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WELLBEING OF THE WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE: FINDINGS FROM AN EMPRICAL STUDY OF GENERATION Z STUDENTS

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Purpose: To assess the factors influencing the physical, psychological and social wellbeing of Generation Z as future workers.
Design/methodology/approach: The research material for this study comprised students at the University of Szczecin (N = 185). The data gathered from the questionnaire and anthropometric data were grouped into four categories: demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, employment and educational activity, lifestyle and somatic indicators, and psychological and social wellbeing. The selection of variables included in the analysis was determined by the authors.
Findings: The research suggests that the wellbeing of Generation Z is shaped more by subjective perceptions of their circumstances and self than by objective measures. Three groups of such factors were identified: self-rated health status, loneliness in a general sense, intimate and social belonging, and life satisfaction. The variables recurring across these groups – physical activity, time spent online, and self-rated financial status – emerge as significant factors in shaping the wellbeing of young workers.
Research limitations/implications: A clear predominance of women in the sample. Most of the students surveyed were women (72%), as more women study these subjects. Women were more interested in anthropological research. We surveyed only volunteers. A small research sample (N = 185) of students, all from the University of Szczecin (Poland).
Originality/value: Wellbeing of prospective young workers representing Generation Z. The paper is for psychologists, sociologists, labor market analysts, public health analysts.
Keywords: Generation Z, wellbeing, young worker.
Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

Wellbeing is a broad state of physical and mental health that is defined not only by the absence of illness, but also by a sense of satisfaction with one's work, self-esteem, as well as the ability to cope with stress. Such a state fosters a positive attitude towards paid employment. A person who has self-esteem and is satisfied with their work is more likely to take steps to develop personally and nurture relationships. Affirmation and kindness from others boost self-esteem and increase motivation to develop skills (Burt, Atkinson, 2012).

Collaboration with others helps build friendships in both private and professional life, which provide support, as well as foster genuine interactions within the team. A balance between work and personal life is extremely important and to a large extent prevents loss of motivation. Positive wellbeing is a protective factor, and scientific evidence shows that mental health significantly impacts physical health. Adopting healthier behaviours can improve immune function and reduce stress-related physiological responses (Chida, Steptoe, 2008; Demakakos et al., 2010; Frempong et al., 2026).

Employee wellbeing is important because it enhances productivity, engagement and creativity among staff, while at the same time reducing stress, sick days and staff turnover. Workers who are in good psychological and physical condition tend to be more loyal, collaborate effectively and achieve objectives more successfully, which translates into building the competitive advantage and financial success of the organisation. Investing in wellbeing is an investment in human capital, supporting work-life balance, health and development, which is now a modern business imperative.

Today's young employees represent Generation Z. Young adults immersed in digital technologies are valued in the labour market due to their proficiency in using modern devices. This article examines the wellbeing of young adults who are still in education but have already decided on their field of study. The aim of this empirical study was to identify factors influencing the physical, psychological and social wellbeing of Generation Z as future employees. The analysis was based on data obtained from a questionnaire and anthropometric measurements, which were used to construct somatic indicators. The set of variables was determined by the authors in line with the study objectives. We established a research hypothesis: The factors influencing the physical, psychological and social wellbeing of Generation Z as future workers are subjective.

2. Materials and methods

The research material for this study comprised empirical data collected from students of economics, biology, and psychology at the University of Szczecin (N = 185). The study was conducted in late 2025 / early 2026 in Szczecin, Poland. Table 1 presents the characteristics of the respondents by gender and calendar age. A convenience sampling method was used. Data collection involved respondents completing a questionnaire, followed by non-invasive anthropometric measurements taken by the authors. The anthropometric measurements included: body weight [kg], body height (*basis vertex*) (B-v) [cm], and waist circumference [cm]. Body measurements were taken in accordance with the principles of established anthropometry (Martin, Saller, 1958). Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous. All respondents gave their verbal consent to participate in the study.

