider those who report being on maternity leave as being in paid employment, but we exclude from the analysis: the self-employed, those who are in full-time education or an apprenticeship, taking care of family or retired. In addition, we exclude observations before the first wave the individual reported being active in the labour market, and observations after the wave they first reported being retired. This ensures that we only include those who have been active in the labour market at least sometime during the observation period (for control and treatment group observations).[3]

In the second step of our analysis, we focus on heterogeneity across individuals and analyse whether the transition into unemployment has a different impact on people with different characteristics. To this end, we estimate

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[3]A few individuals experience multiple paid employment to unemployment transitions. In these cases we have only considered the first transition and ignored subsequent transitions. There are a few cases where an individual reports being in paid employment in one wave, unemployed the next wave, but was employed in between these two waves. We exclude these cases.

the model described in Equation (1) using an event study approach, but separately for samples based on individual characteristics: gender role attitudes and work identity.

Existing research shows that longer durations of unemployment have a more severe impact on life satisfaction and well-being (Booker & Sacker, 2012; Clark, 2006; Hahn et al., 2015; Lucas et al., 2004; Oesch & Lipps, 2013). This is supported by a recent meta-analysis based on 46 samples reported in 29 studies published between 1990 and 2020 which finds a population effect size for the overall relationship between unemployment and well-being of $d = 0.32$ (Gedikli et al., 2023). As those with stronger work identity, as well as women with egalitarian attitudes and men with traditional gender role attitudes, may look for work more intensively and hence get back to work quickly, we split these groups further into those who get a paid job after the transition and those who remain unemployed, and estimate the models separately for these sub-groups to better understand the differences in the effect of unemployment transition on life satisfaction observed for men and women with different strengths of work identity and different gender role attitudes.

The construction of these groups and their rationale are discussed in detail in the Data and Variables section. We estimate all models separately by gender.

4 | DATA AND VARIABLES

We use data from a nationally representative longitudinal household survey, Understanding Society: the UK Household Longitudinal Survey (UKHLS) which started in 2009–2010 (University of Essex 2022). While information is collected from all sampled household members, most of the data come from interviews conducted with adult (aged 16 and older) members of the responding sampled households, who are interviewed repeatedly at approximately 1-year intervals. We use data from the first 11 waves which cover the period 2009–2020, and exclude interviews conducted after March 2020 to restrict the analysis to the pre-pandemic period. The longitudinal nature of the survey and the topics covered (including socio-demographic factors, education, labour market experience, health and well-being and attitudes) make it particularly suited to our analysis.

The well-being outcome (LS_{gt}) that we use is the question on overall life satisfaction, which is measured on a 7-point fully labelled scale ranging from 1 (*being completely dissatisfied*) to 7 (*being completely satisfied*). The main variable of interest is the transition into unemployment and is measured by the respondents' self-reported main activity status at each interview. This variable takes a value 1 for those who were in paid employment in year $t-1$ and unemployed in year t, and 0 for those who were in paid employment at year $t-1$ and t. We then code lags and leads of the transition. We describe how these variables are constructed for different scenarios in the Table A1 in Appendix S1.

All models also include a set of covariates (in X_{gt}) to capture the standard determinants of life satisfaction (see Dolan et al., 2008). These include various individual characteristics: a measure of self-reported health (excellent or very good used as reference, good or fair, poor), disability status (which is 1 for those who report being long-term sick or disabled and 0 otherwise), age groups (40–49 used as a reference, 16–19, 20–29, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59 and 60–75 years; younger and older people are excluded), educational qualification (university degree used as reference, other higher, A-level etc., GCSE etc., other qualification, no qualification). As household characteristics we include marital status (never married used as reference; cohabiting as a couple, married or in civil partnership; and separated, divorced or widowed), the number of own children in the household (no children used as reference, one, two or more) and dummies for the age of the youngest own child in the household [0–4 years, 5–11 years, 12–16 years,17–19 years, adult children (20+ years) with those without children used as reference].[4] The household income measure is the log of gross monthly household income equivalised using the modified OECD scale. Finally, we control for region of residence (London used as reference).

