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DIVISIONS IN JOB QUALITY IN NORTHERN IRELAND

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, there has been increased recognition that when assessing the state of the labour market it is important to pay attention to not just the *quantity* of jobs, but also the *quality* of jobs. This has come about as a result of widespread agreement that a sole focus on how many jobs an economy has offers only a partial perspective, with a growing consensus that an understanding of the quality of jobs is also required.

This paper aims to examine and profile the quality of jobs in Northern Ireland and to assess divisions in job quality, amongst those in employment. Using data from the Poverty and Social Exclusion Northern Ireland survey, this paper will use the OECDs recently developed multi-dimensional conceptualisation of job quality to assess the quality of jobs in Northern Ireland. It will also look at in-work progression (and regression) over time in terms of the skills used, the variety of tasks performed and the level of responsibility. From here the paper moves to examine the impact of poor job quality for a number of individual health and well-being outcomes. Overall, the paper provides greater clarity on the quality of jobs in Northern Ireland, whilst also helping to establish an understanding of both the determinants and the impact of poor job quality for individuals.

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DIVISIONS IN JOB QUALITY IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Lisa Wilson, Nevin Economic Research Institute

1. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally discourses around employment and labour market policies have tended to focus on the number of people in employment. In recent decades, however, there has been increased recognition that in assessing the state of the labour market we need to consider both the quantity and the quality of jobs (OECD, 2015). In this way, over the past number of decades there has been a marked rise in inequality and insecurity for those in employment across OECD countries, reflecting a combination of shifts in the industrial structure, a decline of labour market institutions, technological changes, globalisation and a number of key policy changes (Bailey, 2016; Gilbert and Besharov, 2011; Whittaker and Hurrell, 2013). This has fuelled claims about the spread of 'bad jobs' and a great deal of debate about the extent to which these claims are well-founded (Gregg and Wadsworth, 2011; Lemieux, 2008; Salverda *et al*, 2014). Moreover, there is growing concern amongst academics, policy makers and political commentators that job quality is an important concern in its own right given the proportion of time most people spend either looking for a job or in employment (OECD, 2012). Furthermore, there is concern for job quality because of the potentially profound influence which the nature and quality of one's job has for the overall well-being of the worker (Cazes *et al*, 2015; OECD, 2015; Stiglitz *et al*, 2009), business performance and outcomes (Bryson *et al*, 2014; Harter *et al*, 2002), and in turn broader economic progress and societal well-being (Clark, 2015; Jeffrey *et al*, 2014; OECD, 2014; OECD, 2015).

Reflecting the broader international concern with job quality the Northern Ireland Executive (2016: 14) has recently taken up interest in the issue and made a commitment in its recently published draft Programme for Government to 'increase the proportion of people working in good jobs' in Northern Ireland. In practice, however, there is very little empirical evidence about the quality of jobs or about the divisions which exist in terms of job quality amongst those in employment in Northern Ireland.

Consequently, this paper will examine and profile the quality of jobs in Northern Ireland and assess divisions in the quality of jobs amongst those in employment using the OECDs (2015) recently developed multi-dimensional conceptualisation of job quality. This framework considers earnings, labour market security and quality of the working environment as factors which we should consider when assessing job quality. Furthermore, this paper explores progression/regression in one's job over time, as a way of getting at dynamics or durability in terms of one's job over time. From here it looks at some of the implications of poor job quality for individual health and well-being outcomes. Data from the 2012 Poverty and Social Exclusion Northern Ireland (PSE-NI) survey are used for these purposes.

The results of this paper show that slightly over one third of adults in paid employment in Northern Ireland are in poverty, or in insecure employment or working in a poor-quality environment. In terms of risk factors, socioeconomic position was consistently found to be an important determining factor of poor job quality. Across the three dimensions it was found that the risk of poor job quality is higher for those in lower status jobs, those with below degree or no educational qualifications, and those in part-time employment. In terms of sociodemographic characteristics, the results showed that those who are relatively young, and those with children (and in particular lone parents) possess a higher risk of poor job quality than older working-age adults or workers without children. Furthermore, in terms of firm characteristics the study found that those working in market sector jobs, and particularly those employed in the construction industry have a higher risk of poor job quality when compared to those in the non-market sector.

The analysis also showed that for a substantial number of people there has been little change in terms of the skills used, the tasks performed or level of responsibility in one's job over the past five years. Thus, whilst these findings do not allow us to comment directly on whether poor job quality is a temporary or transitory state, they do probably provide a good indication that for many poor job quality is an enduring state.

Furthermore, this paper shows that creating good quality jobs is not just important in its own right or even in terms of how we might assess overall labour market performance. In this regard, poor quality employment was shown to be negatively associated with a number of individual health and well-being outcomes. Taking these findings together, a number of policy recommendations are made on how we might improve job quality in Northern Ireland.

2. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

During the 1980s and 1990s the key labour market focus of most relevant international institutions including the European Commission and the OECD was to increase the numbers of people in employment, with little to no attention given to the nature or quality of jobs (Guillen and Dahl, 2009; OECD, 2012). However, since the start of the millennium various international institutions such as the European Commission, the OECD and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) have become concerned with job quality and championed the idea that what is needed is not always more jobs, but better quality jobs.

Concern for job quality has been growing on the basis of a growing international literature documenting the segmentation and polarisation of the labour market, the increase in the number of low paid jobs and the general widening of wage inequalities over recent decades (Goos and Manning, 2007; Lemieux, 2008; Machin, 2011; Maitre *et al*, 2012; Thompson, 2015). Furthermore, concern for a number of other related labour market issues, which have intensified since the onset of the crisis, has been important in giving rise to an evolving interest in assessing not just *how many* jobs an economy offers or whether or not one has a job but also the quality of jobs (OECD, 2015). Specifically, the issue of in-work poverty has come to the fore

in policy debates both at international and national level as it has become increasingly clear that whilst employment is the surest route out of poverty, it does not guarantee that the worker and their household can avoid poverty (Crisp *et al*, 2009; Maitre *et al*, 2012). Job security is another issue of particular concern, given the rise of ‘non-standard’ and precarious employment and evidence citing the negative impact which a lack of job security has for both individuals and organisations (Bailey, 2016; Cheng and Chan, 2008; Millward *et al*, 2000; Sverke *et al*, 2004; Thompson, 2015). In addition, research documenting the importance of not only the economic aspects of employment such as the size of the reward, but also the non-economic aspects of employment, such as the nature of the work performed and the quality of the work environment for the well-being of individuals and the households in which they live has gained prominence (Cazes *et al*, 2015; OECD, 2015; Stiglitz *et al*, 2009). Beyond this, the quality of available jobs has been shown to be an important driver of labour force participation influencing decisions such as whether to work, whether to quit and the number of hours to work (Coulibaby, 2006). Furthermore, job quality has been shown to be related to firm performance, and in turn aggregate economic performance, with those working in higher quality jobs shown to be more productive, be absent from work less often than those in poorer quality jobs and be more loyal to their employer (Clark, 2015; Harter *et al*, 2002; Jeffrey *et al*, 2014; OECD, 2014; OECD, 2015).

