



Introduction

During 2011 and 2012 ONS has collected subjective wellbeing data as part of the Labour Force Survey. This provides the opportunity to explore the relationship between employment and wellbeing in more detail. In this paper we present some descriptive statistics from a 6-month dataset.

Employment Status

The association between unemployment and reduced subjective wellbeing is well established and is clearly shown in Figure 1 with the unemployed have lower levels of wellbeing than those in work.

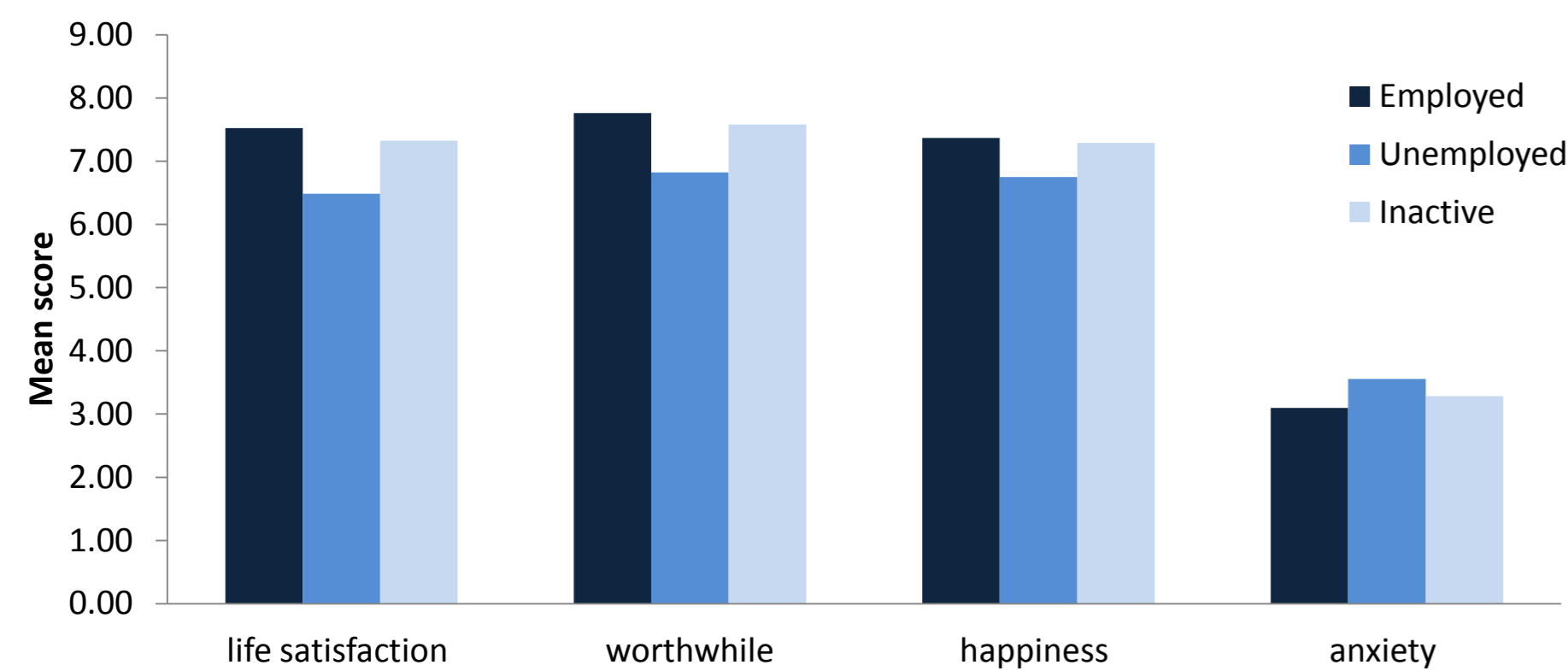


Figure 1. Mean Wellbeing Scores by Employment Status

Detailed economic status

Using the APS data the three broad employment status categories in Figure 1 above can be refined so that employment can be split into four, and economic inactivity split into five groups. This is shown in Figure 2.