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[4]Since the Great Recession, children have been leaving home at later ages and that may contribute to stress and life satisfaction levels of parents. As the % of respondents with children older than 19 was substantial (7–10%), we included a separate dummy for this group.

Since the sample period includes the latter part of the recession, we also add year dummies to capture year-specific general effects on life satisfaction over and above the impact of individual circumstances.

Adult interviews in the Understanding Society were mostly administered face-to-face with a few by telephone until Wave 7,[5] after which an increasing proportion of the sample completed the questionnaires online (29% in Wave 8, 51% in Wave 9, 59% in Wave 10). The question on life satisfaction was asked as part of the self-completion questionnaire, but in the case of telephone interviews, interviewers read out the questions and response options, and the respondent's responses are recorded by the interviewer. As the presence of an interviewer may affect the response to the life satisfaction question, all our models control for interview mode.

Our final estimation sample comprised 181,028 person-year observations: 80,410 men and 100,618 women. This includes 136,551 person-year observations where respondents have self-reported their ethnic group as 'White – British/English/Scottish/Welsh/Northern Irish', 2733 where they have chosen 'White – Irish' and 41,744 where they have chosen other ethnic groups.[6] We refer to the first two groups as 'White majority' and the third group as 'ethnic minorities'. As ethnic minorities' labour market experience may include additional issues of discrimination, direct or indirect, English language difficulties and unfamiliarity with the labour market in case of immigrants, we provide the estimation results of the overall model for White majority and ethnic minorities separately (Race Disparity Unit, 2023; Zwysen et al., 2021). However, as the sample sizes for gender role attitudes and work identity models for ethnic minorities are very small, we restrict this analysis to the White majority group.

4.1 | Work identity

In the 2nd, 5th, 8th and 11th waves of the Understanding Society, respondents were asked 'How important is your profession to your sense of who you are?' with response options 'very important', 'fairly important', 'not very important', 'not at all important', 'don't know/doesn't apply'. Based on these answers, we identify respondents with a strong work identity as those who answered 'very' or 'fairly important'.

As work identity may change over time, particularly at younger ages, we compared responses to this question across the four waves and categorised individuals into two groups: those who consistently reported strong identity (very or fairly important) across all waves when they participated in the survey, and those who consistently reported weak identity (not very, or not at all important) across all waves when they participated in the survey. We estimate the models separately for these two groups to compare the effect of unemployment on individuals with weak versus strong work identity.

The additional group of those who switched between these two categories is difficult to interpret as sample sizes prevent us from separately analysing switches in the two directions. We therefore do not report results for this group.

4.2 | Gender role attitudes

To analyse whether gender role attitudes moderate the effect of unemployment, we use data from the 2nd, 4th and 10th waves of the Understanding Society, when respondents were presented a series of five statements and asked if they agreed or disagreed on a fully labelled 5-point agree–disagree scale (with 1 meaning *strongly agree* and 5 meaning *strongly disagree*) to evaluate their gender role attitudes. The statements were: (1) a pre-school child

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[5]Telephone interviews were 0.5–2.5% of all adult interviews until Wave 10. In Wave 11, due to the pandemic, all face-to-face interviews were suspended after March 2020, but we only use data collected until March 2020.

[6]Other White groups, Gypsy or Irish Traveller, mixed/multiple ethnic groups (White and Black Caribbean, White and Black African, White and Asian and other mixed groups), Asian/Asian British (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese and other Asian groups), Black/African/Caribbean/Black British (Caribbean, African, other Black groups), Arab and any other ethnic groups.

is likely to suffer if his or her mother works; (2) all in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job; (3) both the husband and wife should contribute to the household income; (4) a husband's job is to earn money, a wife's job is to look after the home and family; (5) employers should make special arrangements to help mothers combine jobs and childcare. As we are interested in the impact of job loss on life satisfaction, we focus on the statement: 'A husband's job is to earn money, a wife's job is to look after the home and family' since this is the one that most captures the homemaker/breadwinner dichotomy that we want to analyse. We therefore compared the responses to this question across the three waves and categorised individuals into two groups: those who consistently reported egalitarian values (disagree or strongly disagree), and those who consistently reported traditional values (agree, strongly agree). We estimate the models separately for these two groups to compare the effect of unemployment on individuals with traditional versus egalitarian gender role attitudes.

