

Poor work-life balance may be damaging your health

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Working adults across Europe with poor work-life balance are more likely to report poor general health, according to a study published in the open access journal *BMC Public Health*.

Within the limited hours available in a day, working adults can be confronted with multiple challenges including deadlines, financial obligations and pressing [family responsibilities](#). These situations may create work-life conflict and negatively affect an individual's involvement in their work, family and [social life](#). The perceived inability to balance work and life demands may have an adverse effect on [health](#).

To examine the associations between work-life balance and self-reported health among working men and women in Europe, a team of researchers at Universität Bielefeld and the Leibniz Institute for Prevention Research and Epidemiology-BIPS, Germany, analyzed data from the 6th European Working Condition Survey, conducted in 2015. Participants of the survey were asked to report on their [general health](#), how well their working hours fit in with family or social commitments outside of work and a general description of their employment. Responses from 32,275 working adults across 30 countries were included.

The authors found that workers who reported poor work-life balance were twice as likely to also report poor health. This association was slightly higher among women than men, although men were overall more likely to report poor work-life balance. Longer weekly working hours were more likely to be reported by men than women, but men were more likely to determine their working hours themselves, while women frequently had their working arrangements set by their company.

The study's lead author, Aziz Mensah, a Doctoral researcher at the University of Bielefeld, Germany, said: "Traditional and societal expectations of behavior for men and women, where women are responsible for caregiving and household activities and men responsible for paid work, may explain the gender work-life imbalance and adverse health outcomes we observed."

The authors also compared work-life conflict and poor health across

regions in Europe. Working men and women from Nordic countries, including Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Norway, were the most likely to report a good work-life balance (85.6% for men and 86.9% in women), while working men and women from Southern Europe, including Greece, Spain, Italy, Portugal, Cyprus and Malta, were the least likely to report good work-life balance (80.99% for men and 76.48% for women).

Dr. Nicholas Kofi Adjei, co-author of the study from the Leibniz Institute for Prevention Research and Epidemiology—BIPS, Germany said: "Long working hours, increased psychological involvement in work, inflexible working times and role overload can all contribute to work-life conflict among employees. Variations in socio-economic policies common to multiple countries, such as [parental leave](#), support for child and elderly care, and general welfare and equality policies, may also have an effect on the balance of work and family life."

The results demonstrate a need for organizations and policymakers to provide working conditions and social policies which allow adults to deal with competing demands from work and family activities without a negative effect on health, according to the authors.

As [work-life balance](#) was assessed using a single question asking participants whether working hours fit in with family or social commitments, the authors caution that this may not encompass all contributing factors, but that it does serve as an important indicator. As self-reported data was used, individual's measures of general health may also differ across countries.

More information: Aziz Mensah et al. Work-life balance and self-reported health among working adults in Europe: a gender and welfare state regime comparative analysis, *BMC Public Health* (2020). [DOI: 10.1186/s12889-020-09139-w](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-020-09139-w)

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