To date however, despite much interest and substantial progress having been made, job quality has remained a high level international concern which has been given hardly any prominence in policy practice at either international or national levels (OECD, 2015). One major obstacle to job quality obtaining any significance in policy practice is that job quality is inherently a multidimensional concept which can be conceptualised and measured in many different ways, and so it is difficult to reach a consensus on a job quality framework that can be applied in various contexts, while maintaining its fundamental principles and key dimensions. Another obstacle to international efforts seeking to assess job quality is related to the difficulty of defining and measuring job quality in ways that are amenable to comparisons over time, across countries and sociodemographic groups. Linked to this are data availability issues which inevitably further compound these issues. Consequently, despite substantial interest and progress having been made at international level on the issue of job quality this has, for the most part, been part of an ongoing debate, centered on refining the conceptualisation and measurement of job quality. As a result, there has been less action in terms of assessing job quality, and so there is limited knowledge on how countries compare in terms of job quality. Even less attention has been given to the concept of job quality within specific countries/regions. This inevitably masks divisions in job quality within countries and so there is limited knowledge on how individuals within countries/regions compare.

The Northern Ireland Executive (2016: 14) however recently made a commitment to ‘increase the proportion of people working in good jobs’ in Northern Ireland. This commitment was made as part of a ‘well-being framework’ and presented in the recently published Programme for Government which aims to improve the well-being of all. This inclusion of job quality in a framework seeking to improve the well-being of the people of Northern Ireland is significant as

it provides clear recognition from political leaders that job quality is a fundamental component of well-being. Furthermore, its inclusion as one of fourteen outcomes in the Programme for Government represents a political commitment to addressing job quality in Northern Ireland, and a dual focus for policy makers to at once increase the quantity and quality of jobs in Northern Ireland. Unsurprisingly however there is very little empirical evidence which documents the quality of jobs or divisions in job quality in Northern Ireland. Labour market reporting has persistently focused on the numbers of people employed, unemployed and economically inactive (See Labour market report published monthly from Department of Economy). Henceforth, given a lack of knowledge on the quality of jobs in Northern Ireland alongside the recent commitment of the Northern Ireland Executive to increase the proportion of people working in good jobs, it is timely to undertake an examination of job quality in Northern Ireland. Through doing this not only will a better understanding of job quality in Northern Ireland be obtained, but we will also gain an understanding of the factors which drive differences in job quality across the dimensions and the impact of poor job quality for a number of individual health and well-being outcomes.

3. JOB QUALITY

Defining job quality is a difficult task given that there is a lack of consensus on what constitutes a good quality job and a tradition of different disciplines emphasising different criteria (Burchell *et al*, 2014). For example, in economics job quality has traditionally been assessed in terms of monetary compensation, such as the hourly wage level, number of working hours or fringe benefits such as benefits-in-kind. Assessments in sociology have tended to be concerned with skills levels, working conditions, and the degree of autonomy and control over one's work. Psychologists have tended to emphasise the subjective aspects of employment such as levels of satisfaction and the extent to which one's job is worthwhile and intrinsically meaningful.

For some decades, however, it has been recognised that these approaches need to be integrated, with recognition that job quality is more accurately a multi-dimensional concept with both economic and non-economic aspects of one's job needing to be accounted for in order to comprehensively assess the quality of one's job (Burchell *et al*, 2014). Thus, drawing across the different disciplines a number of international institutions have, throughout the past two decades, been working to bridge these conflicting approaches and develop an integrated framework for measuring job quality. This has resulted in substantial progress in efforts to develop, more or less, comprehensive conceptual frameworks with which to assess job quality.

The first years of the millennium saw the first significant attempt to define job quality at international level with the European Union institutionalising job quality in the Lisbon Treaty as the key employment policy objective (European Commission, 2001). The result of this process saw the identification of two broad categories of job quality which together comprised 10 dimensions relating to (1) the characteristics of the job and (2) wider socio-economic and

labour market contexts. At this stage the European Commission even set about defining several specific indicators for evaluating each dimension of job quality known as the 'Laeken indicators', to be measured using existing data sources available at European level (European Commission, 2001). While this initiative merits praise as it constituted an important step to develop an internationally comparable system of job quality indicators, the Laeken indicators were constrained by the need for indicators for each dimension across all member states (Eurofound, 2012). Moreover, the Laeken indicators have been widely criticised for being too general and missing critical aspects in terms of the quality of jobs, such as earnings. Others are critical of the Laeken indicators because of the tension which arises from attempting to merge the interests of workers and their employers in one concept, with Green (2006) pointing out that potential conflicts of interests between these are underplayed. Green (2006) uses the example of the flexible labour market to make this argument, pointing out that whilst it may not be conducive to a sense of security on the part of the employees, it is deemed profitable for employers.

The European Trade Union Institute (ETUI) also developed a 'job quality index' to compare job quality across the EU27 countries (Leschke and Watt, 2008). This index takes the perspective of workers and consists of six sub-indices including: wages; non-standard forms of employment; work-life balance and working time; working conditions and job security; access to training and career advancement; and collective interest representation and participation. Those responsible for developing the job quality index however note difficulties in getting meaningful comparative data across the six dimensions for each member state and recommend that more detailed country level assessments of job quality should still be carried out (Leschke *et al*, 2012).

Other important initiatives at international level include the 'Decent Work' agenda launched in 1999 by the ILO. In 2002 the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions also devised a framework for assessing work and employment quality (Eurofound, 2002). More recently, the ILO, in collaboration with Eurostat and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, has taken further important steps in unifying the elements across the different international initiatives by producing a 'Manual on Concepts and Definitions of Decent Work' that could be used for monitoring progress in implementing the ILO Decent Work Agenda in the area of labour standards; employment; social protection and social dialogue, including economic and social contextual information such as labour market performance; equal treatment or forms of work that should be abolished (ILO, 2012). In practice, however the OECD (2011b) explain that many of these aspects of employment quality are not adequately covered by existing indicators and thus argue that this manual should only provide broad measurement guidance. Furthermore, the OECD (2015) questions the adequacy and actionability of the ILO-UNECE-Eurostat framework for policy purposes given its very wide scope and recommended use of both drivers and outcomes of job quality.

