

NOTA DE PREMSA

Reduced working hours benefit health, but may increase gender differences

- *According to a study by the Hospital del Mar Research Institute, Pompeu Fabra University, Sant Joan de Deu Research Institute and Sant Joan de Déu Health Park, working fewer hours while maintaining the same salary has a positive effect on physical and mental health and work-life balance*
- *However, it also finds that, in the experiences evaluated, the measure may increase the unequal distribution of roles between women and men. It notes that women devote more time to caregiving and domestic work, while men spend more on leisure*
- *The researchers conducted a systematic review of the scientific evidence surrounding this type of measure. They highlight that any initiative in this field must also include an analysis of other working conditions that may have an impact on health*

Barcelona, March 5th, 2026 – **Working fewer hours while earning the same salary** has a **positive impact on worker health**. A logical conclusion, but one that cannot overlook other impacts of this type of measure, such as the **unequal distribution of roles between women and men**. A finding highlighted by a study conducted by the Centre for Research in Occupational Health (CISAL), a joint research group between the Hospital del Mar Research Institute and Pompeu Fabra University; the Primary Care and Mental Health Technology Assessment Group (PRISMA), from the Sant Joan de Déu Health Park (PSSJD); and the Sant Joan de Déu Research Institute (IRSJD), along with researchers from the Centre for Biomedical Network Research on Epidemiology and Public Health (CIBERESP). The study has been published in the *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health*.

To reach these conclusions, the team of researchers analysed studies published in the past eleven years on reduced working hour experiences. Altogether, **fifteen studies and reports** focusing on **sixteen experiences carried out across Europe**. Of these, seven were implemented in Scandinavian countries, five in Western Europe, two in Spain and three across various regions. Thirteen were carried out within the public sector and only two in the private sector, with none in the industrial sector. Across the various interventions, the working hours were reduced by between 10% and 25%.

Overall, all the studies indicate that working fewer hours while earning the same salary has a positive impact on mental and physical health and work-life balance, although some note that negative effects may initially occur as employees adapt to the new situation. **All analysed studies reported improvements in work-life balance**, while 82% found benefits for mental health, including reduced stress, less fatigue and burnout, lower anxiety and greater capacity for recovery. 58% showed improvements in overall health and wellbeing, including both self-perceived health and the feeling of happiness and life satisfaction. The individuals who took part in these measures experienced better rest, lower levels of fatigue and more time with their

families. They also exercised more and presented lower rates of obesity, according to certain studies.

Effects which may be attributed to a decreased exposure to stressful work situations. The measure also afforded them more time to enjoy life outside work.

More pronounced gender roles

Despite the improvements, Dr Mireia Utzet, a researcher from the CISAL Group and co-first author of the study, notes that ***“simply reducing working hours is not enough; other initiatives with a gender perspective are also necessary.”*** The study indicates that, overall, the measures implemented to reduce working hours lead **women to dedicate more time to caregiving and domestic tasks**, while men use the extra time for personal activities.

“If we only reduce the working hours, without a more structural change in how life and society are organized, this reduction in working hours will affect women and men differently,” Utzet explains. In this regard, the study’s conclusions indicate that, while the measures are not less beneficial for women, they may intensify gender-based social divisions.

According to Dr Mercè Soler, a researcher from the Sant Joan de Déu Health Park and Sant Joan de Déu Research Institute and co-first author of the study, ***“a gender perspective must be incorporated into the debate on reduced working hours, because creating a genuinely healthier society for both women and men is not just a matter of work schedules.”***

At the same time, the research team notes that, for there to be a positive effect, reduced working hours cannot be met by increased demands to perform the same job in less time. They warn that without additional organizational measures to enhance working or employment conditions, workers will not see positive effects, and the negative aspects of job instability will persist. In this sense, they argue that any such initiative must include an analysis of other working and employment conditions that may have an impact on worker health.

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Cited paper

Utzet M, Soler M, Ramada JM, Menéndez M, Silva-Peñaherrera M, Benavides FG, Serra C. Exploring the health and well-being benefits of reduced working hours with maintained salary: A scoping review and evidence map. Scand J Work Environ Health. 2026 Jan 26:4266. doi: [10.5271/sjweh.4266](https://doi.org/10.5271/sjweh.4266). Epub ahead of print. PMID: 41582927.

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