

How good are jobs in New Zealand? An analysis using the International Social Survey Programme, 1997 to 2015¹

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Abstract

Based on an analysis of the New Zealand data in the Work Orientation module of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) across three rounds (1997, 2005 and 2015), this paper examines how workers in New Zealand perceive their job quality. These surveys imply that New Zealanders have relatively good jobs, as shown in healthy levels of job quality and job satisfaction. They rate highly the quality of their collegial relationships at work and typically perceive the intrinsic quality of their job as better than the extrinsic quality. A key issue in relation to the latter is that they generally do not rate their advancement opportunities as high. While men, full-timers and graduates have some advantages over women, part-timers and non-graduates in extrinsic job quality, the intrinsic quality of work is more evenly experienced. In terms of intrinsic issues, the rising level of stress from 2005 to 2015 poses a concern and there is no evidence that graduates enjoy any kind of premium in the intrinsic quality of work apart from a lower level of hard physical effort.

Keywords: Job quality, job satisfaction, gender, employment status, education, New Zealand

Introduction

Jobs vary significantly in their quality across the world, including in the more developed economies. As Bryson et al. (2016) comment, “the generation of poor quality jobs in Western industrialised nations despite economic growth has encouraged policy makers in Europe and elsewhere to focus their attention on job quality” (p.179). Similarly, Holtgrewe et al. (2015), writing in Europe, observe that “jobs with low wages, low autonomy, physical and psychological strains, limited perspectives and insecure employment do not simply persist, but are newly created” (p.1).

Against this backdrop, this paper aims to examine the perceptions of New Zealand employees of their job quality over the last 20 or so years. It is important to evaluate job quality on a country-specific basis because comparative studies show that there are major variations across countries in the quality of work (e.g. Esser & Olsen, 2011; Holman, 2013) and, wherever possible, it is important to track changes in each country over time (Adamson & Roper, 2019). As Volk and Hadler (2018) comment, “future research should thus consider both individual-level influences within countries and changes over time” (p. 122). Our goal in this context is to use three rounds of the work orientation module of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), conducted in 1997, 2005 and 2015, to provide a systematic analysis of indicators of job quality in New Zealand. While the predictors of skill utilisation have been analysed in the two more recent surveys (Boxall et al., 2019), this is the first study to investigate a wide range of job quality indicators across all three extant surveys. We aim to understand overall trends in job quality

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indicators and job satisfaction while also assessing variations in job quality associated with gender, employment status (full-time versus part-time) and educational levels. Our goal is not to test one of the many theories of job quality but to analyse a large-scale dataset that has not previously been examined for what it reveals about New Zealanders' perceptions of their employment conditions and outcomes. The results are important for informing the debate about job quality in New Zealand.

The paper begins with a literature review that defines job quality, provides some description of the New Zealand context, and briefly reviews international studies of job quality across the socio-demographic categories on which we focus. Given the variability in these studies, the literature review does not lead to specific hypotheses, but does outline our general expectations. Our research methods and modes of analysis are then discussed, followed by descriptions of the results and our discussion and conclusions.

Job quality and its variation across socio-demographic groups

Job quality is of vital importance to individuals and of growing interest to public policy analysts around the world. While there have historically been some differences in the factors that interest scholars in the different social sciences, most researchers now provide an elaborate picture of job quality as comprising a range of intrinsic and extrinsic features (e.g. Clark, 2005; Findlay, Kalleberg & Warhurst, 2013; Osterman, 2013; Adamson & Roper, 2019). The major studies of job quality in countries such as the UK treat it as “a set of characteristics rather than a single index” with an array of aspects that are widely regarded as important indicators of how good or bad a job is (Green et al., 2015, pp. 6-7). The intrinsic factors typically included in job quality studies relate to the nature of the work and its social context in the workplace, embracing some measures of the extent to which the worker finds their job interesting, a good use of their skills (i.e. the degree of skill utilisation), the quality of their work relationships, and the extent to which they can exercise control (e.g. over methods, work pace and work timing), express their voice and participate in decision-making. Intrinsic factors often include a selection of measures relating to work intensity, stress levels and work-life balance. The extrinsic factors measured in studies of job quality nearly always include measures of pay (compensation and benefits in US studies) and the degree of employment security while often including some measure of career prospects. As Green et al. (2015, p. 1) express it:

As well as decent pay, a ‘good job’ offers the scope for development and for taking initiative and some control over one’s tasks, the prospect of a reasonable work load, safe and pleasant working conditions, good social support from colleagues and superiors, opportunities for participation in organizational decision-making (whether direct or through the ‘voice’ of the union), and the flexibility to arrange working hours reasonably to balance one’s work and non-work lives. ‘Bad jobs’ offer none or few of these.

Surveys, such as the ISSP, that ask workers to rate their jobs against these sorts of factors, are, in effect, “subjective measures of objective characteristics” (Brown et al., 2012, p.1008). There is no generally agreed formula for weighting such indicators but worker responses to questions about job satisfaction are often used as a summary measure (Osterman, 2013). The approach we will be adopting in this paper, following the advice of Brown et al. (2012) and other analysis using large national datasets (e.g. Clark, 2005; Bryson et al., 2016), is to assess both job quality indicators and overall job satisfaction.

