



## Press release

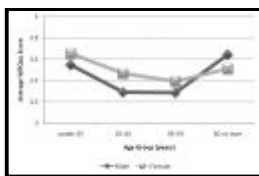
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Please find below our latest release. For further information, please contact: Alan Bradshaw, QoWL Ltd - Tel: 01259 762961 / 07947 127561, Email: [alan.bradshaw@qowl.co.uk](mailto:alan.bradshaw@qowl.co.uk)

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### **Happiness at Work Increases Near Retirement – But for Men More Than Women, Says New Research**

#### **‘Pre-Retirement Bounce’ for over 60s is particularly pronounced in men**



WRQoL graph: by gender

December 01, 2009 - Press Dispensary - New research by psychologists at QoWL Ltd <http://www.qowl.co.uk>, in conjunction with the University of Portsmouth, shows that UK employees in the 60 or over age group report a significantly higher quality of working life than their middle-aged colleagues. And this pre-retirement bounce is more pronounced in men.

The research shows that quality of working life tends to be higher in the under 25 and in the 60 or over age groups, with the 25 to 59 year olds reporting the lowest quality of working life as measured by the Work-Related Quality of Life (WRQoL) scale. This ‘pre-retirement bounce’ in quality of working life reflects a strongly positive change in the way the majority of the survey respondents felt about their work as they neared retirement.

But the trends for men and women showed interesting and highly significant differences, especially in the context of the planned changes in retirement age.

Previous research has shown that women are generally happier than men at work. However, this study shows that as we get older the difference in happiness narrows. And the trends completely reverse at around age 60. At this age, men, with several years of working life still to go, seem to experience a notable increase in quality of working life. However, women, typically nearer to retirement at this age, report much less of an increase. Men, for the first time, have become much happier at work than women.

It isn't clear exactly why the pre-retirement bounce is so much stronger in men, but there are a number of interesting possibilities and QoWL Researchers are investigating this.

It might be related to the differing job roles occupied by men and women. Men may have roles that provide more flexibility and therefore are able to wind down more and reduce their stress. Men may typically have the prospect of a much higher pension, which also provides more flexibility and options.

Alternatively, it may have something to do with gender differences in attitudes towards work and retirement. Men may look forward to retirement much more and see it as an opportunity to stop working and spend more time doing the things they like doing. Women on the other hand may value work for the social opportunities and networks it provides rather than simply as a means of earning money. The prospect of more leisure time may not seem nearly as attractive to women as they may see themselves as ‘still working’ but at home and in a different way. The prospect of more time at home with their husbands may not be a cause of joy and happiness!

The level of improvement in quality of working life is certainly interesting because it shows that satisfaction with work can improve. So it is worth exploring ways of making things better for all workers. Dr Darren Van Laar, lead researcher at QoWL Ltd, said: "While we are only now beginning to identify the factors that contribute to quality of working life, this research underlines the potential benefits that might be reaped from taking action to enhance the work environment and experience for all age groups".

This becomes more than of academic interest when the trends are analysed more closely in the light of the planned increases in retirement ages. Men report little change in their quality of working life from 25 to 59 years, so it might be expected that a relatively small lengthening of their working lives due to later retirement ages could slightly delay the 'Pre-retirement Bounce'.

But, for women, the apparent gradual lessening of their quality of working life with age, coupled with a more substantial increase in the number of years they have to work before retirement, might mean that older women experience further reduction in their quality of working life. They may end up less content in their pre-retirement years – missing out on the 'Bounce'.

QoWL will next be looking to see if the changes in retirement age do lead to lowering of reported quality of life, and will be working with employers to learn why men see things so much more positively after 60. If they can identify the sources of that improvement for men, it may well be possible to work with employers to help their women employees enjoy the 'Pre-retirement Bounce' as well.

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#### **Notes for editors**

##### **Research details**

The research results were drawn from analysis of a sample of more than 5000 university employees using the Work-Related Quality of Life (WRQoL) measure, which has been developed after years of research with 15,000 public sector employees.

The QoWL research suggests there are six core factors affecting an individual's Quality of Working Life:

- Job and Career Satisfaction (JCS)
- General Well-Being (GWB)
- Stress at Work (SAW)
- Control at Work (CAW)
- Home-Work Interface (HWI)
- Working Conditions (WCS)

Initial analysis of survey results shows that men in the over 60 age group reported higher levels of satisfaction in each of these areas than women in that age range.

#### **About QoWL**

QoWL Ltd. is a University of Portsmouth spin out company. Using evidence based survey tools developed and tested during 15 years of peer-reviewed research, QoWL helps organisations assess work-related stress, well-being and quality of working life.

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