The OECD has thus sought to build on the extensive efforts of the ILO-UNECE-Eurostat taskforce by linking conceptual frameworks on job quality with recent OECD work on well-being (Cazes *et al*, 2015). On this the OECD argue that job quality should not be seen as a separate component of well-being, and rather hold that the aspects of employment that contribute to the well-being of individual workers should be the central concern when assessing job quality. Consequently, by following the broader well-being agenda laid out in the 'Better Life Initiative' the OECD developed a job quality framework focused on capturing those aspects of a job that have been shown to be particularly important for the well-being of worker's (Cazes *et al*, 2015). Important details about the OECD job quality framework is that it goes beyond cross-country averages focusing on individual workers; concentrates on outcomes as experienced by individual workers as opposed to drivers of job quality; and favors objective features of job quality, whilst recognising that some aspects of job quality can only be assessed via an individual's subjective assessment. Following this approach the OECD identified three dimensions as comprising the job quality framework: quality of earnings; labour market security and quality of the working environment.

Quality of earnings

Given that the most direct benefit of employment is intended to be resource or material benefits it is unsurprising that earnings quality comprises the concept of job quality. In terms of assessing quality of earnings, it is reasonable to argue that poor earnings quality occurs where the material or resource benefits are inadequate in ensuring one can avoid material hardship. Henceforth, following the key debates laid out in the literature, low pay and in-work poverty are both identified as obvious concerns when seeking to assess poor earnings.

Job security

A large and growing body of literature shows job security to be a fundamental characteristic of job quality and in turn the well-being of workers (OECD, 2015; Jeffrey *et al*, 2014; Salvatori, 2010). Indeed, analysis of data from both the European Social Survey and the International Social Survey Programme has shown that workers consistently rank job security as the most important aspect of their job. Moreover, using data from the International Social Survey and the Eurobarometer surveys Blanchflower and Oswald (2000) found job security to be a key determinant of job satisfaction. Furthermore, several studies have found that a lack of job security has a detrimental effect on a number of other individual well-being outcomes, including both physical and mental health (Sverke *et al*, 2002; Green, 2009; Green, 2011). Going beyond this, other studies have found that the negative effects of job insecurity the well-being of workers. For example, Podsakoff *et al* (2007) found job insecurity to have a negative effect on organisational commitment and loyalty. Other studies suggest that job insecurity may negatively affect productivity, investment in firm specific skills, and consumer confidence (OECD, 2015).

Quality of the working environment

This includes factors that relate to the non-economic nature of the work and the environment under which this is performed. In this respect, quality of the working environment has been

argued to have different dimensions, with employee task control, autonomy, variety, satisfaction, workplace relationships with colleagues and the physical environment all having been identified as important (Bailey, 2016; Gallie, 2007). Thus, whilst employment is generally seen as conferring a range of health and social benefits, increasingly the quality of the working environment has been shown to have important implications for the well-being of workers and in particular health, mental health and job satisfaction outcomes (Cazes *et al*, 2015). Indeed, a number of studies suggest that poor quality employment may actually result in worse health outcomes than unemployment (Bailey, 2016; Butterworth *et al*, 2011; Gallie and Paugman, 2003).

4. DATA AND METHODS

This analysis in this paper draws on data from the PSE-NI survey. The PSE-NI survey is part of the Poverty and Social Exclusion in the UK study (PSE-UK) (2012), funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. The PSE-NI survey is based on re-interviewing people living in households who had previously taken part in the Family Resources Survey (FRS) 2010-11. Consequently, this involved re-contacting 1,702 of the 2,484 households who had taken part in the NI-FRS, and where at least one adult had agreed to be contacted for a follow-up study. Interviews were carried out with 988 households and 2,311 individuals. Of these, 1,256 were working aged adults (18 to 64) with 722 in employment.

NISRA applied a weighting strategy to the PSE-NI survey dataset which involved generating a household weight so that the weighted household-level estimates from the PSE-NI survey matched the corresponding weighted estimates in the NI-FRS - the latter being treated as population estimates. The individual weights were generated by assigning each individual their household weight, and then adjusting so that the weighted distribution of age group and sex matched the 2011 Northern Ireland Mid-Year Population Estimates, based on the 2011 Census. Weighted data are used in all of the analyses that follow (Total weighted sample = 897).

Measuring quality of earnings

Various measures might be employed to capture the quality of individual earnings. For example, earnings quality can be measured using level of wages in either gross or net terms on an hourly, monthly or even on an annual basis (Cazes *et al*, 2015). Such measures however provide only a limited picture of earnings quality since the quantity of work and the stability of earnings over time are also important (Bailey, 2016). Furthermore, the earnings of other members of the household in which one lives is also important in determining what resources are available. As such, it is argued that a more complete measure of earnings quality is the extent to which the households of those currently in paid work are able to avoid poverty.

The PSE-NI survey provides several measures of poverty which are employed here to assess earnings quality in Northern Ireland. The first of these is a low income poverty measure. Using this measure an employee would be said to have poor earnings quality if they lived in a

household with an equivalised net disposable income that is less than 60% of the median. The second is a direct measure of poverty based on the PSE-UKs consensual poverty approach (Mack and Lansley, 1985). The consensual poverty approach asks a representative sample of the population using an attitudinal survey which items from a list of 76 common goods and activities they consider to be a necessity for all adults in today's society. Items which more than 50% of the population consider to be a necessity for all adults in the attitudes survey were considered for the measure of deprivation. A second survey of living standards then identifies who lacks each necessity because they cannot afford it. This is the basis of the deprivation measure which is a count of the number of necessity items that people lack. Analysis of the PSE-UK data led Lansley and Mack (2015) to argue that it is those lacking three or more necessities whom live in 'deprivation poverty' (given the relationship between different levels of deprivation and a range of other disadvantages), and so this is the cut-off used in this study. The third measure used to capture poor earnings quality is the PSE poverty measure which is based on a statistical model first developed by Townsend and Gordon (1989) and a theoretical model developed by Gordon (2000; 2006). The PSE poverty measure is calculated by linking the number of necessities lacking in a household to equivalised net disposable household income using a range of sequential procedures designed to maximise the differences between the 'poor' and the 'not-poor' and minimise the differences within these two groups. Following this methodology, the PSE poverty threshold is set as lacking three or more items *and* having an income below the median for those who lack three necessity items (Gordon, 2014).