The New Zealand context

Job quality is well known to vary across national contexts, including in the dynamics of supply and demand in national labour markets and in the institutions (e.g. labour laws) that affect the “relative power

resources” of the parties to employment relationships (Green et al., 2015, p.7). In terms of its national institutions, New Zealand is a Westminster-style democracy fitting the broad pattern of a liberal-market economy (LME) (Nicholls, 2018). In LMEs, there is greater reliance on markets to control economic activity and a less constrained approach to regulating the labour market (Hall & Soskice, 2001). In New Zealand’s case, labour law promotes collective bargaining, and unionisation is high in the public sector, but “individual employment agreements have covered the vast majority of employees” in the private sector “since the early 1990s” (Rasmussen et al., 2019, p. 57). With a population of only five million, New Zealand’s labour market is small but, at least prior to Covid-19, capable of generating high levels of employment. Employers regularly report a variety of skill shortages (Boxall et al., 2018). In terms of generally recognised issues affecting job quality, the lower average wage level, particularly compared with Australia, has often fostered concerns about a ‘brain drain’ from New Zealand (e.g. Catley, 2001). This is linked to more restricted promotion opportunities in New Zealand, given the small average size of organisations and the few organisations of global scale headquartered in the country (Boxall et al., 2018). In terms of prior survey analysis, studies of large national samples of New Zealand employees gathered in 2005 and 2009 have pointed to a relatively good level of job satisfaction (Macky & Boxall, 2008; Boxall & Macky, 2014; Le Fevre et al., 2015). These studies have also shown a strong link from better job quality, in terms of greater involvement in decision-making, better two-way communication, fair rewards and good training and development opportunities, to better employee well-being (better job satisfaction and work-life balance) and, on the negative side, a strong link from work intensification to poorer levels of employee well-being (greater fatigue and stress and worse work-life balance).

We turn now to considering how job quality may vary across socio-demographic categories.

Job quality and gender

Various national and transnational studies have found differences in job quality based on gender. As is well known, a gender pay gap favouring men is a common finding across a range of countries (e.g. Kalleberg, 2011; Green, 2013). On the other hand, it is typical to find that men report lower job satisfaction than women (e.g. Clark, 1997; Bryson et al., 2016). Once we delve more fully into a range of job quality indicators, however, the picture is more mixed. For example, Clark’s (1998) analysis of OECD countries using data from ISSP 1989 found that men, as expected, reported higher income and better prospects for advancement, but also worked longer hours and reported harder physical work than women. There was little variation by gender in terms of job security, women were slightly more likely to report good relations at work than men, and there was no variation by gender in job content. Similarly, Stier and Yaish (2014), drawing on ISSP 2005, found that while men had an advantage over women in relation to wages and promotion prospects, time autonomy and emotional conditions, women were better off regarding physical conditions, and there were no differences in job security and job content. Thus, while it is very common to find a pay advantage for men, we might anticipate mixed results in relation to working conditions, employment security and the intrinsic quality of work in the New Zealand data.

Job quality and employment status

There is a tendency to view part-time work in terms of dual labour-market theory, which segments jobs into two main tiers: primary and secondary (e.g. Doeringer & Piore, 1971; Reich et al., 1973). Permanent, full-time jobs are seen to possess several positive characteristics that cluster together, while part-time jobs are often described as ‘non-standard’ and seen as inferior in a number of respects (e.g. Kalleberg, 2000; Garz, 2013). We need, however, to be careful with such assertions for four reasons. First, as with job quality generally, there are major differences in the quality of part-time work across nations that vary significantly in their institutional and cultural contexts (e.g. Rasmussen et al., 2004). Second, we can expect part-timers to rate their jobs differently depending on whether they are willingly in part-time work

(‘voluntary’ part-timers) or unwillingly (‘involuntary part-timers’) (e.g. Kauhanen & Nätti, 2015). Thirdly, as Warren and Lyonette (2015) demonstrate in relation to British data, there can be major differences within the range of part-time work: disaggregating part-timers between those working one–19 hours per week and those working 20–29 hours shows that the latter, including a growing proportion of women, are more likely to occupy more responsible roles and to enjoy higher job quality. Fourthly, it is likely that most jobs have a combination of good and bad features (Tilly, 1997), a view supported by various studies of the quality of full-time and part-time work. For example, the OECD (2013), drawing on data from several surveys, found that, in comparison with full-timers, the quality of part-timers’ work was poor in many but not all dimensions. Employees in part-time jobs were worse off than full-timers with respect to hourly wages, promotion prospects, participation in training, job security and union membership. On the other hand, workers in part-time jobs were better off in terms of control over working time and stress levels, leading to better health outcomes. Similarly, the study by Le Fevre et al. (2015), using surveys in New Zealand 2005 and 2009, found that part-timers were less likely than full-timers to report high stress levels at work. As with gender, we might, therefore, anticipate a mixed pattern in job quality across full-time and part-time jobs in New Zealand.