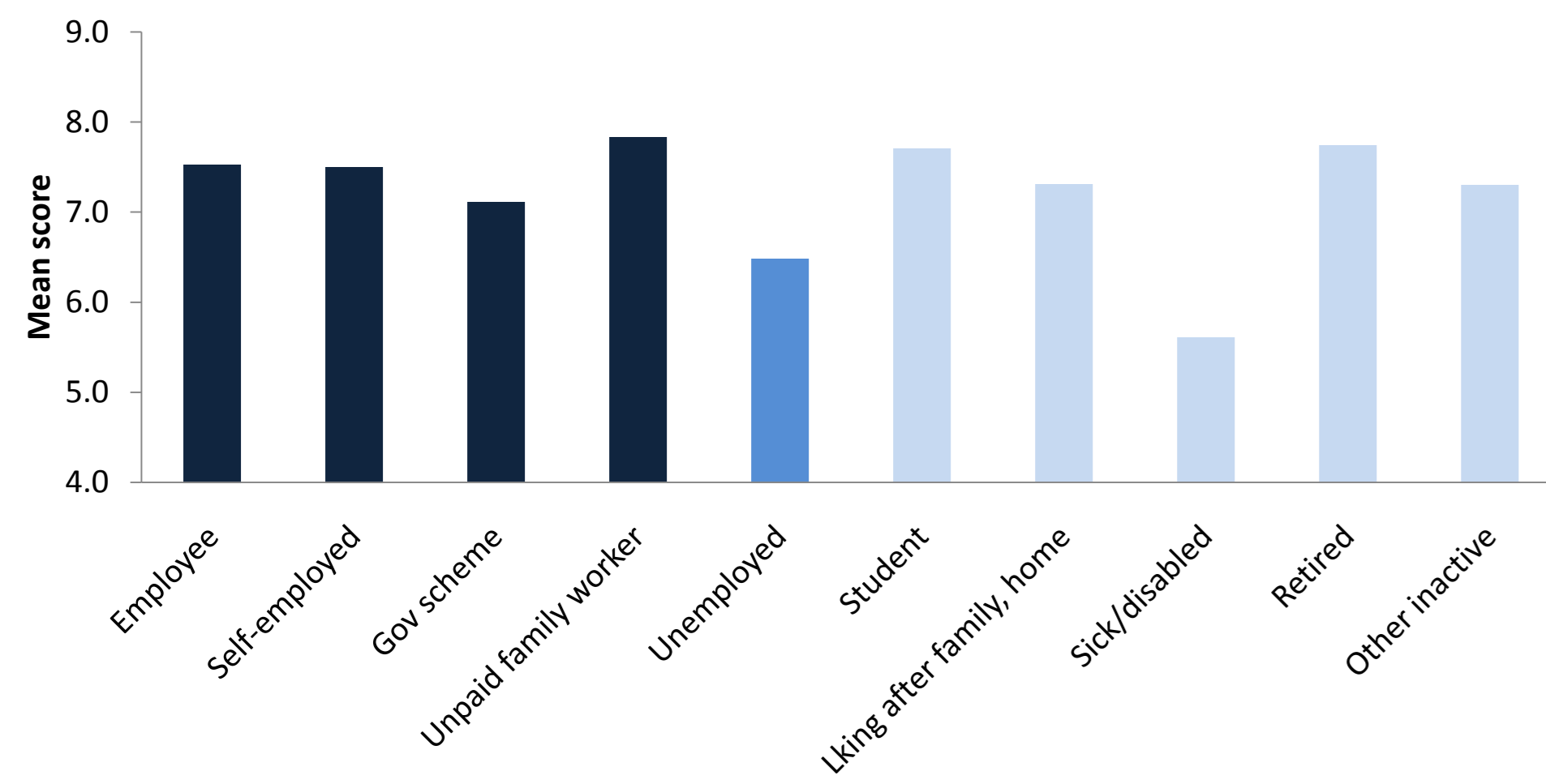


Figure 2. Mean Life Satisfaction score by economic status

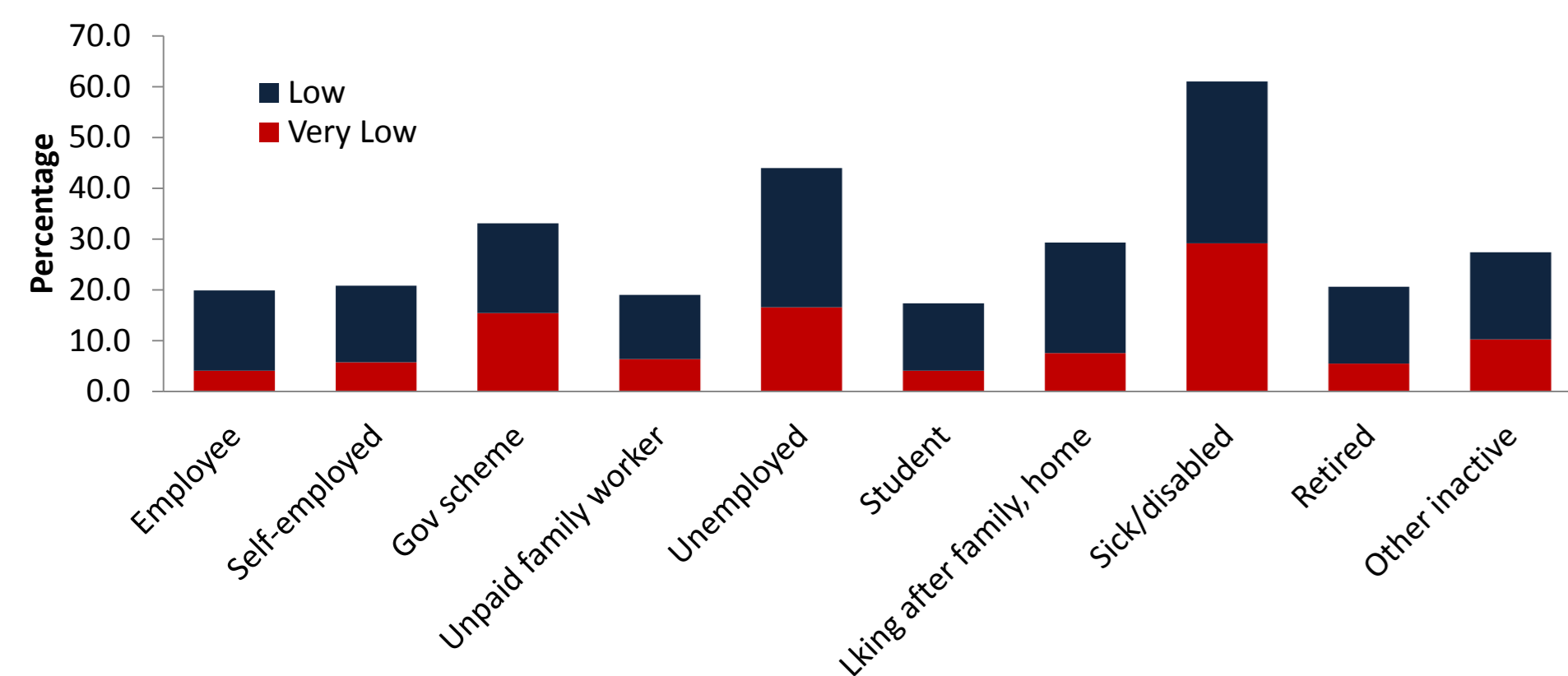


Figure 3. Percentage of each group with low Life Satisfaction

Subjective Wellbeing and Employment

Analysis of the Annual Population Survey (APS) Wellbeing Data, Apr-Oct 2011

Figure 2 shows that the lowest mean life satisfaction (LS) scores are found in the unemployed and the inactive due to sickness or disability groups. These groups also have the highest proportions of people with very low life satisfaction as shown in Figure 3, answering less than 4 on a 10 point scale.

Duration of unemployment

Figure 4 suggests that the negative effect of unemployment on life satisfaction (LS) and feeling that the things you do in life are worthwhile (Worth) may worsen during the first two years. A similar pattern can be seen when looking at the increases over time in the proportion of unemployed people who experience low LS. Around a third (33 per cent) of people who had been unemployed for less than three months has LS scores in the low or very low range compared with nearly two thirds (62 per cent) of those who had been unemployed for between 18 months and two years (Figure 5).