It is worth noting that many previous studies have found a mismatch in levels of poverty across different measures and indeed differential risks of being identified as poor for different subgroups, depending on whether an income poverty or deprivation poverty measure is employed (Bradshaw and Finch, 2003; Whelan *et al*, 2004). Those who have sought to understand reasons for this lack of overlap have found that it is connected to the direct and indirect measurement of poverty and the reliability and validity of different measures (Bradshaw and Finch, 2003; Nolan and Whelan, 2011; Perry, 2002; Ringen, 1988). Clearly however, the fact that there is a mismatch between the measures of poverty is a concern as it may mean that the policy response differs depending on the measure used. This is highlighted in a recent publication from the ESRI examining trends in poverty and deprivation in Ireland over a ten-year period whereby they found that income poverty trends have remained relatively stable over this period, whilst there have been marked increases in deprivation poverty across some groups, particularly for lone parents and working-age adults with a disability (Watson *et al*, 2016). On considering these issues the broad literature base advocates the use of a suite of measures of poverty, rather than the reliance on a single measure. This allows us to exploit the strengths of different measures, whilst at the same time allowing us to understand the complexities and challenges involved when attempting to capture poverty.

Measuring job security

Contractual position immediately comes to mind as a suitable measure when seeking to assess security of employment for those currently in paid work, where it could be argued that those

on various forms of ‘non-standard’ contracts, such as zero hours or temporary contracts, have poor job security. As it happens however the PSE-NI survey does not provide such a measure and so an alternative subjective measure is relied upon in this study to assess job security. Specifically, all adults who took part in the survey and were currently in employment were asked to respond to the survey item: ‘*My job is secure*’ with responses collected on a five-point Likert scale capturing the extent to which those currently in employment felt that their job was secure. For analytical purposes results across this variable were split to distinguish between those who either strongly agreed or agreed that their job was secure versus those who strongly disagreed, disagreed or were not sure. Green (2006) details the findings of various studies which have found that this provides both a valid and reliable indicator of job security.

Measuring quality of working environment

As there are no standard indicators or frameworks for measuring quality of working environment the PSE-UK survey included, following a review of the literature, fourteen questions concerned with the conditions and amenities of work (Bailey and Livingstone, 2011). Responses across each of these indicators were collected on a five-category Likert scale with response options including strongly agree; agree; neither agree nor disagree; disagree and strongly disagree. A factor analysis of results across these questions suggested that twelve of these questions could be used to identify four dimensions: satisfaction or sense of doing work of value; (low) stress; control or flexibility over one’s work; and (good) physical conditions (See Table 1 below). Appropriate levels of internal consistency were found between the items, with a Cronbach’s alpha value of 0.67. For each dimension, scores were summed across the relevant questions and converted to binary variables distinguishing between those reporting positive views from those with neutral or negative views.

Table 1: Quality of the working environment questions

Dimension	Indicator
Satisfaction/sense of value	The work I do is interesting
	The work I do is useful
	I work with supportive colleagues
	Overall, I am satisfied with my job
(Low) stress	I work to tight deadlines most or all of the time (reverse coded)
	I find my work stressful (reverse coded)
Control or flexibility	I decide how I do each task
	I decide what time I start or finish work
	It is easy for me to take a couple of hours off work for personal matters
(Good) physical environment	My work is physically demanding or physically tiring (reverse coded)
	My workplace is always a comfortable temperature
	There is a lot of smoke, dust, fumes or noise where I work (reverse coded)

5. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Using the measures outlined above the analysis which follows takes each dimension of job quality in turn and starts by giving an overall assessment of the proportions with poor quality conditions across the three dimensions. It then moves to focus on the relationship between each dimension of job quality and a range of individual and household characteristics related to the worker including sex, age, household composition, education, occupation, hours worked, as well as the industrial sector in which one is employed. The analysis then explores the overlap between the three dimensions of job quality, using one measure for each (the PSE-UK poverty measure, job security and a combined quality of working environment measure) and considers those who are at risk of suffering poor job quality across multiple dimensions. Next the analysis considers those who are least likely to make progress in their job over time in terms of the levels of skills used, variety of tasks performed and level of responsibility. From here the analysis moves to examine the relationship between job quality and a number of individual health and well-being outcomes.

Quality of earnings

The three measures of poverty reveal substantial levels of in-work poverty in Northern Ireland, although supporting the findings of previous studies the analysis found significant variations across the three measures. Before turning to these results, it is important to point out that whilst the majority of those living in poverty are not in employment, depending on which of the three measures used those in paid work make up between 38% and 48% of all working age adults in poverty.

Looking to levels of in-work poverty, the results in Table 2 below show that one in seven employees were found to be living in poverty based on the low-income measure; slightly over one in four were found to be living in deprivation poverty; and one in seven were found to be living in poverty based upon the combined PSE poverty measure. It is worth commenting that the contrasting picture between income poverty and deprivation poverty measures might be explained by those who argue that a deprivation measure is better able to capture command over resources than current income, and in turn the income poverty derived from this (Nolan and Whelan, 2011). In this way, given that the income poverty measure is assessed in relation to the median when there is a fall or stagnation in real incomes, this change is masked by the overall fall in incomes and so income poverty measures fail to capture the consequences of this for the living standards of individuals. Hence, the higher levels of deprivation poverty seen in comparison to the levels of income poverty suggests that a substantial proportion of the population have an income which allows them to avoid being classified as income poor, yet have either not accumulated enough resources, have eroded their command over resources over time or do not have access to additional resources (such as loans) beyond their income from employment which allows them to overcome these downward pressures to their real income.

Table 2: Quality of earnings captured by levels of in-work poverty in Northern Ireland

	Poor	Not Poor
	%	%
Income poor	14.9	85.1
Deprivation poor	27.3	72.7
PSE poor	15.3	84.7

To gain a better understanding of those who have poor earnings quality we explore the composition of those in poverty in comparison to those who are not experiencing poverty across a number of individual, household and firm characteristics. In doing this, it becomes clear that whilst the rates vary between measures, there is consistency in terms of the risk factors to experiencing poor earnings quality associated with each of these measures of poverty, although for some groups we find substantial divergences across the measures in terms of risk of poverty.

The results in Table 3 below show a statistically significant relationship between poverty and socioeconomic position. Looking specifically in terms of educational qualifications we can see that a gradient exists in terms of the proportions experiencing poverty. The results show that those with no qualifications have the highest proportion experiencing poverty when compared to those with below degree or degree level or higher level qualifications. For example, as seen in the first column of Table 3, 35% of those with no qualifications are living in income poverty, in comparison to 16% of those with below degree level qualifications and under 5% for those with a degree or higher level qualification. An exception to this can be seen in the results for deprivation poverty, where a higher proportion of those with below degree level qualifications experience deprivation in comparison to those with no qualifications. Nonetheless, in comparing across the three measures of poverty, it is consistently the case that those with degree level or higher qualifications experience the lowest levels of poverty. This is in line with previous studies citing an earnings premium for graduates, over those with lower than degree or no qualifications (D'Arcy and Finch, 2016).