Job quality and education

Various researchers have argued that education makes a major difference to job quality. Holman and McClelland’s (2011) study of the *European Working Conditions Survey 2005* found that, generally, the higher the level of education, the higher the average quality of work. This is widely observed in relation to the graduate wage premium, including in New Zealand (Maani, 1999), something that may be more pronounced for postgraduates (Lindley & Machin, 2016; Boxall et al., 2019). Similarly, Kalleberg (2011) posits that, in the USA, workers with higher levels of education have the tendency to occupy better jobs with educational attainment being an important predictor of earnings. Erhel and Guergoat-Larivière’s (2010) study in Europe found that “people with low education levels face greater socio-economic insecurity in terms of wages and work contract and are less likely to receive training” (p.14). In another study, Erlinghagen (2007), using a multi-level analysis of 17 European countries and drawing on data from Round 2 of the *European Social Survey*, found that job insecurity was inversely related to increasing qualifications. Siegrist et al.’s (2005) study using the *Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement* shows that in almost all European countries, “better quality of employment goes along with better education” (p.199). However, it is typical to find that the more highly educated report higher stress levels (e.g. Kalleberg, 2008), which often correlate with positions earning higher income. There is also the issue of expectations raised by greater education: “highly educated workers tend to be more dissatisfied with their jobs since their relatively high expectations are less likely to be met by the reality of their jobs” (Kalleberg, 2011, p.43). In Bryson et al.’s (2016, p. 190) study comparing Britain and France, “the least educated” British workers reported “the highest job quality” and “British higher educated workers tend(ed) to declare themselves as less satisfied”, findings that contrast with the “more hierarchical occupational structure” (p. 206) of France. In the Anglophone world at least, there is growing awareness that the design of jobs in fast-growing graduate occupations is falling short of what is needed to more fully utilise graduate skills (e.g. Okay-Somerville & Scholarios, 2013; Findlay et al., 2017). As with gender and employment status, then, we do not expect that education will predict better job quality across the broad set of indicators in New Zealand.

Methods

The ISSP process randomly samples individuals from the New Zealand Electoral Roll, using a postal survey as its primary method for data collection. This was supplemented by an online survey in 2015. The data in our study draw on the three waves (1997, 2005, 2015) of the ISSP datasets that feature the

work orientation module, containing questions on pecuniary and non-pecuniary features of work. This forms a non-panel time-series, and we use a large selection of the job quality variables that are repeated across the surveys. No response rate was given for the 1997 survey but those for 2005 and 2015 were 59 per cent (n=1309) and 36 per cent (n=901), respectively. These datasets are openly available and have been weighted using the Census data (1996, 2006 and 2013) to ensure they are representative of the national population (Milne, 2016). Data on employees' job values and outcomes were collected from 316, 875 and 386 respondents for the 1997, 2005 and 2015 surveys, respectively. Our analysis examined employees aged from 16 to 65 years. It excluded the self-employed and the unemployed. Respondents reported their gender and we divided their educational attainments into four categories: primary only, secondary only, vocational qualifications, and degree holders (bachelor and postgraduate levels combined). Consistent with the convention in New Zealand, workers were classified as part-time when they reported working fewer than 30 hours per week (Statistics NZ, 2014).

Responses to the questions on job quality were mainly obtained on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1= strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree. This included three extrinsic outcomes: 'My job is secure', 'My income is high', 'My opportunities for advancement are high'. (We use the term 'career prospects' interchangeably with the last of these in this paper.) The items on job quality using this scale included four intrinsic ones: 'My job is interesting', 'I can work independently', 'In my job I can help other people', 'My job is useful to society'. Using the same scale, a question on skill utilisation was added in the 2015 survey for New Zealand ('In my job I can use my skills and experience').

The response categories for other intrinsic indicators were somewhat different. For relationships between management and employees and between workmates/colleagues ('In general, how would you describe relations at your workplace?'), the possible responses were: 1 = very good, 2 = quite good, 3 = neither good nor bad, 4 = quite bad, and 5 = very bad. The response categories for indicators of work hardship or strain ('Do you have to do hard physical work?' and 'Do you find your work stressful?') were anchored from: 1 = always, 2 = often, 3 = sometimes, 4 = hardly ever and 5 = never. These variables were then reverse-coded so that a lower score indicates a better outcome, as with all the other indicators.

Without wishing to equate job quality with job satisfaction but recognising its important role as a predictor of employee well-being and turnover behaviour (Brown et al., 2012; Bryson et al., 2016; Volk & Hadler, 2018), we included the latter as an additional outcome variable. This is measured on a seven-point scale, anchored from 1 = completely satisfied to 7 = completely dissatisfied. Data were analysed in SPSS using t-tests for comparing means of gender and employment status, and analysis of variance (ANOVA) for differences between educational groups.