We do not analyse the additional group of those who switched gender role attitudes over time due to its heterogeneity. It is possible that switchers comprise those who change their gender role attitude due to changes in their partnership and parenthood status, but sample sizes prevent a more in-depth analysis. As with work identity, we re-estimate these models for the consistently egalitarian and traditional gender role groups, after splitting these into groups based on whether they get a paid job in the year after the transition.

4.3 | Type of job loss

The relationship between life satisfaction and unemployment might depend on the reasons for unemployment and any heterogeneity observed might be sensitive to the share of individuals who are, for example, involuntarily as opposed to voluntarily unemployed. Some reasons for unemployment could be seen as outside of an employee's control (e.g. redundancy, the end of a temporary contract or dismissal), while others, at least partly, may be a consequence of individual agency (e.g. health reasons, care-related reasons, moving to a new area). We estimate separate models for those who experience 'non-voluntary' unemployment (56% of our sample) and those who experience 'voluntary' unemployment (44% of our sample). Note that the control group remains the same – those who never experience any unemployment transition.

5 | RESULTS

Among the 18,437 men and 21,231 women in our sample, 1008 men and 984 women experience an unemployment transition during the survey period (see Table 1). Among the 13,090 White majority men and the 15,150 White majority women, we have 741 and 690 transitions from paid employment into unemployment. The sample sizes for ethnic minority men and women are 5347 and 6081, which translate into much smaller numbers of transitions: only 267 for men and 294 for women. Descriptive statistics for the white majority and ethnic minority samples, separately for men and women, are provided in Table A2 in the Appendix S1.

An important decision in the event study approach is the number of lags and leads to include. We started by estimating a comprehensive model including two to nine lags and leads (the minimum and maximum number of lags and leads that is possible given the data). The results are shown in Tables A3 and A4 and Figure A1 in the Appendix S1. The joint significance tests of different lags and leads suggest that for men the optimal model should include four lags and four leads and for women two lags and two leads. We use the more parsimonious model with same number of lags and leads for both men and women: *four lags and leads*. The results are shown in Column (1) of Table 2 for men and Column (1) of Table 3 for women (and in Figures A2 for men and A5 for women in the Appendix S1); the estimated coefficients of all variables included in these models are reported in the Table A5: Appendix S1. The coefficients of the control variables are as expected; for example, life satisfaction is higher for younger and older age groups, for those with higher income and better health and for

TABLE 1 Sample composition.

	Person-year observations	Individuals	Unemployment transition
Men	80,410	18,437	1008
White majority	61,861	13,090	741
Ethnic minorities	18,549	5347	267
Women	100,618	21,231	984
White majority	77,423	15,150	690
Ethnic minorities	23,195	6081	294

TABLE 2 Estimated coefficients from an event study of paid employment to unemployment transition on life satisfaction for men.

	White majority					Ethnic minority
		Gender role attitude		Work identity		
	All	Egalitarian	Traditional	Strong	Weak	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Wave (Ref: 4+ waves before transition, ≤$t-4$)						
3 waves before transition, $t-3$	−0.08	−0.20+	−0.46	−0.30*	0.14	0.22
2 waves before transition, $t-2$	−0.06	−0.25*	−0.29	−0.27*	0.33*	0.14
1 wave before the transition, $t-1$	−0.19**	−0.31**	−0.33	−0.35**	0.10	0.09
Transition wave, t	−0.50**	−0.76**	−0.29	−0.79**	−0.20	−0.23+
Wave after transition, $t+1$	−0.37**	−0.51**	−0.59	−0.70**	−0.09	−0.13
2 waves after transition, $t+2$	−0.26**	−0.53**	−0.93+	−0.47**	0.03	0.15
3 waves after transition, $t+3$	−0.24**	−0.44**	0.22	−0.46**	0.07	−0.03
4+ waves after transition, ≥$t+4$	−0.12	−0.46**	0.68	−0.35*	0.18	−0.02
No. of person-year observations	61,861	28,635	2478	27,928	9020	18,549

Note: Robust standard errors: +$p<0.10$, *$p<0.05$, **$p<0.01$. These models have been estimated using an event study approach and control for age group, self-reported health, disability, educational qualification, marital status, the number of own children in the household and age group of the youngest own child in the household, log of gross monthly household income equivalised using the modified OECD scale, region of residence, year of interview and interview mode. The data used are from the Understanding Society Waves 1–11 (2009–2020 March).

those in partnerships compared to never married/single, and are lower for those who are separated, divorced or widowed.

