

Entrepreneurial Health and Wellbeing

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SOTA Review No 29: May 2019

Issues of employee mental health and well-being have received considerable recent attention. Much less attention has been paid to well-being among entrepreneurs despite the combination of risk and anxiety which starting a business may involve. Entrepreneurial well-being has been defined as "a positive and distinctive mental state that reflects entrepreneurs' affective and cognitive experiences of engagement in entrepreneurship as the process of venture creation". We review the existing evidence on different aspects of entrepreneurial well-being and identify gaps in the evidence base on this 'darker side' of entrepreneurial activity.

Background

How can entrepreneurs stay well, whilst engaging in what is inherently a challenging, risky and very personal undertaking? How can they make the most of their freedoms, their passions, their journeys and achievements, as a foundation for a healthier life, all round? Whilst research has long recognised that entrepreneurship is a stressful experience (Boyd & Gumpert, 1983; Buttner, 1992; Rahim, 1996), less attention is typically paid to wider issues of well-being, health and entrepreneurship, and to exploring specific causes of entrepreneurial mental and physical ill-health. This is surprising, since physical, emotional and social health experiences can indeed be influenced by the characteristics of a given occupation (Ravesteijn et al., 2013; Danna & Griffin, 1999).

Surely it is a question of considerable significance to ask whether becoming an entrepreneur has a positive effect, overall, on the wellbeing of those we train, support, educate and fund to follow this path? This research agenda speaks to our

broader duty of care, and reminds us of the need to consider the entrepreneur as a whole person, rather than simply a useful socio-economic development tool.

There are, indeed, many obstacles and demands, uncertainty in outcomes, intense competition, lack of resources (Baron, 1998), and more personal factors such as loneliness and lack of support from colleagues, all of which can make the start-up experience highly stressful (Akande, 1992; Buttner, 1992; Rahim, 1996). Entrepreneurship is associated with risk taking, uncertainty, intense work effort, and considerable responsibility (Aldrich & Martinez, 2001; Boyd & Gumpert, 1983; Covin & Slevin, 1991). Driven by a high need for achievement (Brockhaus & Horwitz, 1986; McClelland 1961), entrepreneurs place pressure on themselves to perform well (Hambrick, Finkelstein & Mooney, 2005). They experience a sense of personal responsibility for venture outcomes (Thomson, Kopelman & Schriesheim, 1992), and bear the cost of their mistakes and those of their employees (Goldsby, Kuratko & Bishop, 2005).

Because of this, self-employed individuals work longer hours compared to employees (Eden, 1975; Lewin-Epstein & Yuchtman-Yar, 1991), and such a long commitment of time and energy is often at the expense of family and social activities (Kuratko & Hodgetts, 2004). Entrepreneurial stress may also be due to role ambiguity (Buttner, 1992). Entrepreneurs typically perform a variety of tasks such as “business opportunity recognition, business planning, resource acquisition, hiring, managing, and leading employees, creative problem solving, and quick decision making in uncertain and ambiguous situations (Douglas & Shepherd, 2000). Entrepreneurs fulfil a multitude of roles, such as recruiter, spokesperson, and negotiator, often as part of their boundary spanning activities, which involve interactions with a variety of internal and external stakeholders such as employees, customers, suppliers, regulators, lawyers, and investors, which is also a source of stress (Goldsby et al., 2005).

In spite of the clearly stressful nature of the occupation, nevertheless the relationships between self-employment, entrepreneurship and health have been given relatively little attention within the literature. One group of studies compares entrepreneurship and the self-employed to other occupational groups, from a health and well-being perspective, and we present a snapshot of this work. Volery and Pullich’s (2010) study, which broke new ground in adopting interpretivist approaches, is also presented within the evidence below.

Entrepreneurial health and well-being defined

The World Health Organisation define health as a “state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (WHO, 1986: 2).” Health is understood to be created through the interaction of biological, psychological and organizational processes (Brief, Butcher, George & Link, 1993). Unhelpfully, though, leading theories of health and well-being have oftentimes deployed the terms of ‘health’, ‘health related quality of life’, ‘quality of life’, ‘well-being’, and ‘life-satisfaction interchangeably (Karimi & Brazier, 2016).

Well-being itself can be approached through both hedonic and eudemonic perspectives. Hedonic approaches conceptualize well-being as a “*focus on pleasure and happiness*” (Cooke, et. al. 2016, pp. 732), whereas eudemonic perspectives to well-being “*suggest that psychological health is achieved by fulfilling one’s potential, functioning at an optimal level, or realizing one’s true nature (ibid,*

2016, pp. 732).” Quality of life models (QoL), theorise well-being more broadly still, and incorporate physical, physiological and social aspects of functioning (ibid, 2016, pp. 732).

The phenomenon of ‘entrepreneurial well-being’ has itself recently begun to receive attention, and has been defined as “a positive and distinctive mental state that reflects entrepreneurs’ affective and cognitive experiences of engagement in entrepreneurship as the process of venture creation” (Shiv, 2015, pp. 30).

Evidence

As noted, there is a body of work comparing entrepreneurs’ well-being - often studied as the self-employed’s physical, mental and affective health - to that of employers and / or managers. Table One presents an overview of this, much of which is troubling, and some of which is contradictory. Pegula (2004, p 34), for example, found that homicide and suicide rates for the self-employed were much higher than those for employed workers in the same sectors, and Dodd (2011) has argued that family firms in particular have a unique mixture of well-being challenges (and advantages).