Results

The ranking of job outcomes over time

Table 1 shows the relative rankings of job outcomes over time. As mentioned above, the lower the score, the more favourable the outcome. The best outcome in all surveys is, therefore, the quality of relationships with colleagues. In effect, most New Zealand workers agree or strongly agree that they get on well with their workmates.

There is then a cluster of factors that score close to 2 out of 5 (the 'agree' level on the main scale) and that relate to the intrinsic quality of work: being able to help others, being able to work independently, relationships with management, having an interesting job, and doing something that is useful to society. To this group, we can add skill utilisation in the 2015 survey, which is the second highest indicator in

this year. In other words, while there is clearly room for improvement (because these scores cluster around ‘agree’ rather than ‘strongly agree’ in the main scale), New Zealanders tend to consider that their jobs are fairly good in these intrinsic aspects.

We then see a break in job quality to levels of reported job security and hard physical work, which fall between the 2-level and the 3-level (‘neither agree nor disagree’) on the scale. We might say that New Zealanders are mildly positive about their job security and somewhat more ambivalent about having hard physical work.

There is then another break to three factors that rank poorly across all surveys because they fall onto the negative side of the respective scales. These include the incidence of stressful work and the extrinsic factors of high income and career prospects (advancement opportunities), which are the lowest ranked factors in 1997 and 2005 and constitute two of the bottom three in 2015.

Across the period from 1997 to 2015, we do not see much change in job quality. Only one indicator has improved over the entire period: the incidence of those reporting high income. There are some deteriorations between 1997 and 2005 (in interesting work and the ability to work independently). The period from 2005 to 2015 sees four changes: job interest improves, people feel that they are more able to help others and are more useful to society, but they also report more stressful work. In terms of job satisfaction, the average New Zealander rates their job between ‘fairly satisfied’ and ‘very satisfied’. There is a significant deterioration in job satisfaction between 1997 and 2005 but not between 1997 and 2015.

Table 1: Job outcomes: rankings over time

Indicator	1997 n=316	Rank	2005 n=875	Rank	2015 n=386	Rank
Job is secure	2.40	7	2.27	7	2.24	8
Income is high	3.52 ^{a,b}	11	3.30 ^a	11	3.17 ^b	10
Career prospects	3.23	10	3.13	10	3.21	12
Interesting job	1.99 ^a	3=	2.19 ^{a,b}	5	2.06 ^b	7
Working independently	1.85 ^a	2	2.05 ^a	4	1.98	4
Can help others	1.99	5	2.01 ^c	2	1.88 ^c	3
Usefulness to society	2.14	6	2.24 ^c	6	2.04 ^c	6
Good management relations	1.98	3=	2.03	3	1.99	5
Good collegial relations	1.59	1	1.71	1	1.70	1
Skill utilisation					1.77	2
Hard physical work	2.55	8	2.51	8	2.63	9
Stressful work	3.15	9	3.03 ^c	9	3.24 ^c	11
Job satisfaction	2.52 ^a		2.86 ^a		2.71	

Note: differences in means with the same letter are significant at the 0.05 level

Job quality and gender

Tables 2 to 4 report the results of the t-tests comparing men and women in terms of their job quality across the three surveys. In 1997 (Table 2), there are only two significant differences in the average levels of their job outcomes: women report a greater ability to help others in their job while men report a higher

level of hard physical effort in theirs. The number of significant differences expands to four in 2005 (Table 3). The gender differences in helping others and in hard physical work remain, but men now report a greater incidence of high income, and women that their job is useful to society. These four differences remain in 2015 (Table 4) and a fifth is added: men, on average, report a higher level of job security. The picture, then, across the years is one of women's jobs being more altruistic and men's jobs more physically demanding. As expected, a gender pay gap is evident in the two most recent surveys in a higher proportion of men reporting high income, and men also report better job security in 2015. However, we do not see any gender differences across the years in perceptions of career prospects, in the intrinsic features of job interest and the ability to work independently, in levels of job stress, or in the quality of relationships with management or colleagues. There is no difference in levels of skill utilisation between men and women in 2015. The results in terms of job satisfaction tend to confirm this general picture: there are no significant differences relating to gender in 1997 and 2005 while there is a difference favouring men at $p < 0.10$ in 2015.

Table 2: Job outcomes: mean differences between men and women (ISSP, 1997)

Job outcomes	Total	Men (a) n=144	Women (b) n=168	Mean Diff (a-b)	SE	p-value
Job is secure	2.4	2.5	2.29	0.217	0.143	0.131
Income is high	3.52	3.42	3.63	-0.204	0.138	0.14
Career prospects	3.23	3.18	3.29	-0.109	0.147	0.458
Interesting job	1.99	2.03	1.95	0.087	0.086	0.312
Independent work	1.85	1.88	1.83	0.052	0.099	0.598
Can help others	1.99	2.12	1.87	0.252	0.114	0.028*
Usefulness to society	2.14	2.19	2.09	0.097	0.13	0.454
Hard physical effort	2.55	2.73	2.37	0.368	0.161	0.023*
Stressful work	3.15	3.11	3.19	-0.078	0.125	0.533
Good management relations	1.98	2.01	1.94	0.068	0.128	0.592
Good colleagues	1.59	1.61	1.57	0.041	0.086	0.633
Job satisfaction	2.52	2.6	2.43	0.177	0.128	0.168

