

# Happiness spikes on weekends, even for the unemployed

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Weekends spent with family and friends are valued by both people with jobs and those without, according to a study co-authored by Stanford researcher Cristobal Young.

(Medical Xpress)—Weekends are the best days of the week, not only for workers, but also for the unemployed because they can spend more time with others, according to new Stanford research.

"Happiness spikes on the weekend and drops when the [work](#) week

begins. Call it 'weekend bliss' or the 'Monday blues,'" said Cristobal Young, an assistant professor in sociology who co-authored the study with Chaeyoon Lim from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Emotional well-being rises by about 15 percent on weekends, the study shows. This reflects both more positive emotions like happiness and enjoyment, and fewer negative emotions like stress, anger and sadness. The findings are based on a study of 500,000 Americans in the Gallup Daily Poll and eight years of data from the American Time Use Survey.

Understanding the source of weekend well-being is the study's main focus. "Why are people happier on weekends? The tempting answer is not having to go to work, and not having to deal with your boss. But simply having time off work is not the answer," Young said.

Unemployed workers, he said, are a key to understanding the weekend. The jobless have time off work every day of the week. But their well-being rises on weekends just as with workers.

"Because the unemployed do not go to work, one might think that weekends lose their meaning," Young said. "That is not the case. The unemployed get about 75 percent of the boost in well-being on weekends that workers get. This tells us that the weekend is not just about having time off work – it is something much more than that."

## **Weekend socialites**

The amount of time that people spend with family and friends roughly doubles on weekends, the researchers found. For working people, daily time with family rises from three and a half hours during the week to almost seven hours on weekends. Daily time with friends increases from 30 minutes to more than an hour on weekends – a pattern similar for the unemployed.

Above all, the study shows that emotional well-being rises with the number of hours people spend with family and friends. Social time increases positive emotions and reduces negative emotions.

"Social contact is central to our sense of well-being," Young said. This, the authors find, is what explains much of the weekend happiness and the Monday blues. "People who spend weekends alone get very little of the boost in emotional well-being."

Social time is also important to understanding unemployment, the study finds. People out of work spend most of their extra free time alone. Often, the time is spent doing household chores and watching daytime TV.

"Weekends are a break from unemployment," Young said, "because on Saturday and Sunday, other people are available to spend time with."

## **Time: 'a network good'**

A key conclusion of the study is that time should be considered as a "network good."

"Network goods are things that become more useful when they are widely shared," Young said. "Things like cell phones, email and Facebook are examples. If you are the only person you know on Facebook, or if none of your friends use email, these products are not very useful to you."

Likewise, free time is more valuable when there is a network of people with similar schedules. The standard workweek – Monday to Friday with Saturday and Sunday off – results in similar schedules for many people, allowing for easy and unplanned social contacts.

"We take the standard workweek for granted, but it is a lot harder to see people if you don't work the same schedule," Young said.

This, the authors say, gives insight into why the unemployed see little benefit from having so much extra free time.

"We live in a time famine era," Young said. "Extra time should be treasured, but the unemployed get extra time when everyone else is working or at school."

## Unemployment blues

Despite the weekend boost, the jobless show very low levels of well-being and high levels of [negative emotions](#), according to the research.

"Unemployment is psychologically devastating," said Young, whose previous research found that the emotional effect of job loss is comparable to losing one's home. "People feel a deep need to be able to account for their lives, and unemployment takes that away from them in a fundamental way."

With such low levels of well-being, he noted that, "ironically, the jobless need a weekend experience much more than workers do."

In December 2013, the U.S. government cut off unemployment insurance for 1.7 million long-term unemployed. Part of the reason was concern about disincentives – that benefits weaken the motivation to find work.

"The idea that unemployed people are enjoying their time off work flies in the face of overwhelming evidence," Young said. "This is in part because time off during the week is not very valuable to people."

## Downside of flexibility

The [weekend](#) boost in well-being happens mostly because so many people are off work at the same time, Young said.

Increasingly, however, people are looking for individual time off when it is individually convenient. But personal flexibility can be a double-edged sword, the researchers found.

"Time flexibility is good for an individual, but it is bad for groups," Young said. "To make the most of modern life, we should search for temporal coordination – to work at the same times, and have time off together."

Provided by Stanford University

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