

# Men with flexible working hours have successful partners

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Research conducted by Dr Laura Langner at the University of Oxford's Department of Sociology investigated changes in couples' hourly wages once one partner enters work-hour flexibility.

The study found that once men started working flexible hours, their wives' hourly wages increased significantly, particularly if they were mothers (14.2% after four years). The husband's own hourly wages also increased by 7.4% over the following four years.

Dr Laura Langner, who authored the paper published in the journal *Work, Employment and Society*, said: 'The results suggest that men may use flexible working hours as an alternative to part-time work to support their wives' careers. The couple is in a win-win situation – both partners' hourly wages increase when the man enters the flexible arrangement. It also tells us that employers can play an important role in supporting not just their employee's but also the whole family's work-family compatibility.'

The study analysed west German couples entering [flexible work](#) between 2003-2011 using data from the German Socio-Economic Panel Study (SOEP). A flexible working hours contract is defined as one in which the employee is able to determine when they work during the day and week.

However, this win-win situation only seems to apply to couples in which the male [partner](#) starts working flexible hours. If women start working flexible hours, they only benefit if they work at least 30 hours. They do not benefit at all if they are mothers and even lose out if they combine [work](#) hour flexibility with working part-time. Similarly, the positive effect for their non-flexible male partners is less pronounced.

The male partners were also more likely to be working flexible hours – despite living in a fairly conservative environment. At the time of the study, west Germany had little childcare provision (in 2006 only 7% of under-three-year olds were in childcare according to Destatis). The German population held fairly conservative attitudes towards female employment (in the 2004/5 European Social Survey 51% agreed that 'a

pre-school child suffers if the mother is working').

**More information:** Flexible men and successful women: the effects of flexible working hours on German couples' wages. *Work, Employment and Society*. DOI: [10.1177/0950017017708161](https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017017708161)

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