Note: * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$, *** = $p < 0.001$

N for each variable might vary slightly from the total n

Table 3: Job outcomes: mean differences between men and women (ISSP, 2005)

Job outcomes	Total mean	Men (a) n=404	Women (b) n=471	Mean Diff (a-b)	SE	p-value
Job is secure	2.27	2.31	2.23	0.083	0.077	0.279
Income is high	3.30	3.17	3.41	-0.247	0.078	0.002**
Career prospects	3.13	3.09	3.17	-0.074	0.080	0.358
Interesting job	2.19	2.22	2.15	0.072	0.069	0.296
Independent work	2.05	2.07	2.03	0.040	0.072	0.577
Can help others	2.01	2.09	1.94	0.155	0.066	0.019*
Usefulness to society	2.24	2.33	2.17	0.158	0.075	0.034*
Hard physical effort	2.51	2.72	2.33	0.397	0.091	0.000***
Stressful work	3.03	3.02	3.05	-0.031	0.068	0.649
Good management relations	2.03	2.02	2.04	-0.016	0.072	0.829
Good colleagues	1.71	1.70	1.72	-0.019	0.056	0.730
Job satisfaction	2.86	2.82	2.89	-0.067	0.080	0.401

Note:*= p<0.05, ** = p<0.01, *** = p<0.001

N for each variable might vary slightly from the total n

Table 4: Job outcomes: mean differences between men and women (ISSP, 2015)

Job outcomes	Total mean	Men (a) n=195	Women (b) n=190	Mean Diff (a-b)	SE	p-value
Job is secure	2.24	2.10	2.38	-0.278	0.102	0.006**
Income is high	3.17	2.92	3.42	-0.498	0.107	0.000***
Career prospects	3.21	3.13	3.29	-0.162	0.108	0.135
Interesting job	2.06	2.02	2.09	-0.071	0.083	0.395
Independent work	1.98	2.01	1.95	0.063	0.088	0.478
Can help others	1.88	1.97	1.78	0.194	0.080	0.016*
Usefulness to society	2.04	2.18	1.87	0.321	0.096	0.001**
Hard physical effort	2.63	2.84	2.42	0.424	0.133	0.002**
Stressful work	3.24	3.23	3.25	-0.029	0.084	0.729
Good management relations	1.99	1.96	2.02	-0.061	0.095	0.521
Good colleagues	1.70	1.70	1.71	-0.012	0.075	0.871
Can use skills	1.77	1.75	1.78	-0.022	0.085	0.794
Job satisfaction	2.71	2.61	2.80	-0.194	0.109	0.075

Note:*= p<0.05, ** = p<0.01, *** = p<0.001

N for each variable might vary slightly from the total n

Job quality and employment status

Tables 5 to 7 report the results of the t-tests comparing full-time and part-time workers in terms of their job quality across the three surveys. In 1997 (Table 5), there are four significant differences. As might be expected, a higher proportion of full-timers reports that their income is high and a higher proportion

report that their jobs are stressful. Part-timers report higher average levels of usefulness to society and better relations with management. The difference in high income remains in 2005 (Table 6) but the difference in stressful work is now only significant at $p < 0.10$. Certain job quality differences have now moved in favour of part-timers: not only do they continue to report greater usefulness to society, they also score more favourably on having an interesting job, working independently and being able to help others. These differences, however, disappear in the 2015 survey (Table 7) while full-timers report better outcomes on all extrinsic indicators: pay, job security and career prospects. They also report better skill utilisation while part-timers report better relations with management. They report a higher level of job stress (but at $p = 0.105$). In terms of the pattern, then, we only have one firm result across the years: a higher proportion of full-timers earn high income, but the 2005 and 2015 surveys, taken together, tend to suggest that full-timers are better off in all extrinsics. However, in terms of intrinsic characteristics, these surveys do not enable us to say that there are clear-cut differences between full-timers and part-timers except the probability that full-timers are generally subject to greater stress. There are no significant differences in job satisfaction between the two groups in 1997, but part-timers report better job satisfaction at $p < 0.10$ in 2005 and there is a significant difference favouring full-timers in 2015, which likely reflects the superior extrinsic characteristics of full-time jobs.

Not shown in the tables is the contrast between voluntary and involuntary part-timers. When we use the relevant ISSP items to group part-timers into these two categories, we find no differences in 1997 (but on small numbers). However, we find that involuntary part-timers perceive better career prospects in both 2005 ($p < 0.001$) and 2015 ($p < 0.01$) and harder physical effort in 2015 ($p < 0.01$). Also not shown are the differences between male and female part-timers. There are only eight male part-timers in the 1997 survey but 23 in 2005 and 25 in 2015, so the numbers are small and the 1997 data should be disregarded. The only difference in 2005 is that the females report worse job satisfaction than males ($p < 0.05$) while in 2015 females report better outcomes in four domains: a greater ability to help others ($p < 0.05$), better usefulness to society ($p < 0.01$), a greater ability to use their skills ($p < 0.01$), and a lower level of hard physical effort ($p < 0.05$).