Column (1) of Tables 2 and 3 show that both men and women experience a drop in life satisfaction following the transition from paid employment to unemployment ($t=0$), vis-à-vis the baseline of 4+ periods before the transition, (≥$t-4$), with the drop being larger for men than women (0.50 vs. 0.23; Tables 2 and 3).

We also find results consistent with the presence of an anticipation or triggering effect for men – there is a drop in life satisfaction in the period prior to the transition (0.19; Table 2). Furthermore, both men and women revert to pre-transition levels of life satisfaction, with women reverting back more quickly than men (one wave for women vs. three waves for men). Thus, we find evidence that in addition to experiencing greater well-being loss than women at the time of the unemployment transition, men also experience larger effects both before and afterwards.

TABLE 3 Estimated coefficients from an event study of paid employment to unemployment transition on life satisfaction for women.

	White majority					
		Gender role attitude		Work identity		
	All	Egalitarian	Traditional	Strong	Weak	Ethnic minority
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Wave (Ref: 4+ waves before transition, ≤$t-4$)						
3 waves before transition, $t-3$	−0.03	−0.06	−0.19	−0.11	0.11	−0.25*
2 waves before transition, $t-2$	0.03	0	0.27	−0.01	0.14	0.15
1 wave before the transition, $t-1$	−0.09	−0.14	−0.62*	−0.12	−0.05	0.08
Transition wave, t	−0.23**	−0.29**	−0.87*	−0.24+	0.01	−0.09
Wave after transition, $t+1$	−0.11	−0.12	−0.46+	−0.16	0.16	0.01
2 waves after transition, $t+2$	−0.04	−0.1	0.09	−0.05	0.06	0.04
3 waves after transition, $t+3$	−0.11	−0.13	−0.48	−0.05	0.1	0.03
4+ waves after transition, ≥$t+4$	−0.08	−0.11	−0.29	0.1	0.01	−0.04
No. of person-year observations	77,423	41,107	2263	36,651	9305	23,195

Note: Robust standard errors: $+p<0.10$, $*p<0.05$, $**p<0.01$. These models have been estimated using an event study approach and control for age group, self-reported health, disability, educational qualification, marital status, the number of own children in the household and age group of the youngest own child in the household, log of gross monthly household income equivalised using the modified OECD scale, region of residence, year of interview and interview mode. The data used are from the Understanding Society Waves 1–11 (2009–2020 March).

The results for ethnic minority men and women are reported in Column 6 of Tables 2 and 3. Ethnic minority men also experience a drop in life satisfaction at the point of job loss, but the coefficient is smaller than that of White majority men (0.50 vs. 0.23; Table 2). Additionally, there is no anticipation/triggering effect and the unemployment transition effect dissipates in one period. For ethnic minority women, there is no effect of an unemployment transition on life satisfaction.

5.1 | Gender role attitudes

We next estimated these models separately for those who consistently report egalitarian and traditional gender role attitudes (Columns 2–3 in Tables 2 and 3, Figures A3 and A6 in the Appendix S1) and for those who consistently report strong and weak work identity (Columns 4–5 in Tables 2 and 3, Figures A4 and A7 in the Appendix S1). Table 4 shows the activity status in the period after unemployment transition for men and women of different gender role attitudes and Tables 5 and 6 show the results for sub-groups based on the employment status (paid employment or unemployed) in the period after job loss transition.