Social class is also significantly related to poverty with the results on the income poverty and PSE poverty measures showing that small employers/own account workers experience greater levels of poverty than those across the other social class categories (38% and 29% respectively), albeit this is followed by those in semi-routine/routine occupations. These results reverse when looking at the deprivation poverty measure with those in semi-routine/routine occupations experiencing the highest risk of deprivation poverty (41%), followed by those small employers/own account workers (38%). In contrast, as can be seen in Table 3 below, across the three measures, those in higher status occupations such as managerial/professional or intermediate occupations consistently experience the lowest levels of poverty.

Employment status is also significantly related to poverty, with those in full-time employment (9% income poor; 21% deprivation poor; 11% PSE poor) experiencing significantly lower

levels of poverty than either the self-employed (29% income poor; 27% deprivation poor; 20% PSE poor) or those in part-time employment (23% income poor; 46% deprivation poor; 25% PSE poor). Interestingly, in scrutinizing these results we see that whilst the self-employed experience the greatest level of poverty on the income poverty measure, it is the part-time employed that experience the highest level of deprivation poverty (46%) and PSE poverty (25%). Similar to the results for social class, this is likely indicative of the sometimes sporadic nature of income and previous evidence of underreporting of income among the self-employed (Cabral *et al*, 2015), whilst also highlighting that the self-employed are better able to smooth their consumption of material goods over time and so are less likely than those who are in part-time employment to be deprived of key necessities (Ringen, 1988).

Other risk factors are sociodemographic with the results showing that being relatively young is associated with higher in-work poverty risks. Young adults, and particularly those aged between 25-34 experience the highest levels of poverty across the three measures, with just over one in five experiencing poverty based on the low-income measure (22%), over one in three based on the deprivation measure (39%), and over one in four on the PSE poor measure (27%). In contrast, of the oldest group of workers, those aged 55-64, slightly over 10% experience income poverty, over 6% experience deprivation poverty, whilst only 3% are identified as poor on the PSE poor measure.

Having children (23% of couples, with children are income poor; 31% deprivation poor; 21% PSE poor) and especially being a lone parent (29% income poor; 63% deprivation poor; 49% PSE poor), is associated with higher in-work poverty risks, likely reflecting both constraints on availability for paid work and also access to and the cost of childcare. Consistently across the three measures couples without children experience the lowest levels of poverty.

It is worthwhile commenting on the results in terms of the relationship between gender and poverty where no significant differences were found. Whilst this perhaps is contrary to what we might expect in terms of earnings quality, given that men typically tend to earn more than women (Dias *et al*, 2016), it is worth reemphasizing that as poverty is assessed at the household level and not at the individual level we are less likely to find differences in gender using this measure.

Table 3 also presents the results showing the relationship between poverty and sector of employment. The results across the three measures of poverty show that those employed in the market sector carry a significantly higher risk of being in poverty than those in non-market jobs. Specifically, 18% of those in market jobs experience income poverty (compared to 7% in non-market jobs), 34% experience deprivation poverty (compared to 19% in non-market jobs) and 20% experience PSE poverty (compared to 6% in non-market jobs).

In terms of the relationship between industrial sector and poverty the results show that those with jobs in the construction sector experience the highest levels of income poverty. For example, as shown in Table 3, 28% of those employed in the construction sector experience

income poverty. This is in comparison to 13% of those in the services sector, 10% of those in manufacturing jobs and 16% of those in the sector described as 'other'. The results in terms of deprivation poverty show that those employed in construction and manufacturing jobs experience similar levels of poverty (29%).

Table 3: Differences in earnings quality assessed via poverty amongst working-age adults in employment

	Income poor		Deprivation poor		PSE poor	
	Not Poor	Poor	Not Poor	Poor	Not Poor	Poor
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Gender	ns		ns		ns	
Male	86.0	14.0	75.1	24.9	86.3	13.7
Female	84.3	15.7	69.9	30.1	82.8	17.2
Age category	**		***			
18-24	85.2	14.8	63.3	36.7	87.5	12.5
25-34	77.6	22.4	60.9	39.1	73.2	26.8
35-44	86.2	13.8	76.8	23.2	86.2	13.8
45-54	89.4	10.6	75.5	24.5	88.4	11.6
55-64	89.6	10.4	93.8	6.3	96.9	3.1
Educational qualification	***		***		***	
Degree level or higher	95.1	4.9	87.4	12.6	96.9	3.1
Below degree level	83.7	16.3	66.3	33.7	80.0	20.0
No qualification	65.0	35.0	73.7	26.3	78.9	21.1
Social Class (NS-SEC)			***		***	
Managerial/Professional	95.2	4.8	83.3	16.7	92.9	7.1
Intermediate	95.8	4.2	79.0	21.0	92.3	7.7
Small employers/own account	62.5	37.5	62.3	37.7	70.8	29.2
Lower Supervisory/Technical	88.2	11.8	78.3	21.7	85.5	14.5
Semi-routine/Routine	72.4	27.6	58.6	41.4	73.8	26.2
Hours worked	***		***			
1 to 19	68.1	32.0	38.1	61.9	61.9	38.1
20 to 40	88.2	11.8	74.9	25.1	86.9	13.1
41 +	87.2	12.8	85.4	14.6	91.0	9.0
Employment status	***		***		***	
Full-time employee	91.0	9.0	79.5	20.5	89.3	10.7
Part-time employee	77.1	22.9	53.6	46.4	74.8	25.2
Self-employed	71.0	29.0	73.3	26.7	80.4	19.6
Household composition	***		***		*	
Single Adult	89.0	11.0	72.8	27.2	84.0	16.0
Lone Parent	71.4	28.6	37.5	62.5	51.0	49.0

Couple, with children	77.3	22.7	69.2	30.8	79.2	20.8
Couple, without children	93.8	6.3	82.3	17.7	95.3	4.7
Other household type	94.7	5.3	75.6	24.4	93.4	6.6
Sector of employment	***		***		***	
Market	82.0	18.0	66.1	33.9	80.0	20.0
Non-market	92.6	7.4	80.8	19.2	94.3	5.7
Industry sector (SIC 2007)	**		*		ns	
Manufacturing	90.2	9.8	70.7	29.3	80.4	19.6
Construction	72.5	27.5	71.0	29.0	82.6	17.4
Services	87.2	12.8	74.0	26.0	86.7	13.3
Other*	84.0	16.0	96.2	3.8	100.0	0.0

Notes: (1) Other* includes Agriculture, forestry and fishing; Mining and quarrying; Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply; Water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities. (2) A weighted Pearson chi-squared test was used to determine if the reported differences between the sample categories are statistically significant. In the case of all decompositions: ns = not significant; * = $p < 0.05$; ** = $p < 0.01$; *** = $p < 0.001$.