Table 5: Job outcomes: mean differences between full-timers and part-timers (ISSP, 1997)

Job outcomes	Total	Full-time (a) n=157	Part-time (b) n=48	Mean Diff	SE	p-value
Job is secure	2.40	2.41	2.37	0.04	0.180	0.850
Income is high	3.52	3.33	3.88	-0.545	0.133	0.000***
Career prospects	3.23	3.28	3.10	0.174	0.176	0.326
Interesting job	1.99	1.96	2.06	-0.105	0.108	0.333
Independent work	1.85	1.88	1.86	0.014	0.126	0.914
Can help others	1.99	2.06	1.88	0.177	0.146	0.226
Usefulness to society	2.14	2.25	1.89	0.355	0.142	0.014*
Hard physical effort	2.55	2.52	2.30	0.226	0.194	0.246
Stressful work	3.15	3.31	2.73	0.576	0.179	0.002**
Good management relations	1.98	2.08	1.80	0.277	0.131	0.037*
Good colleagues	1.59	1.59	1.61	-0.017	0.107	0.873
Job satisfaction	2.52	2.57	2.36	0.207	0.164	0.208

Note: * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$, *** = $p < 0.001$

N for each variable might vary slightly from the total n

Table 6: Job outcomes: mean differences between full-timers and part-timers (ISSP, 2005)

Job outcomes	Total	Full-time (a) n=528	Part-time (b) n=140	Mean Diff	SE	p-value
Job is secure	2.27	2.23	2.31	-0.082	0.100	0.413
Income is high	3.30	3.21	3.56	-0.353	0.092	0.000***
Career prospects	3.13	3.08	3.27	-0.191	0.105	0.068
Interesting job	2.19	2.20	2.03	0.173	0.085	0.042*
Independent work	2.05	2.14	1.92	0.218	0.094	0.020*
Can help others	2.01	2.06	1.87	0.193	0.087	0.026*
Usefulness to society	2.24	2.29	2.09	0.198	0.095	0.038*
Hard physical effort	2.51	2.50	2.49	0.010	0.120	0.931
Stressful work	3.03	3.13	2.99	0.141	0.084	0.094
Good management relations	2.03	2.10	1.94	0.153	0.093	0.102
Good colleagues	1.71	1.73	1.66	0.067	0.072	0.350
Job satisfaction	2.86	2.92	2.73	0.197	0.104	0.059

Note: * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$, *** = $p < 0.001$

N for each variable might vary slightly from the total n

Table 7: Job outcomes: mean differences between full-timers and part-timers (ISSP, 2015)

Job outcomes	Total	Full-time (a) n=272	Part-time (b) n=72	Mean Diff (a-b)	SE	p-value
Job is secure	2.24	2.14	2.50	-0.364	0.131	0.006**
Income is high	3.17	2.94	3.80	-0.854	0.133	0.000***
Career prospects	3.21	3.06	3.47	-0.407	0.138	0.003**
Interesting job	2.06	1.98	2.14	-0.162	0.103	0.116
Work independently	1.98	1.94	1.92	0.022	0.107	0.838
Can help others	1.88	1.88	1.83	0.044	0.102	0.668
Usefulness to society	2.04	2.02	2.18	-0.163	0.133	0.226
Hard physical effort	2.63	2.57	2.74	-0.163	0.171	0.344
Stressful work	3.24	3.29	3.12	0.171	0.106	0.105
Good management relations	1.99	2.04	1.77	0.267	0.125	0.034*
Good colleagues	1.70	1.71	1.63	0.076	0.096	0.428
Can use skills	1.77	1.66	1.96	-0.299	0.104	0.004**
Job satisfaction	2.71	2.62	3.00	-0.379	0.142	0.008**

Note: * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$, *** = $p < 0.001$

N for each variable might vary slightly from the total n

Job quality and educational attainments

Tables 8 to 10 report the ANOVA results of job outcomes by educational attainment across the three surveys. In 1997 (Table 8), there are significant differences in job security, income, hard physical effort, stressful work and relations with management. The pairwise comparisons (not shown) reveal that graduates report better levels of job security and income than those with secondary qualifications but

also report greater stress and a poorer relationship with management. Those with vocational qualifications report higher income than those with secondary qualifications but a poorer relationship with management. In 2005 (Table 9), graduates report higher income than primary and vocational groups while reporting greater stress and a poorer relationship with management than the secondary group. All groups report lower levels of hard physical work than the primary group. The secondary-qualified group report better opportunities for advancement and greater ability to help others than the primary-qualified group. Interestingly, graduates report a lower ability to work independently than the vocational and secondary groups. By 2015 (Table 10), the significant differences have reduced considerably. While better than all other groups, graduates' reporting of high income is significantly greater than only the primary group. Graduates do report significantly lower levels of hard physical work than all other groups and the secondary-qualified do in comparison with the primary-qualified. Overall, we can see the graduate wage premium across the surveys but there is no evidence that graduates enjoy any kind of premium in the intrinsic quality of work apart from the physical effort of work. Although the secondary group has the best outcomes in both years, there are no differences in job satisfaction in 1997 ($p=0.103$) or in 2005. In 2015, the results are very close to significance ($p=0.050$) with the primary group having the best outcome. Consistent with the intrinsic picture, this tends to suggest that graduates do not enjoy a premium in job satisfaction.