In line with the female homemaker and male breadwinner hypothesis being more relevant for men and women with traditional gender role attitudes, we expected a larger drop in life satisfaction for egalitarian compared to traditional women, and for men, we expected the opposite pattern. We find that compared to women with egalitarian gender role attitudes, women with traditional gender role attitudes experience, relative to baseline (≥$t-4$), a bigger drop in life satisfaction in the period before job loss (anticipation effect), a bigger drop in the period of unemployment transition (0.87 vs. 0.29; Table 3) and continue to experience this effect for one period. These results are opposite of what we had expected. If traditional women are less likely to want to participate in the labour market, it is likely that those who do are a select group who work due to financial constraints, and a greater need

TABLE 4 Labour market status after transition.

	Still unemployed	In paid employment	Out of the labour market	Not interviewed	Total (100%)
White majority					
Men	21.7%	45.0%	17.1%	16.2%	5900
Women	17.1%	41.2%	21.8%	20.0%	5788
	2269	5037	2268	2114	
Men					
Egalitarian	17.5%	45.9%	18.4%	18.2%	2413
Traditional	23.1%	46.2%	10.2%	20.4%	225
	670	1513	567	592	
Women					
Egalitarian	15.1%	44.7%	20.9%	19.3%	2873
Traditional	55.7%	21.9%	8.2%	14.2%	183
	665	1487	787	730	
Men					
Strong work identity	16.4%	52.2%	15.0%	16.4%	1886
Weak work identity	26.4%	36.8%	15.6%	21.2%	1100
	599	1389	455	543	
Women					
Strong work identity	15.8%	47.3%	14.2%	22.7%	1926
Weak work identity	16.0%	31.4%	27.3%	25.3%	780
	429	1155	487	635	
Ethnic minority					
Men	29.6%	36.2%	12.3%	21.8%	1970
Women	21.0%	34.2%	18.1%	26.7%	2281
	1063	1494	655	1039	

for paid employment. Table A6 in the Appendix S1 confirms that women with egalitarian gender role attitudes have higher household income compared to those with traditional gender role attitudes. It is possible that for traditional women, who are more likely to be in households with lower income, the financial necessity of work results in a drop in well-being which outweighs any gain associated with an employment status which may be more closely aligned with their gender role attitudes.

Furthermore, we find that women with traditional gender role attitudes are less well qualified and work in lower paying jobs; both are consistent with the speculation that the larger negative impact of unemployment for women with traditional gender role attitudes is likely to be due to financial constraints (see Table A6 in the Appendix S1). We also find (see Table 4) that traditional women are more likely to keep looking for work in the period after job loss than egalitarian women (55% vs. 15%), while egalitarian women are more likely than traditional women to quickly find an alternative job (45% vs. 22%). This indicates that traditional women need a job more and if they lose it they are less likely to find employment again. This may explain the anticipation effect, the greater loss of life satisfaction on becoming unemployed and the longer scarring effect for traditional women.

When we estimate these models separately for those who find a job in the period after transition and those who remain unemployed (see Table 6), we do find that both egalitarian and traditional women who remain

TABLE 5 Estimated coefficients from an event study of paid employment to unemployment transition on life satisfaction for White majority men.

	Gender role attitude: egalitarian		Gender role attitude: traditional		Work identity: strong		Work identity: weak	
	Unemployed	Paid employment	Unemployed	Paid employment	Unemployed	Paid employment	Unemployed	Paid employment
Wave (Ref: 4+ waves before transition, ≤t−4)								
3 waves before transition, t−3	−0.56*	−0.26	0.51	0.34	0	−0.29	−0.32	0.19
2 waves before transition, t−2	−0.46+	−0.36*	0.45	0.16	−0.15	−0.12	−0.06	0.55**
1 wave before the transition, t−1	−0.23	−0.37**	0.23	0.23	−0.29	−0.15	−0.5	0.49*
Transition wave, t	−0.81**	−0.83**	−0.25	−0.04	−0.92*	−0.56**	−0.82*	−0.13
Wave after transition, t+1	−0.96**	−0.29*	0.42	−0.51	−1.16**	−0.35*	−0.89*	0.28
2 waves after transition, t+2	−0.80*	−0.56**	−0.18	−1.09	−0.59+	−0.32+	−0.83*	0.1
3 waves after transition, t+3	−0.38	−0.45**	0.84**	0.46	−0.48	−0.26	−0.53	0.4
4+ waves after transition, ≥t+4	−0.57+	−0.40*	1.46**	0.93	−0.18	−0.17	−0.59	0.53*
No. of person-year observations	26,645	27,329	2305	2357	26,351	27,026	8210	8325

