

Unionised employees have a better work-life balance

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Credit: Hamza Butt/Sole Treadmill

Employees working in unionised work places are more likely to benefit from family friendly practices that promote a healthy work-life balance and are better than the statutory minimum, according to UCL-led

research.

Professor Alex Bryson (UCL Institute of Education) and John Forth from the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) undertook the research for the Trade Union Congress (TUC) to evaluate the benefits that unions provide.

The researchers found that employers with unions are more likely to implement work-life balance practices, over and above those they are required to do by law. In addition, there are twice as many work-life practices such as working from home or financial help with childcare in unionised workplaces compared to non-unionised workplaces.

The research also shows that the presence of a [union](#) recognised for bargaining significantly reduces the incidence of long-hours working (over 48 hours per week) and employees' perception of a long-hours culture, as indicated by the belief that one has to work long hours to progress at work. The presence of a recognised union also reduces the likelihood that the employer thinks it is the employee's responsibility to balance work and family life.

"Employees in unionised settings appear to experience a better work-life balance and have more family friendly practices available to them compared with similar employees in the non-union sector. This is a success story for trade unions that appears to have attracted little attention, one that is perhaps all the more surprising given the organizational challenges trade unions have been facing in recent years." said Professor Bryson.

Across the economy just over 22 per cent of workplaces recognised a union, compared to only 12 per cent in the [private sector](#). Because larger workplaces tend to recognise trade unions, [employee](#) coverage is higher than workplace coverage: half of employees work in a workplace with at

least one recognised trade union, but this falls to around one-third in the private sector.

Professor Bryson explained, "According to the research, three-quarters of workplace managers agree or strongly agree "it is up to individual employees to balance work and family responsibilities". The percentage agreeing has risen since the early 2000s even though more regulations aimed at improving work-life balance - such as a right to request flexible working - have come into force. So it is, perhaps, no wonder that British workers look on in envy at the rights to extended paid leave and other statutory supports to work-life balance enjoyed on the continent, particularly in Scandinavian countries."

John Forth, NIESR, added, "Work-life balance is one of the most pressing issues in the [workplace](#) today. Our research suggests that there is an important role for both [trade unions](#) and [work-life balance](#) practices in helping employees to [balance](#) their work and non-work commitments."

The report also found that effective unionism plays an important role in the degree to which employees' express job-related anxiety. Union strength is associated with lower anxiety among women in the private sector, independently of their care responsibilities. Work-life practices are only linked to lower anxiety in unionised workplaces. Caring for the ill, disabled or aged is much more strongly linked to higher job-related anxiety in the non-union sector than the union sector— in the union sector the association disappears in the case of women.

The findings highlighted that employees' job-related anxiety falls with the number of dependent children they have. These effects are more pronounced in the non-union sector and in both the union and non-union sectors the association is only statistically significant in the case of women. One possible explanation for this finding is that paid work

offers respite from the stress and anxiety parents face at home when responsible for dependent children.

More information: The added value of trade unions.

www.tuc.org.uk/added-value-trade-unions

Provided by University College London

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