

Singles need work / life balance too

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(Medical Xpress)—If you think balancing work and family demands is one of the central challenges of modern life, you might be surprised to learn that parents score better than their childless counterparts on the work/life balance scale.

New research by Professor Jarrod Haar from Massey University has compared the levels of work/[life balance](#) achieved by [parents](#) and non-parents with some surprising results.

Professor Haar surveyed 609 parents and 708 non-parents for his study. He found that 52 per cent of parents felt happy with their work/life balance, while only 42 per cent of those without children felt they were achieving balance.

"I found that work/life balance was important and broadly identical for both samples – but the parent group actually had slightly better results than the non-parent group," he says.

"It's not about kids or no kids. Everyone has multiple roles they are trying to balance. It might be work and sports or, if you're religious, your church – and that can be just as draining and hard to juggle as someone who has [young kids](#)."

Professor Haar also found that, for those able to achieve a decent level of work/life balance, the results were equally beneficial.

"Work/life balance was equally important to both groups in the study,

and in both cases achieving balance led to greater job and [life satisfaction](#) and better mental health. It's a reminder to managers not to categorise people as parents or non-parents, and then assume the non-parents don't have anything important going on."

Professor Haar says it is often easier for parents to maintain a clear line between work and non-[work time](#).

"Parents are better at getting up and leaving the office at the end of the day," he says. "It's easy to flag going to the gym and stay at your desk, but you can't decide not pick the kids up from daycare! Maybe parents are just a little more skilled at achieving that balance because they have to be."

Feeling good about your work/life balance is also a lot about perception. Professor Haar says it's not about the number of things you do, but how you feel about doing those things and whether you feel you are doing them well.

"There are good life skills that come with balancing multiple roles well – it makes you feel good about yourself and you are more likely to cope with unexpected additional stresses.

"You could have 100 things on and think, 'Woohoo, I'm really achieving here'. Or you could have two things on and think, 'Oh, I can't handle this'. It's about your perceived ability to cope – if you're somehow managing to do it all to your satisfaction, then go for it. One person's exhaustion is another's exhilaration."

Professor Haar says the key piece of advice to come out of his research is the value of flexibility, both from an individual and company standpoint.

"At a personal level my advice would be to take stock of all the things in your life and decide which are the important ones. Focus on those and be a bit flexible with yourself if you don't achieve the less important ones all the time."

He says employers need to recognise that work/life balance policies are good for everyone, not just those with children. Flexible start and finish times, for example, can benefit all employees.

"Accommodating the needs of parents is a good thing, but you can be single and childless and still lead a busy, stressful life. Policies that focus solely on parents must make single employees feel discriminated against at times."

Key statistics:

- 52% of parents felt they were achieving above average levels of work/life balance versus 42% of non-parents.
- 37% of parents said they experienced above average levels of job burnout versus 48% of non-parents.
- 43% of parents said they experienced above average levels of anxiety versus 54% of non-parents
- 39% of parents said they experienced above average levels of depression versus 50% of non-parents
- 61% of parents said they had above average levels of job satisfaction versus 43% of non-parents
- 61% of parents said they had above average levels of life satisfaction versus 48% of non-parents.

Provided by Massey University

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