Note: Robust standard errors: +$p < 0.10$, *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$. These models have been estimated using an event study approach method and control for age group, self-reported health, disability, educational qualification, marital status, the number of own children in the household and age group of the youngest own child in the household, log of gross monthly household income equivalised using the modified OECD scale, region of residence, year of interview and interview mode. The data used are from the Understanding Society Waves 1–11 (2009–2020 March). The number of observations for the two sub-groups, unemployed and paid employment, will not add up to the number of observations for the overall group (egalitarian and traditional or weak and strong identity) as the control group observations will appear in both sub-group estimations.

TABLE 6 Estimated coefficients from an event study of paid employment to unemployment transition on life satisfaction for White majority women.

	Gender role attitude: egalitarian		Gender role attitude: traditional		Work identity: strong		Work identity: weak	
	Unemployed	Paid employment	Unemployed	Paid employment	Unemployed	Paid employment	Unemployed	Paid employment
Wave (Ref: 4+ waves before transition, ≤t−4)								
3 waves before transition, t−3	−0.25	−0.13	−0.31	−0.08	−0.33	−0.21	0.08	0.52
2 waves before transition, t−2	−0.18	−0.1	−0.29	0.63	0.12	−0.22	−0.39	−0.08
1 wave before the transition, t−1	−0.49+	0.03	−0.76+	−0.24	0.04	−0.16	−0.7	−0.07
Transition wave, t	−0.72**	−0.24+	−1.12*	−1.43*	0.09	−0.34+	−0.66	−0.07
Wave after transition, t+1	−0.74**	0.03	−0.5	−0.2	−0.14	−0.26	−0.6	0.29
2 waves after transition, t+2	−0.31	−0.03	−0.25	0.16	0.27	−0.24	−1.43*	0.44
3 waves after transition, t+3	−0.49+	0.05	−1.10+	0.2	−0.21	0.01	−0.5	0.62
4+ waves after transition, ≥t+4	−0.32	0.06	−0.62*	0.41	0.05	0.07	−0.82+	0.2
No. of person-year observations	38,669	39,518	2182	2120	35,029	35,635	8650	8770

Note: Robust standard errors: +$p<0.10$, *$p<0.05$, **$p<0.01$. These models have been estimated using an event study approach method and control for age group, self-reported health, disability, educational qualification, marital status, the number of own children in the household and age group of the youngest own child in the household, log of gross monthly household income equivalised using the modified OECD scale, region of residence, year of interview and interview mode. The data used are from the Understanding Society Waves 1–11 (2009–2020 March). The number of observations for the two sub-groups, unemployed and paid employment, will not add up to the number of observations for the overall group (egalitarian and traditional or weak and strong identity) as the control group observations will appear in both sub-group estimations.

unemployed in the period after transition experience longer scarring effects compared to those who find an alternative job more quickly.

Also, contrary to our expectations, men with more egalitarian gender role attitudes report a larger loss in life satisfaction (from baseline, ≥$t−4$) than those with more traditional attitudes and the effect for the latter is not statistically significant (0.76 vs. 0.29; Table 2) and a longer scarring effect, lasting for up to 4+ periods after the transition. We find that the proportion of those who are back in paid employment 1 year after the job loss is similar for traditional and egalitarian men. However, while traditional men are more likely than egalitarian men to still be unemployed 1 year after the transition (23.1% vs. 17.5%; Table 4), egalitarian men are more likely to drop out of the labour market than traditional men (18.4% vs. 10.2%; Table 4). This suggests that egalitarian men may need to adjust to a new situation (inactivity) which may also mean new expectations, and this appears to have long-lasting effects on their satisfaction. The finding that men with traditional gender role attitudes keep looking for a job while those with egalitarian attitudes drop out of the labour market could indicate a higher expectation of finding a job among traditional men and hence a lower fall in life satisfaction.

