

Higher-earning men would take a pay cut to spend more time with partners

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Most men in Europe want to spend fewer hours at work and more time with their families even though it would cut their income, a major study on employment shows.

The common belief that higher-earning men like to work longer to build their careers is shown to be wrong by the study – men who earn the majority of their household's income were most likely to want to work less.

Sociologists Dr Shireen Kanji and Dr Robin Samuel also found that for men breadwinners the attraction of spending more time with their partner is as strong a pull as children's company.

Dr Kanji, of the University of Leicester, and Dr Samuel, of the University of Bern, analysed survey data on the working lives of more than 4,000 men in 12 European countries, including the UK. In an article in the journal *Sociology* they say:

- around 58% of men breadwinners – those who earned more than their partners – were more likely to want to work less and spend more time at home, and only 15% wanted to work longer.
- male breadwinners with a partner and no children were as keen to work less and spend more time at home as were men with both a partner and children.
- among men who earned the same or less than their partners or were single, most also wanted to work fewer hours, though the proportion was lower than for male breadwinners. They were also less likely to want to work fewer hours than male breadwinners.
- being too tired after work to take part in family life was associated with an increased likelihood of feeling overworked.

In their article, the researchers say: “We show that male breadwinners are at a higher risk of overwork and this is related to the job interfering with their family life, a specific form of work-life conflict. The implication is that male breadwinners feel constrained from participating as fully as they desire in family life, even if they do not have children.

“For male breadwinners, being in a partnership is more salient to overwork than having children. Perhaps it is the inability to spend time with a partner that stimulates the feeling of overwork.”

The study is the first to analyse whether European men want to work less than they do. “Little is known about whether men actually want to work long hours,” the researchers say.

It had been thought by some that higher earning men might be content to work longer hours because high status jobs pay well. But the research suggests that because they can afford to work less and take a pay cut, they are more willing to do so than lower-earning men.

The researchers also say that their finding suggests businesses “need to pay more serious attention to work-life balance as an issue for men, not only a women's issue as currently seems to be the practice.”

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Notes

1. The figures from the survey were:

		average hours worked a week	desired average hours a week	% wanting to work fewer hours	% wanting to work more hours	% wanting to work same hours
	couple, no children, man main earner	45.2	38.64	56.96	15.12	27.92
	couple, no children, man and woman equal earners	42.59	37.89	54.21	17.38	28.41
	couple, no children, woman main earner	40.47	38.09	49.21	29.05	21.74
	couple, with children, man main earner	45.96	39.07	58.33	14.40	27.08
	couple, with children, man and woman equal earners	42.64	38.93	40.09	26.05	33.86
	couple, with children, woman main earner	41.28	40.13	37.86	32.72	29.41
	single men	43.36	39.07	48.60	22.07	29.33

2. The data analysed by the researchers came from Round Five of the European Social Survey, conducted in 2010. The researchers analysed data on working men aged 25-60 in 12 western European countries: Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, Finland, Great Britain, Spain, Denmark, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and France. The number totalled 4,662.

3. Among the survey's questions were: "How many hours a week, if any, would you choose to work, bearing in mind that your earnings would go up or down according to how many hours you work?"; and "Your job prevents you from giving the time you want to your partner and family. How often?" These formed the basis of the data on desired working week.

4. The article is entitled 'Male breadwinning revisited: how specialisation, gender role attitudes and work characteristics affect overwork and underwork in Europe.'

5. The British Sociological Association's charitable aim is to promote sociology. The BSA is a Company Limited by Guarantee. Registered in England and Wales. Company Number: 3890729. Registered Charity Number 1080235 www.britsoc.co.uk