

Shorter working hours do not guarantee happier workers

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A reduction in working hours does not necessarily mean happier employees, as it might merely be adding stress to their general working environment. This is according to a study by Robert Rudolf of Korea University, Seoul, that looks at the impact of South Korea's recently introduced Five-Day Working Policy. The paper, published online in Springer's *Journal of Happiness Studies*, focuses on the overall individual and family happiness of married and co-residing couples living with children, and also assesses the impact of working hours on people's overall job and life satisfaction.

South Korea officially started to introduce its reformative working policy in 2004, in which Saturdays became official non-working days. It also reduced the official working week from 44 to 40 hours. The policy was instigated to enhance living standards, boost the country's weak leisure industry and to reduce the negative effects of excessively long working hours, including low [productivity](#) and high rates of industrial injury.

The natural experimental setting of South Korea's Five-Day Working Policy reform provides an unbiased look into how working hours influence the subjective well-being of workers. Rudolf's study is pioneering as it is the first of its kind to assess the impact of such an external reduction of working hours on the subjective well-being of individuals and families. His analysis is based on the detailed and nationally representative [longitudinal survey](#) of urban Korean [households](#), the Korean Labor and Income Panel Study, conducted between 1998

and 2008.

Rudolf found that working wives and mothers are generally more pleased with the reformative measures than their male counterparts. This is because women face higher work-family role conflicts within the traditional Korean society, and thus suffer more from long overtime hours. Even though full-time workers, and women in particular, are generally thankful that their work week was cut by four hours on average, it has had no significant impact on their overall job and [life satisfaction](#). This is because much of the positive spin-offs gained from fewer working hours are often offset by rising work intensity demands set by employers, while some firms tend to give less holiday time.

These findings show either that traditional theory is wrong to suggest that longer working hours alone have a negative impact on the personal happiness of employees, or it means that increased work intensity, because of cuts in official working hours, completely offsets any positive effects such a move might have. "If the latter holds true, it would be naïve to believe that work time reductions alone can increase worker well-being," warned Rudolf.

More information: Rudolf, R. (2013) Work Shorter, Be Happier? Longitudinal Evidence from the Korean Five-Day Working Policy, *Journal of Happiness Studies*. [DOI: 10.1007/s10902-013-9468-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-013-9468-1)

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