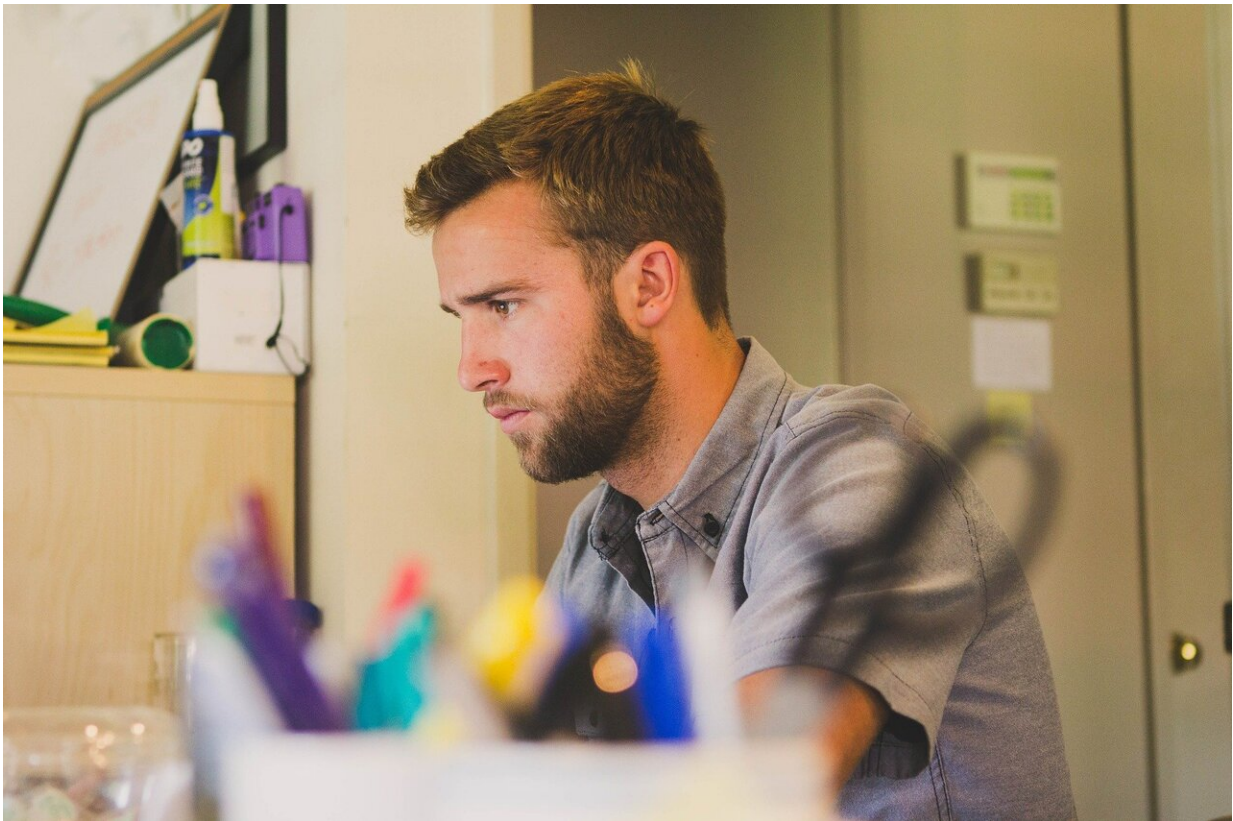


# Formal education does not lead to greater job satisfaction, study shows

March 30 2021, by Shannon Roddel

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Education is considered one of the most critical personal capital investments. But formal educational attainment doesn't necessarily pay off in job satisfaction, according to new research from the University of

Notre Dame.

In fact, there is almost no relationship between the two, according to "[Does Educational Attainment Promote Job Satisfaction? The Bittersweet Trade-offs Between Job Resources, Demands and Stress.](#)" forthcoming in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* from Brittany Solomon (Hall), assistant professor of management, and Dean Shepherd, the Ray and Milann Siegfried Professor of Entrepreneurship, both at Notre Dame's Mendoza College of Business, along with Boris Nikolaev from Baylor University.

"Our study shows people who have invested in [formal education](#) do not tend to be more satisfied in their [jobs](#)," Solomon said. "We found that better-educated individuals do enjoy greater job-related resources including income, job autonomy and variety. But they also endure longer work hours and increased job pressure, intensity and urgency. On average, these demands are associated with increased [stress](#) and decreased job satisfaction, largely offsetting the positive gains associated with greater resources."

In supplemental analyses, the team found that women were more likely to experience an increased negative association between education and job satisfaction, and self-employed individuals experienced a reduced negative association.

"Women still face workplace adversity that can undermine the positive returns on their educational investment," Solomon said. "This dynamic is particularly important given the reversal of the gender gap in education, with more women completing [higher education](#) than men. We explored the notion that the education-job satisfaction link is negative and stronger for women and discovered that, compared to their highly educated male counterparts, highly educated women experience more stress at work and lower job satisfaction."

Relative to traditional occupations, self-employment offers considerable flexibility to organize one's work schedule, choose the work content and decide how to respond to job demands.

"We found that, compared to their wage-employed counterparts, those in [self-employment](#) seem to be more insulated from the adverse effects of education on job stress and satisfaction," Solomon said. "We believe illuminating this boundary condition is notable for the educated and organizations that value and want to retain their educated employees."

The researchers do not suggest avoiding higher education in an effort to achieve higher job satisfaction, but recommend a realistic calculation of trade-offs between "good" and "bad" working conditions and the associated stress and job satisfaction.

"Balancing those conditions that lead to both stress and job [satisfaction](#) may help workers recalibrate their values and ultimately make decisions that suit their priorities," Solomon said. "Leaders may also consider better ways to manage the greater demands encountered by their highly educated employees so that exploiting an organization's greatest human capital does not backfire. For example, by removing incentives for employees to take on excessive work hours, organizations can avoid inadvertently pressuring employees to incur stress that undermines [job satisfaction](#)."

"Many people pursue higher [education](#) to get a better job on paper, not realizing that this 'better job' isn't actually better due to the unanticipated effects of demands and stress over time," Solomon said. "It's good for people to be realistic about the career paths they pursue and what they ultimately value."

**More information:** [Does Educational Attainment Promote Job Satisfaction? The Bittersweet Trade-offs Between Job Resources.](#)

[Demands and Stress](#)

Provided by University of Notre Dame

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