Table 1.
Characteristics of the study participants by gender and calendar age

Specification	Number and percentage	x (±SD)	Min-Max
Male	N = 51 (27.57%)	21.60 (±1.78)	18.76–26.50
Female	N = 134 (72.43%)	20.85 (±2.08)	17.34–28.13
Total	N = 185 (100.00%)	21.05 (±2.03)	17.34–28.13

Source: own research.

The research material comprises 17 variables relating to four main thematic domains: (1) demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, (2) employment and educational activity, (3) lifestyle and somatic indicators, and (4) psychological and social wellbeing. The final domain was analysed using the Revised UCLA (R-UCLA) loneliness scale (Kwiatkowska et al., 2017). This design of the research instrument provides for a multidimensional assessment of the wellbeing of young adults, in line with the assumptions outlined in the introduction.

Descriptive statistics were used for data analysis. Calculations were performed using the statistical software Statistica 13.3. The chi-square (χ^2) test of independence was used to examine the relationships between nominal and ordinal variables, and Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (ρ) was calculated for ordinal variables. The level of statistical significance was set at $\alpha = 0.05$.

3. Results

Demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents

Gender

Women were clearly overrepresented in the study sample, accounting for 72.43% of respondents, while men constituted 27.57%. This should be taken into account when interpreting the results.

Monthly disposable income

The analysis of monthly disposable income indicates that 40.00% of respondents have up to PLN 1000 at their disposal, 27.57% fall within the PLN 1001-2000 range, while 32.43% reported an income above PLN 2000. The income structure varies by gender. The most frequently reported income among women was up to PLN 1000 (46.27%), whereas the most common income among men was above PLN 2000 (45.10%). This suggests that men in the surveyed group are in a relatively more favourable financial situation.

Self-rated financial status

The subjective assessment of financial status was evenly split between 'good' (40.00%) and 'average' (40.00%). A 'very good' rating was reported by 13.51% of respondents, while negative ratings ('bad' or 'very bad') totalled 6.49%. Women were more likely than men to rate their situation as good (42.54% compared to 33.33%), whereas men were more likely to select the 'average' rating.

Employment and educational activity

Gainful employment and career plans

Half of the respondents (50.27%) reported being in paid employment alongside their studies, while the remaining 49.73% were not employed. Clear gender differences were observed: 62.75% of men combined their studies with work, compared to 45.52% of women. The majority of respondents (64.32%) indicated that they had a plan for developing their careers over the next five years, while 35.68% reported having no specific plans. No significant differences between men and women were found in this regard. The vast majority of students (93.51%) had not participated in the ERASMUS programme, suggesting limited international mobility within the population studied.

Lifestyle and physical health indicators

Time spent online

Regarding digital behaviour, the most common response was spending 4–6 hours online per day (61.62%). A smaller proportion of respondents (23.24%) reported using the internet for 1-3 hours daily, while 14.59% spent 7 hours or more online. Men were more likely than women to report using the internet for more than 7 hours a day.

Frequency of exercise per week

The respondents' levels of exercise varied. The largest group (40.00%) reported exercising 2–3 times per week. A further 27.03% exercised once a week, 22.70% did not engage in any exercise, and 10.27% exercised four times per week or more. Clear gender differences were observed. Men were significantly more likely to report high levels of exercise: 27.45% exercises four times a week or more, compared to just 3.73% of women.

BMI

BMI analysis indicated that 61.62% of respondents fell within the normal range. Overweight was observed in 21.62% of respondents, underweight in 11.89%, and obesity in 4.86%. Overweight (31.37%) and obesity (7.84%) were more prevalent among men, whereas underweight (14.18%) was more common among women.

Waist circumference

An assessment of waist circumference confirms a generally favorable somatic profile in the majority of the sample, with 78.92% of respondents falling within the normal range. Excess waist circumference was more common in men (37.25%) than in women (14.93%). Excess waist circumference was defined as a value exceeding half of the individual's height (Ashwell, Gibson, 2014). The guideline *'Keep your waist circumference to less than half your height'* was applied to both sexes.

Psychological and social wellbeing

Self-rated health status

In terms of self-rated health, 44.86% of respondents described their health as good, 30.27% as average, and 17.30% as very good. Negative ratings (poor or very poor) were reported by 7.57% of respondents. Men were more likely than women to report very good health.