5.2 | Work identity

As expected, men with strong work identity experience a greater loss in life satisfaction than those with weak work identity (0.79 vs. 0.20 and not statistically significant; Table 2). Besides experiencing a larger loss in life satisfaction, men with strong work identity also experience a longer lasting negative effect for 4+ waves. Men with stronger work identity also experience a longer anticipation effect, which is consistent with having a stronger labour market attachment. In the period after job loss, strong work identity men are more likely to find a job than men with weak work identity (52.2% vs. 36.8%; Table 4), while weak work identity men are more likely to be unemployed (26.4% vs. 16.4%; Table 4). Even though strong work identity men are more likely to find a job right away, the longer scarring effect is again indicative of stronger attachment to the labour market. For both types of men, those who remain unemployed in the period after transition have longer scarring effects than those who get a job (see Table 5).

For women, we also find a statistically significant drop of 0.24 in life satisfaction in the period of unemployment transition for women with strong work identity as compared to a 0.01 and not statistically significant drop for women with weak work identity (Table 3). This is consistent with our expectations. However, we do not find a longer scarring effect for strong work identity women. Perhaps this reflects the alternative social identities women adhere to upon becoming unemployed.

5.3 | Type of job loss

We next estimated similar models separately for men and women for whom the job loss was voluntary (health reasons, care-related reasons, moving to a new area etc.) versus non-voluntary (made redundant, temporary job ended, dismissed/sacked). We excluded approximately 30 cases where the person said the reason for job ending was that they got promoted or left for a better job. Women were more likely to leave a job for voluntary reasons than men (50% vs. 33%). The estimated coefficients are reported in Table 7 and also shown in Figures A8 and A9 in the Appendix S1.

Among men, for those who experience a voluntary job loss we find an anticipation effect – possibly indicating the drop in life satisfaction triggering the unemployment transition (0.29 vs. 0.12 and not significant). Compared to baseline (≥$t−4$), we also find a somewhat larger loss of life satisfaction among those men experiencing a voluntary job loss (0.59 vs. 0.43), as well as slightly longer scarring effects for these men, possibly indicating a longer job search to find a better match.

TABLE 7 Estimated coefficients of a model of paid employment to unemployment transition on life satisfaction using an event study approach, by type of job loss.

	White majority men		White majority women	
	Non-voluntary	Voluntary	Non-voluntary	Voluntary
Wave (Ref: 4+ waves before transition, ≤$t-4$)				
3 waves before transition, $t-3$	−0.07	−0.04	−0.06	0
2 waves before transition, $t-2$	−0.04	−0.07	0.02	0.08
1 wave before the transition, $t-1$	−0.12	−0.29**	−0.17*	−0.04
Transition wave, t	−0.43**	−0.59**	−0.26**	−0.22*
Wave after transition, $t+1$	−0.32**	−0.46**	−0.09	−0.17
2 waves after transition, $t+2$	−0.22*	−0.33**	−0.06	−0.01
3 waves after transition, $t+3$	−0.20+	−0.33**	0.01	−0.2
4+ waves after transition, ≥$t+4$	−0.06	−0.27*	−0.16+	0.03
No. of person-year observations	60,216	58,450	75,002	75,026

Note: Robust standard errors: +$p<0.10$, *$p<0.05$, **$p<0.01$. These models have been estimated using an event study approach and control for age group, self-reported health, disability, educational qualification, marital status, the number of own children in the household and age group of the youngest own child in the household, log of gross monthly household income equivalised using the modified OECD scale, region of residence, year of interview and interview mode. The data used are from the Understanding Society Waves 1–11 (2009–2020 March).

For women, the results show the opposite pattern: the loss in life satisfaction in the period of transition compared to baseline (≥$t-4$) is smaller when the job loss was voluntary (0.22 vs. 0.26), and there is also a triggering/anticipation effect for non-voluntary job losses.