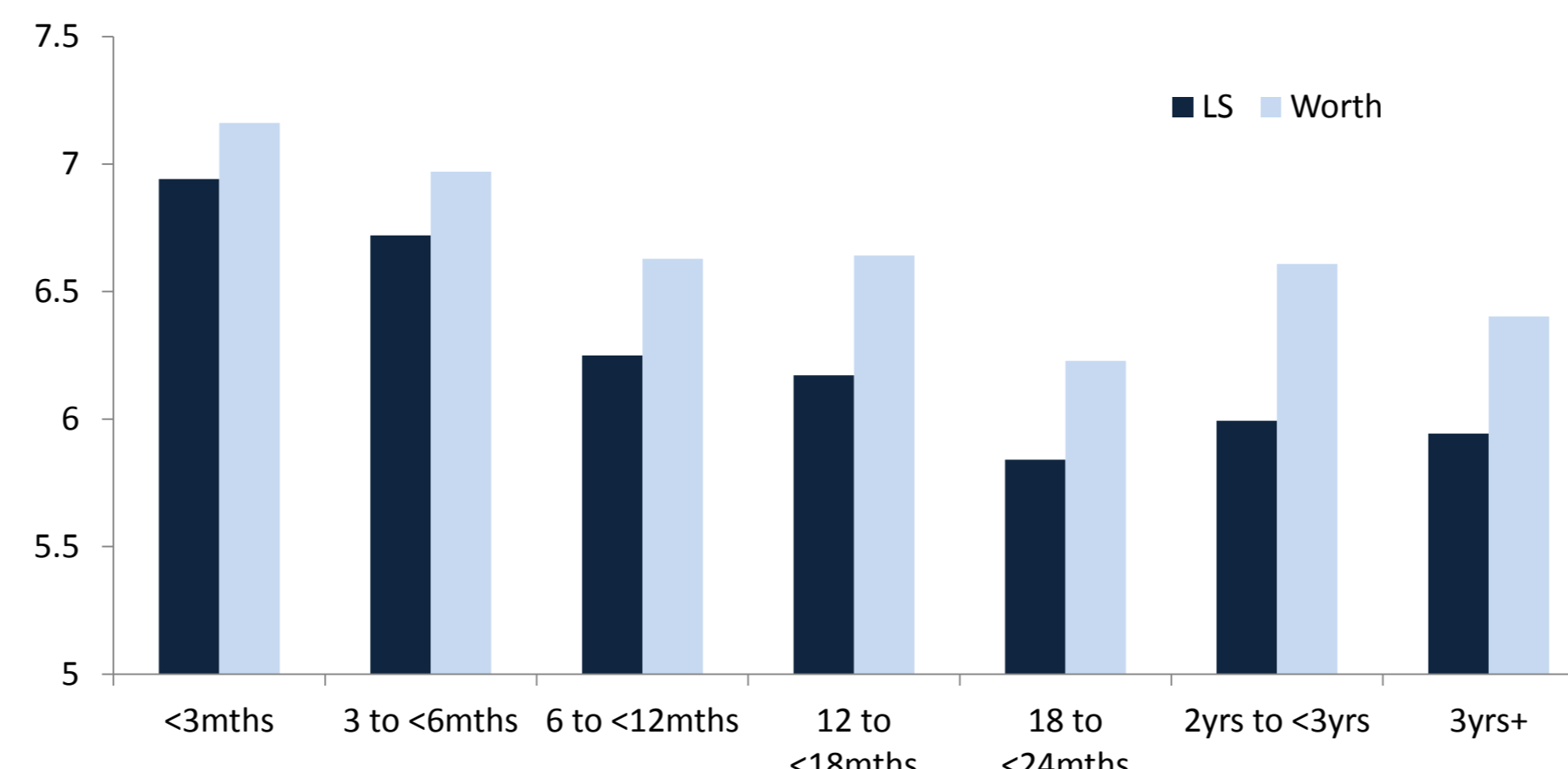


Figure 4 Mean life satisfaction & worthwhile scores by duration of unemployment

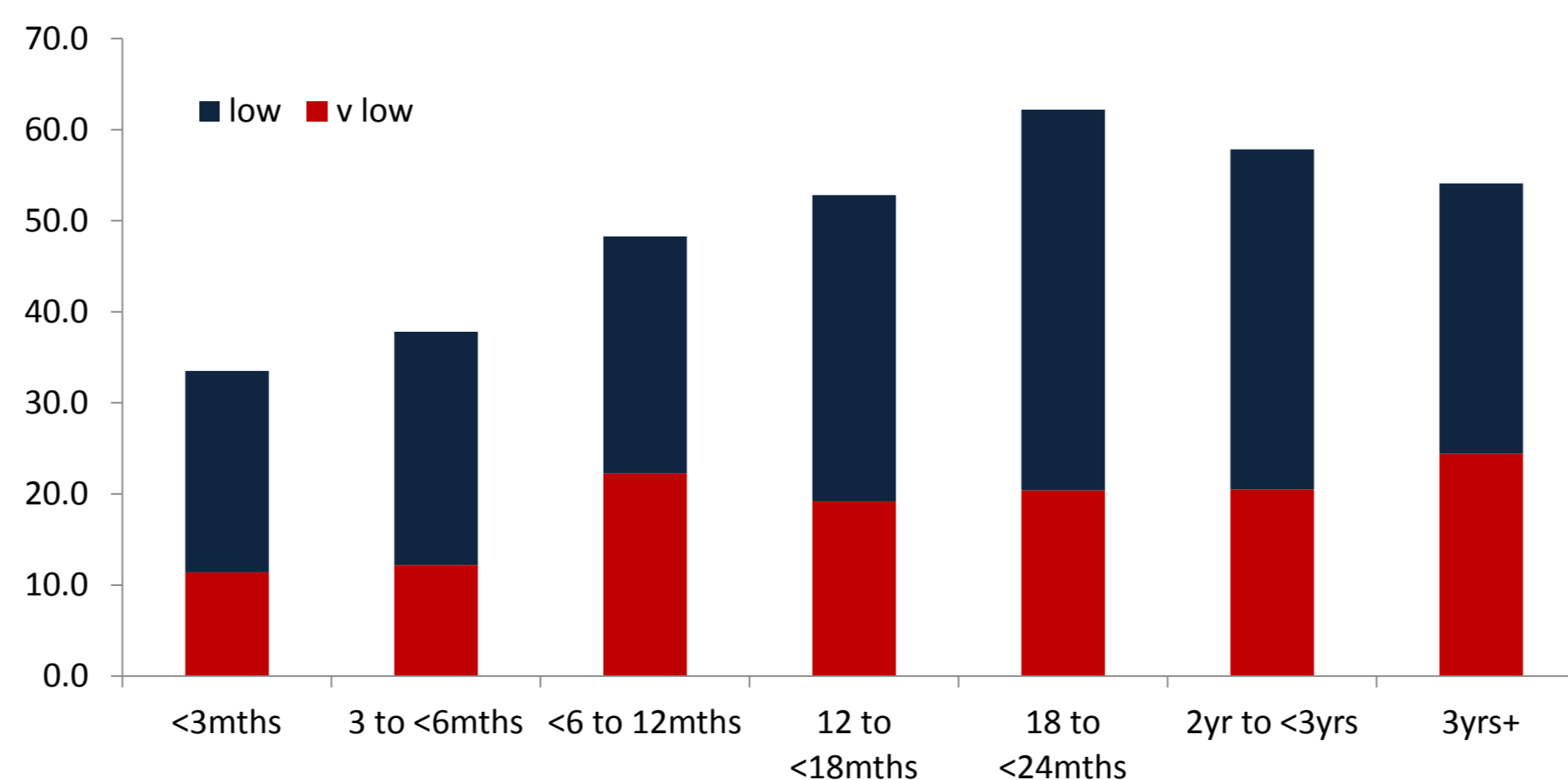


Figure 5 Percentage of unemployed people with low life satisfaction by duration of unemployment

Underemployment

People who take a part-time job because they cannot find a full-time job are underemployed – they would prefer to have more work. The negative association between underemployment and life satisfaction and worthwhile can be seen in Figures 6 and 7. Mean LS for those underemployed was found to be 6.9 compared with 7.7 for other part-time workers and 6.5 for the unemployed. Figure 7 shows that 10 per cent of the underemployed group have very low LS compared with 17 per cent of the unemployed group and 4 per cent of those working part-time.

