

Men are happier when they work full-time

April 24 2017



Credit: Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO)

A "daddy day"? More time to spend at home? Men don't need to work part-time to ensure their well-being. In fact, they are happier if they "just" work full-time. This is one conclusion of the PhD research by sociologist Sean de Hoon who examined the influence of family relationships and parenthood on differences in happiness, income and health. De Hoon obtained his PhD on Thursday 13 April at Erasmus University Rotterdam. His research was funded by the NWO Research Talent programme.

Social inequalities in income, health and happiness have traditionally been ascribed to individual characteristics, such as level of education. But this does not explain everything. Why do men still earn more than [women](#), although women now have higher levels of education on average?

To understand such disparities, we need to consider [environmental factors](#), such as the family and the country in which people live. Sociologist Sean de Hoon studied the role of partner relationships and parenthood in inequalities in income, health and happiness. His study was based on statistical analysis of data from large-scale international surveys.

Full-time and part-time

For one of the studies in his PhD thesis, De Hoon investigated disparities in happiness in relation to part-time or full-time [work](#). Which environmental factors exert influence?

His research shows that a difference in happiness exists between full-time and part-time workers only in the case of people with school-age children. Women in this situation are happier when they work part-time. According to De Hoon, they experience less conflict between work responsibilities on the one hand and family on the other. However, men are happier when they work full-time. 'In doing so, they are meeting the traditional expectations of the man who plays the breadwinner role,' says De Hoon.

De Hoon also studied the 'marriage premium': the fact that married men often earn more than single men. This income advantage is often explained by the theory that [married men](#) should be the breadwinner. The theory has it that they are therefore more focused on their work, and so earn more money.

However, De Hoon also found that the culture of a country is an important factor. In countries where there is a greater disparity between men and women on the labour market, such as Ireland and Hungary, the marriage premium is greater. In these countries, there is more pressure on men to be the breadwinner. The marriage premium is also greater in countries with relatively low rates of divorce, such as Japan. If there is less likelihood of divorce, men probably invest more in their relationship and feel more pressure to play the breadwinner role.

Influence of children

De Hoon also studied the fact that women with children face a major negative impact on their income (the "[motherhood penalty](#)"). However, his research shows that the effect of the first child is much greater than the effect of a second or third child. 'For the benefit of their income, women would do better to skip the first child,' suggests De Hoon ironically.

According to the researcher, the marriage premium and motherhood penalty jointly contribute to the continuing disparity in [income](#) between men and women.

Based on his research, De Hoon suggests that policy makers wishing to reduce inequalities would do well to attempt to make the division of roles between men and women less traditional. 'This could be done by getting men more involved in the care for the children and in household tasks, for example. One such policy measure is a "daddy quota", a scheme in Scandinavian countries that reserves part of the parental leave for fathers.'

More information: 'Family interdependencies: Partnerships, parenthood and well-being in context.' www.nwo.nl/en/research-and-research-projects/i/42/10842.html

Provided by Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO)

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