Life satisfaction

Life satisfaction levels were relatively high, with 36.22% of respondents reporting moderately high satisfaction, 28.11% high satisfaction, and 8.65% very high satisfaction. Low levels of satisfaction (low or very low) were observed in 8.65% of the sample.

Sense of loneliness

Regarding general loneliness, the predominant level was moderate (64.32%), while 35.14% of respondents reported a moderately high level. Women were slightly more likely than men to report higher levels of loneliness. In terms of social loneliness, 59.46% of respondents were characterised by a very low level, and a further 28.11% by a low level, indicating relatively good social integration within the study group. Collective loneliness (lack of belonging) was also predominantly low or very low (76.21% combined).

The structure of the study sample indicates:

1. A clear predominance of women in the sample.
2. Economic variation among respondents, with men exhibiting a relatively better financial status.

3. Moderate levels of employment activity among students, with higher engagement in paid employment among men.
4. Relatively favourable indicators of physical health, alongside a higher prevalence of overweight among men.
5. A moderately high level of life satisfaction, accompanied by a fairly widespread moderate level of loneliness.

The collected data enable further analyses of the relationships between socioeconomic situation, lifestyle, physical health, as well as the psychological and social wellbeing of young adults.

Analysis of statistical relationships between variables

The aim of this stage of the study was to establish whether statistically significant relationships exist between selected variables describing the respondents' demographic and socioeconomic situation, lifestyle, physical health, and psychological and social wellbeing. The chi-square (χ^2) test of independence was used to examine relationships between nominal and ordinal variables. The level of statistical significance was set at $\alpha = 0.05$.

Demographic and socioeconomic factors vs. psychological and social wellbeing in students

In the analysis of the relationships between gender and indicators of psychological and social wellbeing, no associations were found apart from with regard to social loneliness ($p = 0.0273$) (Table 2). This suggests that gender affects the level of perceived social loneliness but not the other aspects of wellbeing analysed.

Table 2.
Relationships between demographic and socioeconomic factors vs. psychological and social wellbeing

Demographic and socioeconomic variables	Psychological and social variables	Test statistic (χ^2)	P	Correlation
Gender	Self-rated health	4.87	0.1902	no
	Life satisfaction	1.23	0.9116	no
	General loneliness	3.52	0.4803	no
	Intimate loneliness	3.01	0.5381	no
	Lack of belonging	1.78	0.7755	no
	Social loneliness	**9.21**	**0.0273**	**yes**
Income level	Self-rated health	7.28	0.3006	no
	Life satisfaction	7.71	0.6570	no
	General loneliness	9.82	0.2033	no
	Intimate loneliness	9.54	0.2175	no
	Lack of belonging	8.47	0.2889	no
	Social loneliness	8.91	0.2626	no
Self-rated financial status	**Self-rated health**	**12.67**	**0.0455**	**yes**
	Life satisfaction	**15.84**	**0.0117**	**yes**
	General loneliness	3.45	0.7537	no
	Intimate loneliness	4.89	0.5810	no
	Lack of belonging	7.12	0.3316	no
	Social loneliness	3.68	0.7266	no

Source: own research.

The findings also indicate that, within the study group, monthly disposable income was not significantly associated with levels of psychological and social wellbeing. However, in contrast to this objective indicator, self-rated financial status showed significant correlations with selected measures of wellbeing. Specifically, a significant association was found between self-rated financial status and self-rated health ($p = 0.0455$) as well as life satisfaction ($p = 0.0117$). No significant association was observed between self-rated financial status and any of the four dimensions of loneliness.

Employment and educational activity vs. psychological and social wellbeing in students

No significant correlations were found for most of the analysed factors describing the respondents' employment and educational activity (Table 3). Gainful employment was only associated with the sense of intimate loneliness ($p = 0.0281$).

