
Balancing Work & Social Life

Interactive readings “Men’s health situation: addressing men’s lack of understanding of their health problems”

➤ Introduction, what does “balancing work and social life” really means?

Most adults today have to balance paid work with their social life. For many, this means maintaining a full-time job while also fulfilling caregiving responsibilities such as raising children, taking care of elders, spending time with partners and loved ones, and being involved in community activities. This equilibrium is commonly referred to as part of the work-life balance and is increasingly recognized as integral for our health and well-being.

➤ What causes a poor work-life balance?

Several studies from European countries have shown that there are key factors tied to poor work-life balance:

- **Job strain:** it refers to an employment situation in which the worker has very high job demands but little control over those demands.
- **Effort-reward imbalance:** it occurs when an employee invests a lot of effort to meet work demands (e.g., workload and work deadlines), but the returns they receive are disproportionately less.
- **Job insecurity:** refers to the overall concern about the continued existence of a job in the future.

➤ How is work-life balance considered in the EU?

In 2019, the EU adopted The Work-Life Balance Directive (Directive (EU) 2019/1158), with the goal of ensuring a better balance between work and social life for both genders. Work-life balance is necessary because poor work-life balance contributes to health problems for both men and women.

This is particularly true for many parents and carers in the EU, who have struggled to combine paid work with family responsibilities, often preventing men from participating enough at home, creating inequality between both parents/carers.

The Work-Life Balance Directive therefore encourages men and women to share caregiving responsibilities more equally.

This law established minimum standards for equal access to suitable leave, flexible working arrangements, and access to care services.

For men, it introduced:

- The right to request a **paternity leave** of at least 10 working days around the time of the child's birth, compensated at least at the level of sick pay.
- The right to request a **carers' leave** for workers providing personal care or support to a relative. They will be entitled to five days of leave per year.
- The right for fathers and carers to request **flexible working arrangements** and protection against unfair dismissal related to exercising these rights

➤ What is flexible working?

Flexible working is one of the main tools used to balance work and social life, especially for parents and carers. Different types of flexible working exist to accommodate to workers' needs:

- **Flexitime:** The workers work a standard core time, but can choose how to spread those hours over the week, within agreed limits.
- **Staggered hours:** it consists in a 'shift system' in which the starting and ending work times for staff vary to allow staff coverage for defined periods (e.g., week per week, day to day). The working time can be fixed and scheduled by the employer or arranged with the employer and 'self-managed' by the staff within their own department or office.
- **Compressed hours:** With this arrangement, the usual number of working days per week can be compressed, which means workers can take a regular day off by either starting early or finishing late. In both cases, the overall number of hours remains the same.
- **Annualised hours / Structured time off in lieu:** work hours are assigned per year rather than per week and also in accordance with peaks activity or demand. This can be implemented following two models (core hours and unallocated hours used for peaks or demands; extra hours on weeks where they are needed allowing to take paid time off on slower periods)
- **Job sharing:** here, a full-time job is divided between two similarly competent part-time workers. Compensation is apportioned between the workers, thus leading to a net reduction in per-employee income uptime.
- **Homeworking/Teleworking:** it consists in working from home and implies making use of computers and other electronic devices to do work from home and communicate directly with the office base.
- **Part-time:** it consists in working less than the normal hours. Part-time work can be organised in several different ways (Several fixed daily working hours, Other fixed cycles, Flexible working hours on demand...)

➤ How does poor work-life balance affect men?

First, a poor work life balance can be a cause of stress thus leading to poor physical health (especially heart diseases). Improving work-life balance can lower stress and the risks of suffering from cardiovascular incidents, improving one's overall health.

Second, the risk of isolation and overall unhappiness when workers neglect their social life is very high, and this can damage workers' mental health, leading to issues like depression or anxiety.

- In 2019, 5.5% of the European male population aged 15 and over reported experiencing chronic depression because of their workplace, keeping in mind that most men struggling with depression are undiagnosed.

Third, men are most affected by accidents in their work-place, which can be a result of poorly balancing work and social life. Indeed, men usually spend more time at work than women, increasing exhaustion and exposure to risks.

- In 2023, around 2 out of every 3 (67.6%) non-fatal accidents at work in the EU involved men.

Finally, poor work-life balance can damage a worker's social relationship, especially with his family. According to the report of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), gender norms, workplace cultures and financial considerations often discourage fathers from taking parental leave. Thus, this can create a feeling of inequality between parents/carers and create a distance between male workers and their children. This can add to the feeling of isolation and stress, increasing the risks of mental health issues.

Questions

Question 1: Poor work-life balance:

- a) affect men's mental health.
- b) can cause isolation.
- c) is a sign of dedication to the workplace

Correct answer: a) and b)

Explanation: Poor work-life balance has detrimental affect on both social life and mental health (burn-out, depression...) and can also impact an individual's work in negative way in the long-term

Question 2: The Work-life balance Directive has for goal(s)?

- a) To ensure good work behaviour
- b) To invite men and women to share responsibilities
- c) To make sure that private life doesn't impact the workplace

Correct answer: b)

Explanation: The European Work-life Balance Directive allows men and women to share responsibilities more equally regarding caregiving and parenthood, by giving men the right to request a paternity leave, a carer's leave or flexible working arrangements

Video

YouTube video : "Work-life Balance – The School of life"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MPR3o6Hnf2g>

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