Job Security

The results for job security show that whilst the majority of those in employment felt as though their job was secure (63%), over a third of those in employment (37%) were either not sure if their job was secure or perceived their job to be insecure. This is substantive and shows the prevalence of job insecurity right across the workforce. This is of particular concern given evidence of the negative impact which job insecurity has for a range of other individual, social and economic well-being outcomes (McCarthy, 2015; Shaheen, 2013).

The results across the age categories are counter-intuitive and in contrast to what we might expect given findings of other studies which have explored in much further detail, than is done here, job security (insecurity) in the labour market (George *et al*, 2015; Shildrick *et al*, 2012). In attempting to interpret these findings the conjecture is that the subjective insecurity measure employed is interpreted differently across the age groups and in turn we are seeing this non-random response bias coming through in the results. A recent Pew research centre publication (Brown, 2016) provides some support for this interpretation whereby it was found that when asked a majority of working-age adults said that job security was on the decline, yet a majority also said that their job was secure. Clearly further work is needed here to understand how individuals form perceptions of job security versus their actual employment terms.

It is clear that there is a significant relationship between job security and socioeconomic position. For example, the risk of having an insecure job declines the higher one's educational qualification. In this way, across the educational qualification categories presented in Table 4 we see that whilst close to half (45%) of those with no educational qualifications perceive their job to be secure, 60% of those with below degree level qualifications and 75% of those with degree level or higher qualifications perceive their job to be secure.

Furthermore, perceived risk of job security varies by social class. Those who are in managerial/professional (67%) or intermediate occupations (67%) are most likely to perceive their job to be secure. In contrast, those who are in lower supervisory or technical occupations (51%) or are self-employed or own account workers (53%) are the least likely to perceive their job to be secure.

The risk of job security also varies by employment status. Specifically, the results show that under half of those who are self-employed (47%) perceive their job to be secure, compared to 56% of those who are employed part-time and 69% of those who are employed full-time. Furthermore, the results also show that the longer one's weekly working hours the more likely they are to perceive their job to be secure. Indeed, 67% of those who work 41 or more hours per week and 65% of those who work between 20 and 40 hours per week perceive their job to be secure. This is in comparison to 45% of those who work between 1-19 hours who perceive their job to be secure.

Looking at the relationship between job security and sector of employment the results show that the risk of job insecurity is higher amongst those employed in the market sector (39%) when compared to those in non-market employment (31%).

In terms of industrial sector, the results in Table 4 show that those employed in the construction sector are the least likely to perceive their job to be secure, with less than one third (32%) of those with jobs in construction agreeing that their job was secure. This is in comparison to close to two-thirds of those employed in both the manufacturing (64%) and services sector (65%) perceiving their job to be secure, and four-fifths of those employed in the sector described below as 'other'.

Table 4: Differences in job security amongst working-age adults in employment

	My job is secure...	
	Agree	Disagree
	%	%
Gender	ns	
Male	64.0	36.0
Female	62.0	38.0
Age category	ns	
18-24	75.2	24.8
25-34	62.2	37.8
35-44	62.2	37.8
45-54	60.6	39.4
55-64	59.6	40.4
Educational qualification	***	
Degree or higher	74.9	25.1
Below degree	59.8	40.2

No qualification	45.0	55.0
Social class (NS-SEC)	*	
Managerial/Professional	67.2	32.8
Intermediate	67.4	32.6
Small employers/own account	52.8	47.2
Lower Supervisory/Technical	51.4	48.6
Semi-routine/Routine	60.9	39.1
Hours worked	***	
1 to 19	45.1	54.9
20 to 40	65.1	34.9
41 +	67.1	32.9
Employment status	***	
Full-time employee	68.7	31.3
Part-time employee	56.2	43.8
Self-employed	45.8	54.2
Household Composition	ns	
Single Adult	65.4	34.6
Lone Parent	63.0	37.0
Couple, with children	58.7	41.3
Couple, without children	63.0	37.0
Other household type	70.5	29.5
Sector of employment	*	
Market	60.8	39.2
Non-market	69.4	30.6
Industry sector (SIC 2007)	***	
Manufacturing	64.1	35.9
Construction	31.9	68.1
Services	64.9	35.1
Other*	80.8	19.2

Notes: (1) Other* includes Agriculture, forestry and fishing; Mining and quarrying; Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply; Water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities. (2) A weighted Pearson chi-squared test was used to determine if the reported differences between the sample categories are statistically significant. In the case of all decompositions: ns = not significant; * = $p < 0.05$; ** = $p < 0.01$; *** = $p < 0.001$.

Quality of the working environment

As discussed in the data and methods section above quality of the working environment is assessed using four measures: satisfaction/sense of value; stress; control/flexibility; and quality of the physical environment. Analysis of these indicators show that whilst a majority (74%) of those currently in employment are satisfied with their job and believe that their job is of value, a substantial proportion of employees have jobs that are stressful (66%); have little

control or flexibility in terms of their working arrangements (49%); have a poor quality physical working environment (45%).

Table 5: Quality of the working environment in Northern Ireland

	Yes	No
	%	%
(High) Satisfaction/Sense of value	74.0	26.0
(Low) Stress	34.3	65.7
(High) Control or flexibility	51.1	48.9
(Good) Physical environment	54.6	45.4

The four measures are quite diverse in terms of overall levels of poor quality, but also in terms of risk factors to negative conditions (See Table 6). Stress is the measure most unlike the others, with high levels of stress associated with those in managerial/professional occupations (80%), the self-employed (65%), those with degree or higher qualifications (75%), those who work full-time or longer hours and middle-aged adults (70% of those aged between 35-54 are highly stressed).

In contrast, those in semi-routine/routine occupations, those in part-time employment and those with low working hours have a higher risk of having low levels of satisfaction (39%, 40% and 40% respectively) and low control or flexibility over one's work (57%, 63% and 58% respectively). Low satisfaction is also more common amongst those with below degree (30%) or no educational qualifications (20%) when compared to those with degree level or higher qualifications (18%). Those aged between 18-24 are also most at risk of having low job satisfaction (39%) or reporting low control/flexibility with one's job (66%). Furthermore, lone parents are most likely to report low satisfaction (44%) and low control/flexibility (69%). One explanation for this could be that for lone parents there is additional demands and responsibilities in terms of childcare commitments which place additional constraints on lone parents, as a result of difficulties combining work and family responsibilities.