Table 3.
Relationships between employment and educational activity vs. psychological and social wellbeing

Employment and education variables	Psychological and social variables	Test statistic (χ^2)	p	Correlation
Paid employment	Self-rated health	2.14	0.6669	no
	Life satisfaction	4.62	0.3974	no
	General loneliness	6.83	0.1442	no
	Intimate loneliness	**9.12**	**0.0281**	**yes**
	Lack of belonging	6.01	0.1895	no
	Social loneliness	4.58	0.4012	no
Career plans	Self-rated health	3.78	0.4328	no
	Life satisfaction	**10.61**	**0.0166**	**yes**
	General loneliness	0.52	0.9181	no
	Intimate loneliness	0.74	0.8513	no
	Lack of belonging	1.19	0.7548	no
	Social loneliness	0.21	0.9891	no
Erasmus	Self-rated health status	4.60	0.3320	no
	Life satisfaction	1.68	0.7850	no
	General loneliness	2.14	0.7147	no
	Intimate loneliness	0.61	0.9097	no
	Lack of belonging	**9.18**	**0.0276**	**yes**
	Social loneliness	2.08	0.7232	no

Source: own research.

In contrast, having a career plan was strongly associated with life satisfaction ($p = 0.0166$). Although relatively few respondents had participated in the Erasmus programme, a significant association was found between taking part in an international student exchange and experiencing social loneliness ($p = 0.0276$).

Lifestyle and somatic factors vs. psychological and social wellbeing in students

Given that one defining characteristic of Generation Z is their immersion in new technologies, the relationships between time spent online and participants' psychological and social wellbeing were of particular interest (Table 4). Significant correlations were found between time spent online and self-rated health ($p = 0.0290$) and life satisfaction ($p = 0.0318$). However, no similarly strong correlations were observed between time spent online and any of the four dimensions of loneliness.

Table 4.
Relationships between lifestyle and somatic factors vs. psychological and social wellbeing

Lifestyle and somatic variables	Psychological and social variables	Test statistic (χ^2)	p	Correlation
Time spent online [hours/day]	**Self-rated health**	**9.34**	**0.0290**	**yes**
	Life satisfaction	**9.01**	**0.0318**	**yes**
	General loneliness	4.87	0.3089	no
	Intimate loneliness	3.12	0.5644	no
	Lack of belonging	3.28	0.5435	no
	Social loneliness	5.02	0.2994	no
Exercise [number of times per week]	**Self-rated health**	**18.72**	**<0.001**	**yes**
	Life satisfaction	6.32	0.2402	no
	General loneliness	**10.54**	**0.0124**	**yes**
	Intimate loneliness	8.21	0.0937	no
	Lack of belonging	1.89	0.7639	no
	Social loneliness	1.45	0.8516	no
BMI [kg/m^2]	Self-rated health status	13.34	0.3434	no
	Life satisfaction	15.70	0.4022	no
	General loneliness	1.19	0.9773	no
	Intimate loneliness	15.34	0.4275	no
	Lack of belonging	9.59	0.6523	no
	Social loneliness	16.21	0.0627	no
Waist circumference [cm]	Self-rated health	0.57	0.9659	no
	Life satisfaction	2.11	0.8336	no
	General loneliness	0.48	0.7857	no
	Intimate loneliness	4.82	0.4381	no
	Lack of belonging	2.34	0.6734	no
	Social loneliness	0.94	0.8168	no

Source: own research

Significant associations were found between the frequency of exercise and both self-rated health ($p < 0.001$) and general loneliness ($p = 0.0124$). However, no associations were observed between somatic indicators, i.e. BMI and waist circumference, and psychological and social wellbeing.

4. Discussion

Throughout human history, the nature of work has undergone profound change. Activities such as gathering, hunting and farming required different sets of tasks in order for societies to survive and develop. The rise of urban life necessitated greater specialisation in daily activities and led to the emergence of established professions, fostering stronger social interactions. More recently, the information technology revolution has reshaped forms of employment within less than a generation. However, changes in attitudes and behaviours tend to occur more slowly than advances in technology (Litchfield et al., 2016). Transformations in the labour market – related to employer requirements, employee skills, staffing constraints and many other employment-related factors – have become a source of stress. Such pressures do not foster a positive working environment. Consequently, wellbeing has emerged as an important and

economically beneficial goal for both employees and employers. A sense of professional fulfilment, satisfaction in one's private life, and good physical and mental health constitute key components of an employee wellbeing, influencing emotions, overall quality of life, the ability to cope with difficulties, and personal development.