Table 8: Job outcomes: mean differences by education (ISSP, 1997)

Job outcomes	Total	Primary	Secondary n=93	Vocational n=150	Degree n=44	p-value
Job is secure	2.40	n/a	2.71	2.33	2.19	0.038*
Income is high	3.52	n/a	3.85	3.39	3.15	0.002**
Career prospects	3.23	n/a	3.52	3.13	3.08	0.052
Interesting job	1.99	n/a	2.10	1.99	1.90	0.314
Work independently	1.85	n/a	1.89	1.91	1.81	0.752
Can help others	1.99	n/a	2.22	1.92	2.01	0.123
Usefulness to society	2.14	n/a	2.29	2.15	2.00	0.328
Hard physical effort	2.55	n/a	2.79	2.51	2.15	0.035*
Stressful work	3.15	n/a	2.98	3.18	3.54	0.008**
Good management relations	1.98	n/a	1.61	2.20	2.14	0.000***
Good colleagues	1.59	n/a	1.60	1.64	1.57	0.808
Job satisfaction	2.52	n/a	2.35	2.70	2.57	0.103

Note: * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$, *** = $p < 0.001$

N for each variable might vary slightly from the total n

Table 9: Job outcomes: mean differences by education (ISSP, 2005)

Job outcomes	Total	Primary n=178	Secondary n=263	Vocational n=235	Degree n=185	p-value
Job is secure	2.27	2.39	2.23	2.25	2.27	0.531
Income is high	3.30	3.55	3.19	3.38	3.05	0.000***
Career prospects	3.13	3.34	3.03	3.13	3.04	0.037*
Interesting job	2.19	2.37	2.13	2.16	2.16	0.086
Work independently	2.05	2.07	1.91	2.00	2.31	0.002**
Can help others	2.01	2.22	1.91	2.00	2.01	0.013*
Usefulness to society	2.24	2.26	2.29	2.21	2.22	0.855
Hard physical effort	2.51	3.06	2.57	2.64	1.77	0.000***
Stressful work	3.03	3.03	2.94	3.00	3.22	0.030**
Good management relations	2.03	1.95	1.96	2.00	2.23	0.041*
Good colleagues	1.71	1.76	1.70	1.64	1.72	0.569
Job satisfaction	2.86	2.84	2.76	2.86	3.00	0.192

Note: * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$, *** = $p < 0.001$

N for each variable might vary slightly from the total n

Table 10: Job outcomes: mean differences by education (ISSP, 2015)

Job outcomes	Total	Primary n=45	Secondary n=99	Vocational n=95	Degree n=145	p-value
Job is secure	2.24	2.34	2.15	2.16	2.32	0.415
Income is high	3.17	3.72	3.26	3.20	2.92	0.000***
Career prospects	3.21	3.24	3.33	3.22	3.09	0.353
Interesting job	2.06	2.07	2.11	2.06	2.00	0.794
Work independently	1.98	1.95	1.98	1.91	2.04	0.708
Can help others	1.88	1.97	1.84	1.87	1.88	0.880
Usefulness to society	2.04	2.21	2.04	2.06	1.97	0.530
Hard physical effort	2.63	3.55	2.77	2.99	2.03	0.000***
Stressful work	3.24	3.30	3.30	3.20	3.22	0.786
Good management relations	1.99	1.94	1.89	2.09	2.00	0.499
Good colleagues	1.70	1.74	1.64	1.71	1.73	0.825
Can use skills	1.77	1.92	1.77	1.77	1.72	0.725
Job satisfaction	2.71	2.40	2.68	2.63	2.87	0.050

Note: * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$, *** = $p < 0.001$

N for each variable might vary slightly from the total n

Discussion and conclusions

The rankings of job outcomes in Table 1 enable us to make some observations about job quality in New Zealand. What stands out is that New Zealand workers rate the intrinsic quality of their jobs more highly than the extrinsic quality. This includes the quality of their relationships at work, most especially with colleagues but also with management, and the quality of their job content and its positive impacts on others. These indicators of job outcomes could improve but they are sitting at relatively healthy levels, as is overall job satisfaction. The incidence of hard physical work and, especially, the incidence of stressful work, qualifies this picture of good intrinsic job quality somewhat. A particular concern is the increase in job stress from 2005 to 2015.