Looking to the results for poor physical conditions in Table 6 the results show that males (51% compared to 40% females), the relatively young (63% of those aged 18-24 compared to 40% aged 55-64), those with no qualifications (55%), those in part-time employment (40%) and those in lower supervisory/technical jobs (81%) and those who work in the industry described as 'other' (73%) are most likely to report poor physical conditions when compared across their respective categories.

Table 6: Differences in quality of the working environment amongst working-age adults in employment

	Satisfaction/ Sense of value		Stress		Control/Flexibility		Physical Environment	
	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Poor	Good
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Gender	ns		ns		ns		***	
Male	27	73	31.9	68.1	46.8	53.2	50.5	50
Female	24.8	75.2	37.2	62.8	51.3	48.7	39.6	60
Age category	**		*		***		***	
18-24	39.4	60.6	42.3	57.7	66.3	33.7	62.5	38
25-34	29.1	70.9	34.9	65.1	56.3	43.7	47.6	52
35-44	23.1	76.9	29.7	70.3	43.5	56.5	47	53
45-54	20.6	79.4	30.3	69.7	42.9	57.1	35.5	65
55-64	24.2	75.8	44.4	55.6	40.4	59.6	40.4	60
Educational qualification	**		*		ns		***	
Degree or higher	18.2	81.8	25	75	45.5	54.5	28.6	71
Below degree	30.2	69.8	35.9	64.1	52.5	47.5	50.3	50
No qualification	20	80	40	60	40	60	55	45
Social class (NS-SEC)	***		***		***		***	
Managerial/Professional	15.9	84.1	19.8	80.2	45.7	54.3	32.9	67
Intermediate	28.7	71.3	35	65	47.2	52.8	25.7	74
Small employers/own account workers	20.8	79.2	48.6	51.4	25.4	74.6	60.6	39
Lower Supervisory/Technical	18.8	81.2	30.4	69.6	55.1	44.9	81.2	19
Semi-routine/Routine	38.8	61.2	47.8	52.2	57	43	55.7	44
Hours worked	***		***		*		ns	
1 to 19	39.8	60.2	59.3	40.7	58.4	41.6	45.1	55
20 to 40	27.7	72.3	33.8	66.2	48.9	51.1	45	55
41 +	15.2	84.8	33.8	66.2	43.9	56.1	47.1	53

Employment status	***		***		***		*	
Full-time employee	22.1	77.9	26.3	73.7	49.5	50.5	45.6	54
Part-time employee	40	60	56.4	43.6	63	37	39.5	61
Self-employed	19.4	80.6	34.6	65.4	18.5	81.5	55.6	44
Household composition	**		ns		*		ns	
Single Adult	20.8	60.2	33.3	66.7	42	58	54.3	46
Lone Parent	43.8	56.3	47.9	52.1	68.8	31.3	49	51
Couple, with children	21.6	78.4	31.4	68.6	46.2	53.8	43	57
Couple, without children	29.2	70.8	35.9	64.1	53.3	46.7	43.1	57
Other household type	29.5	70.5	32.9	67.1	50.9	49.1	49.1	51
Sector of employment	***		***		ns		ns	
Market	29.2	70.8	29.2	70.8	45.9	54.1	48.6	51
Non-market	17.1	82.9	17.1	82.9	51.5	48.5	41	59
Industry sector (SIC 2007)	*		ns		***		***	
Manufacturing	35.9	64.1	32.3	67.7	56.5	43.5	64.1	36
Construction	29	71	31.9	68.1	30.9	69.1	71	29
Services	22.8	77.2	33.8	66.2	50.7	49.3	36.6	63
Other*	19.2	80.8	53.8	65.9	22.2	77.8	73.1	27

Notes: (1) Other* includes Agriculture, forestry and fishing; Mining and quarrying; Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply; Water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities. (2) A weighted Pearson chi-squared test was used to determine if the reported differences between the sample categories are statistically significant. In the case of all decompositions: ns = not significant; * = $p < 0.05$; ** = $p < 0.01$; *** = $p < 0.001$.

Relationships between the dimensions

Next we assess the relationships between the dimensions of job quality by exploring the overlap between the different dimensions (earnings quality, job security and quality of working environment) of job quality. In doing this we hope to get closer to obtaining an overall sense of job quality in Northern Ireland, as well as gaining an understanding of those who are most at risk of suffering poor job quality across multiple dimensions.

In terms of earnings quality, given that there is little to choose between the poverty measures in terms of relationships with risk factors the analysis that follows will use the PSE poverty measure to assess earnings quality on the basis that it combines deprivation and low income, giving an overall poverty risk. The same measure of job security is used as was in the preceding analysis. An overall measure is used to assess quality of the working environment, which is based on bringing together scores across each of the dimensions. Those who have negative or poor conditions in two or more dimensions are considered to have an overall poor quality working environment. On this basis 13% of working age adults in employment are considered to work in a poor-quality environment.

In terms of assessing the overlaps between the three dimensions of job quality the results show that slightly over one in three (35%) working age adults in paid employment have poor job quality on one of the three dimensions, 13% are considered to have poor job quality across two dimensions, whilst only 1% are considered to have poor job quality across all three dimensions. On interpreting these results, it is easy to come to the conclusion that the groups experiencing poor conditions across the different dimensions of job quality are relatively distinct. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind the results above were a high degree of commonality was found across the three dimensions in terms of risk factors to poor job quality. Across the three dimensions the risk of poor conditions is consistently more prevalent amongst the young, the self-employed, those in part-time employment, those with children (and in particular lone parent), those employed in market sector jobs, those in semi-routine/routine occupations, and those employed in the construction industry. Furthermore, it is worth noting that some of the lack of overlap may be attributed to random error in the measures and to the use of dichotomous measures across the three dimensions (Bound *et al*, 2001).

Progression

It is also interesting to think through changes in job quality over time, as this gives us an insight into the duration of particular states and allows us to think about progression out of poor quality employment, but also regression into poor quality employment. As already mentioned the PSE-NI survey is a cross-sectional survey, and so we are not able to track job quality over time, such as what might be possible if longitudinal data were available. Nevertheless, the PSE-NI survey does have some data in terms of advancement in one's job and asks those currently in employment to assess the extent to which they feel they have progressed, regressed or have had no change in their job in terms of the skills used, the variety of tasks performed, and level of responsibility throughout the last five years.