Yet all is not doom and gloom. Naughton (1970) for example, asserted that entrepreneurs experienced greater levels of job satisfaction and autonomy than salaried managers despite the fact that self-employed spent more hours on the job. In another study, significant differences between entrepreneurs and employees were found, such that entrepreneurs showed lower somatic and mental morbidity, lower blood pressure, lower prevalence rates of hypertension, higher well-being and more favourable behavioural health indicators in comparison to employees in a nationally representative sample in Germany (Stephan & Roesler, 2010). Along the same lines, Eden (1975) found out that the self-employed were more likely to enjoy enriching job requirements for self-fulfilment, better physical working conditions, more control over other people and better resources. This was argued to be because entrepreneurs perform “active” work, that requires dedication, but also is tiresome and involves emotional engagement. Parasuraman and Simmers (2001) found the self-employed to enjoy greater autonomy and schedule flexibility at work, and report higher levels of job involvement and job satisfaction than those employed in organizations. All these variables have long been associated with better workplace wellbeing. Being one’s own boss can provide individuals the freedom and flexibility to structure their work-lives, according to their preferences, and thereby execute added control over their work situation (Loscocco, 1997). This reduces the level of work-family conflict experienced (Greenhaus et al, 1989), enabling the self-employed people to manage the conflicts between work and home more effectively, and in-turn increase psychological well-being (Greenhaus, et. al., 1989; Loscocco, 1997; Loscocco and Leicht, 1993).

By contrast, contradictory research study findings attribute work related antecedents towards more favourable health and well-being experiences of employees. Jamal (1999) found out that the self-employed experienced higher job stress, non-work satisfaction, and psychosomatic health problems. Boyd & Gumpert (1983) also found that entrepreneurs reported back-problems, indigestion, insomnia and headaches, the causes of which were claimed to be loneliness, immersion in business, people problems and the need to achieve.

Table 1 : A brief snapshot on entrepreneurial health, in comparison to employees

Health antecedents	Entrepreneurs	Entrepreneur's well-being levels, compared to employees and / or managers
Physical factors	Lower mean systolic and diastolic blood pressure (Stephan & Roesler, 2010).	Higher
	Better physical working conditions (Jamal, 2007).	Higher
	More physician visits than employees (Stephan & Roesler, 2010).	Lower
Mental factors	Fewer diagnosed mental and anxiety disorders (Kawakami et. al., 1996).	Higher
	Higher prevalence rates of stress related mental disorders (Jamal, 1997).	Lower
Cognitive/Affective factors	Higher levels of life satisfaction (Stephan & Roesler, 2010).	Higher
	Lower need for support (Sexton & Bowman, 1985).	Lower
	Personal factors such as loneliness and lack of support from colleagues (Akande, 1992, Buttner, 1992, Rahim, 1996).	Lower
	Meaningfulness in self-directed venturing can be argued to positively support good health (Nadar, 2015).	Higher
	More emotional exhaustion (Jamal, 2007)	Lower
Outside work factors	Greater work-family conflict, and lower family satisfaction (Parasuraman & Simmers, 2001).	Lower
	A large commitment of time and energy is at the expense of family and social activities (Kuratko & Hodgetts, 2004).	Lower

Vollery & Pullich's (2010) multiple case study probed the perceived physical, mental and social well-being of entrepreneurs, using entrepreneurs' own perceptions of their lives. Physical well-being was understood by this sample as *"being free of pain, being able to hike up a mountain, and having the energy to fulfil my obligations"* (ibid, pp.11). Entrepreneurial threats to physical well-being were having to work long hours, eating irregular meals, having only three days of vacation per year, struggling to maintain work-life balance and having high blood pressure (ibid, 2010). Turning to mental wellbeing, entrepreneurs' interpretations of an ideal mental state included the mind and soul being in order, feeling strength from the cheerfulness of the inner world, and the absence of depression, stress, anxiety, and burnout. "Lack of appreciation by colleagues, lack of perceived hardiness, optimism and self-esteem, financial crisis and lack of trust in delegating tasks to others" were some reasons responsible for threatening the mental well-being (ibid, 2010). An optimal social well-being was seen to be dependent on keeping a closely-knit family, cultivating friendships, maintaining trusted relationships with family and friends, having a good

reputation within society and being integrated into a social network. Threats to social well-being were poor communication patterns with colleagues on primary decisions, and lack of time with friends and family.

Summary and Evidence Gaps

Entrepreneurs' working life impacts differently upon their well-being than that of employees or managers. Whilst many of these special characteristics can be positive in their effect, others appear to be quite harmful to overall well-being. Greater research is needed to explore this complicated issue on its own terms, and not simply as a comparator to other occupational groups. More in depth, nuanced and grounded work is demanded if modern articulations of health and well-being theories are to be applied to our own sphere of study (Mehta et al, 2017). Funders and policy makers too need to be more receptive to recognising the dark side of entrepreneurship, and work with us to support further studies, even if the results cast doubt on the current entrepreneurship hagiography. Research is also needed to identify solutions to these health challenges, and to embed well-being awareness and management into entrepreneurship training and education.

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