Job security receives a mildly positive score but the worst outcomes are associated with the other extrinsic factors of pay and the quality of career prospects in New Zealand. Of these two, the latter is the most problematic, reinforcing the picture of New Zealand as a country dominated by smaller firms that offer more restricted opportunities for advancement (Boxall et al., 2018). The pay issue is likely to be less concerning. One reason is that the incidence of high pay is increasing but the more important reason is the nature of the question itself in the ISSP surveys. Because most people are not necessarily seeking high levels of pay, but do wish their rewards to be commensurate with their efforts (e.g. Siegrist, 1996; Boxall & Macky, 2014), a better question would be one that asked about whether they feel fairly paid for their contribution.

The results in respect of gender are broadly as we might anticipate. They show a difference in reporting of high income, in favour of men, and a greater propensity for men to report hard physical work, which is to be expected with male domination of labouring work in sectors such as farming and construction, while women report a greater ability to help others and society. The latter most likely reflects the greater proportion of New Zealand women who work in professional and administrative roles in sectors such as healthcare, education and social work (e.g. Public Service Commission, 2021). Otherwise, men and women are very much the same in their perceptions of the intrinsic and extrinsic quality of their jobs and in their reported level of job satisfaction; the latter contrasting with typical findings elsewhere (e.g. Bryson et al., 2016). They are equally able to apply their skills and are equally affected by poorer advancement opportunities in New Zealand. They report almost identical levels of stress. We see, then, a mixed picture in respect of job quality differences by gender. Apart from the gender pay gap, it would be wrong to reach an overall judgement on whether men or women in New Zealand have better quality jobs.

The results in terms of full-time versus part-time status should also caution us against over-generalising which group has better quality employment. Full-timers have an obvious ability to earn higher levels of pay and the most recent survey suggests that they are better off in terms of all extrinsic factors – pay, job security and career prospects – which may be reflected in their better level of job satisfaction in 2015. This is what we would expect because they are more likely to be core members of the organisation that management wishes to protect. They are more likely to be recipients of an organisation's investment in career development, as shown in their greater reporting of skill utilisation in 2015. However, the intrinsic indicators are not flattering to full-timers. They report higher levels of stress (at $p = 0.002$ in 1997 and around $p = 0.10$ in 2005 and 2015), as in previous New Zealand studies (Le Fevre et al., 2015), generally have inferior intrinsic outcomes compared to part-timers in the 2005 survey, and show no significant differences in 2015 (except for the quality of relations with management, which is more positively rated by part-timers). We can, therefore, talk about an extrinsic advantage to full-time New Zealand workers but not an intrinsic one. The interesting finding that involuntary part-timers perceive better advancement opportunities than voluntary part-timers might suggest that many of the former are in organisations where they can see a pathway to a full-time job. While the numbers are small in relation to male part-timers,

the 2015 survey suggests that female part-timers occupy somewhat better jobs, a picture that is also found in the UK where job quality for male part-timers sits “at the bottom of all workers” (Warren & Lyonette, 2015, p.82). This paper did not set out to test any particular theory of job quality but there is a message here for this body of theory: our results suggest that a rigid classification of part-time jobs as ‘non-standard’ or ‘secondary’ is inappropriate. The empirical picture does not support this kind of over-simplification.

The findings on how education is associated with job quality are also cautionary. The graduate wage premium is evident in relation to the lowest qualified group in each survey. Graduates also generally report a lower level of hard physical effort than all other groups. However, it is not apparent that graduates enjoy a premium in all extrinsic job factors or in intrinsic job quality in New Zealand. The 2015 survey paints an egalitarian picture of the intrinsic quality of work, which is socially desirable but may also suggest, as elsewhere (e.g. Kalleberg, 2011), that the expectations of New Zealand graduates are not as well fulfilled as they would like. That suspicion is reflected in the relatively less flattering rating of their job satisfaction, paralleling findings in Britain (Bryson et al., 2016).

Like all studies, this one has its limitations. It is not a panel-based study but relies on three cross-sectional surveys, which are then analysed for what they tell us about differences between key groups and trends over time. Like many surveys of job quality designed for transnational use, it must make do with a modicum of questions and a lack of multi-item scales for complex issues, such as job interest and autonomy. That said, it offers the best available overview of job quality in New Zealand.

The main message, apparent across all surveys, is that New Zealand has relatively healthy levels of intrinsic job quality and job satisfaction. New Zealanders enjoy the collegiality of their workplaces. On the other hand, their advancement opportunities are typically more restricted. And, while men, full-timers and graduates have some advantages over women, part-timers and non-graduates in extrinsic job quality, the intrinsic quality of work is more evenly experienced. In terms of intrinsic issues, the quality of work design, including in graduate-dominated occupations, and the levels of stress experienced in the workforce are obvious areas for further research. Further analysis of job quality could also take the step of disaggregating part-time working hours, as in British studies (Warren & Lyonette, 2015). In terms of practical implications, employers concerned about employee retention in New Zealand could usefully survey their workforces on the kind of job quality indicators contained in the ISSP surveys, with this study providing a set of benchmarks. The sociality of New Zealand workplaces is a widespread strength but employers who can provide more interesting work without increasing stress levels, better opportunities for career development, and a fair relationship between effort and rewards, are likely to enhance employee satisfaction and commitment.

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