The results show (Table 7) across the three measures that the majority of respondents have progressed in their job over the last five years (60% progressed in terms of level of skill used; 58%

in terms of variety of tasks performed and 54% in terms of level of responsibility). Nevertheless, we also see in Table 7 that across each of these measures, close to a third of respondents said that their job has stayed the same. It is also noteworthy that around one in twenty felt that they have regressed in terms of the skills used (6%), variety of tasks performed (6%) and level of responsibility over the past five years (6%). Further analysis (not presented here) shows that a lack of progress is associated with workers close to retirement age, part-time employment, having no educational qualifications, working in the private sector, being a small employer/own account worker and working in semi-routine or routine occupations. These findings are in line with previous studies which have found that workers tend to progress in their job over time, but that this starts to level off or decline as worker's approach retirement (George *et al*, 2015). Andersson *et al* (2005) argue that the fact that the less educated, those in part-time employment and those in lower skilled sectors are least likely to make progressive changes in their jobs over time is that these groups are less likely to receive employer provided training (Andersson *et al*, 2005). Moreover, Andersson *et al* (2005) point out that when training is provided, it tends to be less intensive and narrower in focus.

Table 7: Changes in job over time

	Level of skill used	Variety of tasks performed	Level of responsibility
	%	%	%
Progressed	59.5	57.6	53.7
Stayed the same	34.6	36.1	40.3
Regressed	5.9	6.4	6.0

Impact

Whilst the analysis thus far has predominantly concerned itself with describing job quality and risk factors to poor job quality in Northern Ireland as well as barriers to progression over time, it is also worthwhile considering the impact which poor job quality has on other aspects of individual well-being. In this way, given the cross-sectional nature of the PSE-NI survey we cannot hope to demonstrate a causal relationship between poor job quality and individual well-being outcomes, nevertheless there is value in exploring associations.

Three individual well-being measures are employed for this purpose. The first is concerned with overall subjective well-being and captures overall satisfaction with life. The second captures whether one has a long-standing illness or disability. The third is a self-reported health measure and captures health in general.

Table 7 below shows the risk of having low satisfaction with life overall, a longstanding illness or disability and fair or bad overall health by employment status. It also compares the risk of having low well-being for those with high or good job quality across the three dimensions. In doing this we see that those who are unemployed or economically inactive are significantly more likely to have poor quality health and well-being outcomes than those in employment. For example, 39% of those who are economically inactive and 37% of the unemployed have low satisfaction with their life overall. This is in comparison to 16% of working age adults who are in employment.

Nevertheless, when we look at the results in terms of earnings quality we see that those who have poor earnings quality (i.e. the working poor) (47%) have a higher risk of reporting low overall life satisfaction than the unemployed or economically inactive. Those with poor earnings quality (27%) also have a significantly higher risk of having a long-standing illness or disability than the unemployed (19%).

In terms of security of employment, the results show that those who do not perceive their job to be secure (30%) have a significantly higher risk of reporting low satisfaction with life than those with a secure job (20%). These results hold for long-standing illness or disability and for those with fair or bad general health, although the differences are not statistically significant for these measures. Similarly, in assessing the results for individual health and well-being outcomes in terms of good and poor quality working environment we see that in each case those who work in a poor quality environment have a higher risk of having worse health and well-being outcomes, although these differences are not statistically significant.

Table 8: Health and well-being outcomes by employment status and dimensions of job quality

	Low overall life satisfaction	Has long-standing illness or disability	General health fair or bad
	%	%	%
Employment status	***	***	***
Employed	16.1	15.7	12.6
Unemployed	36.6	19.4	23.6
Economically inactive	39.2	51.3	49.1
Dimensions of Job Quality			
Earnings quality	***	***	***
High earnings quality	18.8	14.1	11.3
Poor earnings quality	47.4	26.9	22.4
Job security	***	ns	ns
Job is secure	20.3	15.3	11.7
Job is not secure	30.3	16.7	14.2
Quality of working environment	ns	ns	ns
Good quality working environment	22.1	15.5	11.5
Poor quality working environment	26.7	16.2	14.2

6. SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

This paper sought to provide a clearer understanding of both overall job quality, as well as divisions in job quality in Northern Ireland. In doing this, the paper found that between one in four and one in

seven working-age adults in employment are poor; over a third of those in employment are working in jobs which they perceive to be insecure and slightly over one in ten working-age adults in employment are working in a poor-quality environment. Overall, slightly over one in three adults of working age falls into one or more of these categories. Together these findings highlight fundamental problems in the labour market caused by widening inequalities in pay, the increasing polarised nature of the labour market, the rise of low paid and low skilled jobs, and the increase in replacement of full-time jobs with part-time or precarious jobs.

Perhaps most striking is the evidence which shows the importance of job quality for a number of other individual health and well-being outcomes. Thus, whilst the corrosive effects of unemployment for individual health and well-being are well rehearsed in the literature little attention has been paid to the implications of poor job quality for individual health and well-being. The results of this study however show that a higher proportion of the working poor have low overall life satisfaction, a long-standing illness or disability and poor general health than the unemployed. Taken together the findings of this study suggest that if the NI Executive is serious about improving the well-being of all then job quality in Northern Ireland needs to be central to labour market policy development, with the performance of the labour market assessed in terms of both the number *and* the quality of jobs. Furthermore, assessments of individual well-being need not just be concerned with whether or not one has a job, but also the quality of that job.

In this way, if a central goal of the NI Executive is to achieve *more* and *better* jobs then not only does policy need to be designed in such a way to achieve this outcome, but measurement needs to reflect this by bringing together a range of job quality indicators in the assessment of labour market performance. One significant limitation of the analysis presented here is that it is based on a single cross-sectional survey. Thus, whilst the survey does provide a clearer understanding of job quality in Northern Ireland, and the impact of poor job quality on individual health and well-being outcomes these analyses are based on data taken from a snapshot in time, which is known to have limitations (Bound *et al*, 2001). Taking lessons from the international literature base on how we should measure job quality questions on job quality should be embedded into rolling or longitudinal government-funded surveys, such as the Labour Force Survey if we are serious about having a joint focus on both the quantity and quality of jobs in Northern Ireland and designing policy in such a manner.

The findings in terms of common risk factors to poor job quality across the three dimensions point towards the need for a broad policy agenda to improve job quality. This needs to cover the material rewards of work, particularly for those in low paid jobs. It should also extend well beyond this and include policies which would improve job security and quality of the working environment, particularly for those groups who are disproportionately affected by insecure employment and poor quality working environments. Given the increased risk of poor job quality which some groups face policy makers should give further consideration to and address the specific barriers which these groups face in obtaining good quality jobs.

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