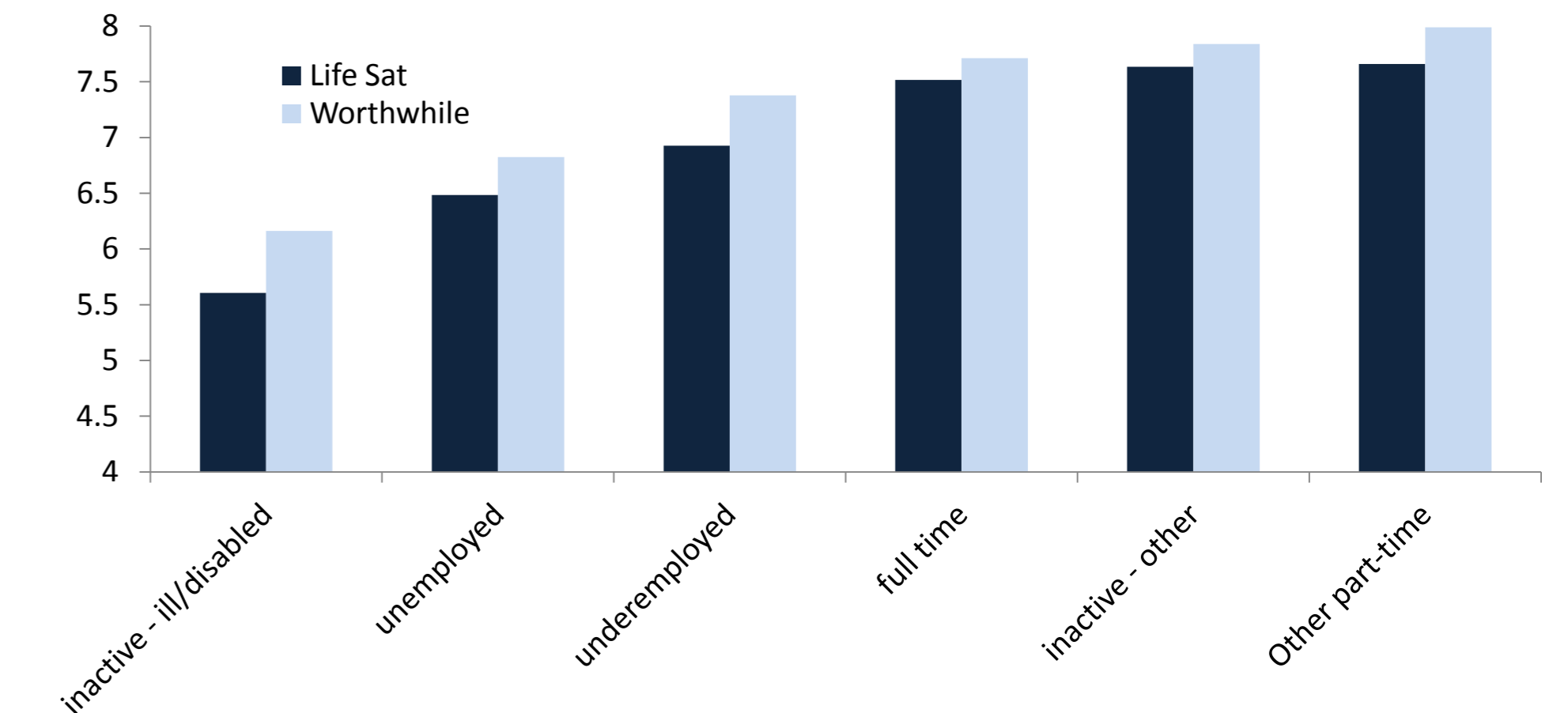


Figure 6 Mean life satisfaction and worthwhile scores by employment

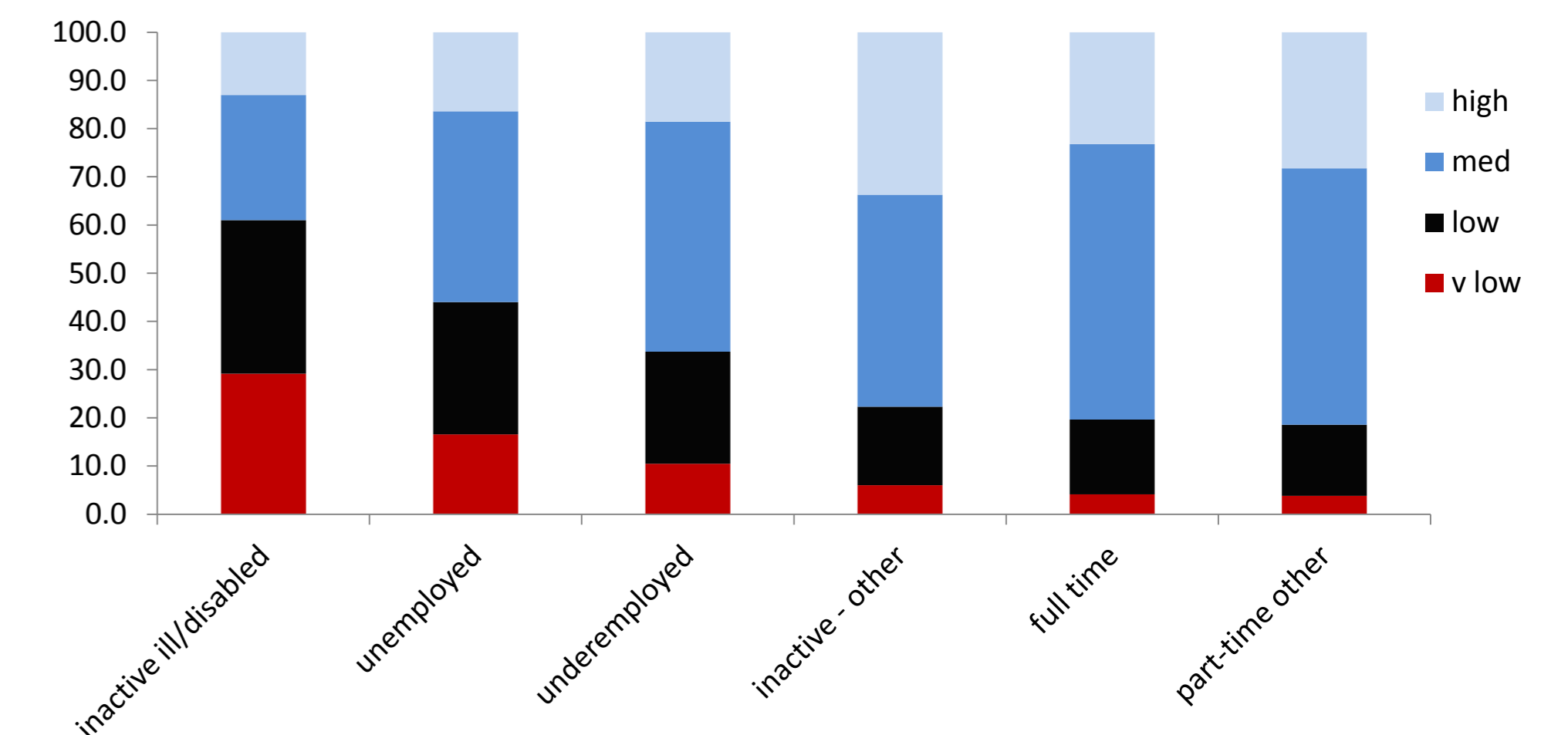


Figure 7 Distribution of life satisfaction scores by employment status

Conclusion

The large sample size of the APS allows us to measure wellbeing for much smaller, more discrete and policy-relevant segments of society. This can 'deshroud' associations with wellbeing. We have demonstrated this by disaggregating employment status into smaller more discrete segments. We find, for example, that the economically inactive have lower levels of wellbeing than those in employment and higher levels than the unemployed. However, when we disaggregate these groups further we find that those who are inactive for health reasons have the lowest levels of wellbeing. Similarly disaggregating part-time work reveals the negative association between underemployment and wellbeing.