We also estimated the models for gender role attitude and work identity sub-samples separately by type of job loss. The estimates are based on small cell sizes for those who experience unemployment when we combine type of job loss and attitudes/identity, and are shown in Figures A10–A13 in the Appendix S1. We find that men with strong work identity experience a greater life satisfaction loss and a longer scarring effect if the job loss was non-voluntary, which is consistent with greater attachment to the labour market and loss of identity utility (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000). We find no such difference for men with weak work identity, and for women with strong or weak work identity.

6 | CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Unemployment is a difficult experience, with effects on people's well-being that go well beyond the loss of income and often leaves long-lasting scars (Clark, 2003; Clark et al., 2008). We examine this for men and women in the United Kingdom. We extend previous studies by exploring heterogeneity in the damaging effect of unemployment for men and women: differences in work identity and gender role attitudes.

Our findings that all men experience a significant drop in life satisfaction when they become unemployed are consistent with the existing literature. What we are able to show is the differences in the experience among men. We find that the experience of a transition into unemployment is more damaging for men with strong work identity. While this is as expected, contrary to our prior, we find that men with egalitarian gender role attitudes suffer more from job loss than those with traditional gender role attitude. Men with a strong work identity and those with egalitarian gender role attitudes account for a similar share of men (45%) and they experience very similar losses in well-being when becoming unemployed. As those who continue to be unemployed in the period after job loss experience a greater life satisfaction loss than those who get a job, we

investigated if this pattern explained the result. Both types of men are equally likely to get a job after job loss, but while men with traditional gender role attitudes who do not get a job are more likely to keep looking for a job, those with egalitarian attitudes are more likely to drop out of the labour market. This could reflect that traditional men expect to get a job (and so do not give up on looking for one) resulting in a lower life satisfaction loss after losing a job.

While the existing literature agrees that men tend to suffer more than women from becoming unemployed, by exploring the heterogeneity among individuals, we also show that unemployment can be damaging for certain women too. Our priors had been informed by the revolution in gender roles: when women start defining themselves less through motherhood and more through their work and their careers become important parts of their identity and a significant indicator of satisfaction in their lives (see, Goldin, 2006). However, we found that the loss in life satisfaction was even greater for women with traditional gender role attitudes. A closer inspection of the characteristics of this relatively small group of women revealed them to be less well educated, employed in less well-paying jobs and have a lower household income. We offer the suggestion that for this group employment may be motivated by financial necessity and they may struggle to find a new job following unemployment, this combination of factors may explain why the drop in life satisfaction following unemployment is greater for this group. Therefore, regardless of gender role attitudes, over time, as more women are in paid employment (ILO, 2017), the well-being cost of unemployment may become larger.

On the other hand, we show that work identity does not influence the relationship between unemployment and well-being among women. Although this finding may appear counterintuitive, it may still speak to the societal expectations and social norm to work which strongly attach work to male identity while regarding unemployment more socially acceptable for women and offering greater range of non-employment roles for them (Carroll, 2007; Gedikli et al., 2023). As noted in theoretical explanations, engaging in alternative social roles upon becoming unemployed can weaken its damaging effect on well-being (Jahoda, 1982; McFadyen, 1995).

Another interesting finding is that women who experience a job loss because of 'voluntary' reasons (such as look after other person, look after family, leave to have a baby, moved area) experience a greater life satisfaction loss than those who experience non-voluntary job loss (dismissal, redundancy, temporary job ending etc.). This could be because while these are voluntary decisions in the sense that these were triggered by the employee rather than the employer, these women may have felt compelled to make this choice as women still tend to be the main carer in the family and make professional sacrifices for family reasons. Given the large and increasing share of women in the labour force, their experience should not be neglected by policymakers, and a better understanding of the heterogeneity of the impact of unemployment opens up the possibility to better identify and target workers who are particularly vulnerable and may need additional support such as free childcare at or near the workplace, opportunities for working from home and other flexible working arrangements.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data files used for the analysis cannot be made available due to data access restrictions. The Understanding Society (End User License version) data files were used for this analysis. These data files can be accessed from the UK Data Service (https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/studies/study?id=6614) by registered users

after they agree to the terms and conditions of accessing the data. The code used to transform the data files can be made available by the authors on request.

CODE AVAILABILITY

The code used to transform the Understanding Society survey data files can be made available by the authors on request.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

Appendix S1.