Patterns of individual wellbeing are not universal. Studying populations and comparing them against a uniform standard remains difficult, even though the experience of wellbeing is related to respondents' calendar age. Wellbeing is inherently subjective and, as a determinant of physical health, may be adversely affected by life stress, lifestyle-related diseases and chronic conditions (Steptoe et al., 2015). Therefore, members of Generation Z – now young adults – may assess their wellbeing differently from their parents or grandparents. The set of characteristics included in this analysis was selected by the authors based on their scientific relevance and feasibility of collection within a student population.

Our findings identified three groups of factors significant for the wellbeing of Generation Z: self-rated health (self-rated financial status, time spent online and exercise), loneliness (gender, gainful employment, participation in the Erasmus programme and exercise), life satisfaction (self-rated financial status, career plans and time spent online). The recurrence of certain variables suggests that they may be more influential than other characteristics. Positive subjective wellbeing constitutes a protective factor for health. Numerous studies indicate that happy people tend to succeed in many areas of life, including marriage, friendships, income, work performance and health. Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) propose a conceptual model to explain these findings, arguing that the relationship between happiness and success is bidirectional: not only does success contribute to happiness, but positive emotions also facilitate success. Furthermore, evidence suggests that positive emotions – one of the core components of wellbeing – may underlie many desirable traits, resources and life outcomes associated with happiness (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005) and an active life (Liffiton et al., 2012).

A comprehensive meta-analysis conducted by Chida & Steptoe (2008) suggests that higher levels of positive wellbeing predict a longer life expectancy in healthy populations and improved survival rates among those with existing illnesses. The analysis showed that both positive affective states (e.g. emotional wellbeing, positive mood, joy, happiness, vigour, energy) and positive character traits (e.g. life satisfaction, hopefulness, optimism, sense of humour) were associated with reduced mortality in studies of healthy populations. Moreover, positive psychological wellbeing was found to be significantly associated with reduced cardiovascular mortality in studies of healthy individuals, as well as with improved survival among patients with kidney failure and HIV (Chida, Steptoe, 2008).

Social and emotional skills, as well as specific attitudinal patterns, are shaped during upbringing and through socialisation within a given community. Within these environments, individuals learn both attitudes and strategies for emotional regulation (Layard et al., 2014; Bernard, Stephanou, 2018). Positive developmental patterns acquired during childhood and

adolescence form the foundation of young adults' behaviour in the workplace. In the context of demographic changes and the resulting challenge of successfully managing age-diverse work groups, it is becoming increasingly important to effectively harness employees' strengths and capabilities. Promoting the wellbeing of all employees can enhance team cohesion and, consequently, contribute to the organisation's overall success.

5. Conclusions

The results of the analyses indicate that self-rated financial status is significantly associated with both self-rated health and life satisfaction, whereas objective income levels show no significant correlation with psychological and social wellbeing. This suggests that the key factor within the studied population is the individual's perception of their financial situation rather than their actual income level. Consequently, the wellbeing of young adults appears to be more closely tied to a sense of economic security than to objective income levels. The employment status of the university students studied – whether or not they engage in paid work – does not show significant correlations with life satisfaction or with most dimensions of psychological wellbeing. The few significant correlations observed appear to be isolated (e.g. intimate loneliness). This suggests that merely combining work and study does not have a clear positive or negative effect on wellbeing. In contrast, the significant association between having a career plan and life satisfaction indicates that a future-oriented mindset and a sense of life direction may serve as protective factors for psychological wellbeing. The greatest number of statistically significant relationships was observed among variables describing lifestyle, particularly exercise and time spent online. Exercise was significantly associated with self-rated health and general loneliness, while time spent online was linked to self-rated health and life satisfaction. In contrast, objective somatic indicators, such as BMI and waist circumference, showed no significant correlations with psychological or social wellbeing. These findings suggest that daily behaviours and subjective perceptions play a more important role in determining wellbeing than objective physical or economic status.

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