

An additional 20 minutes commuting each day lowers job satisfaction equivalent to a 19% pay cut

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Credit: University of the West of England

An additional 20 minutes of commuting each working day is equivalent to a 19 percent annual pay cut when it comes to measuring how satisfied people say they are with their jobs, a new study has found.

Researchers from the University of the West of England (UWE Bristol) examined the impacts of commuting to work on the wellbeing of more than 26,000 employees in England over a five year period.

The study revealed that, all else being equal, every extra minute of commuting time reduces [job satisfaction](#) and leisure time satisfaction, increases strain and worsens mental health.

Principal Investigator, Dr Kiron Chatterjee, an Associate Professor in Travel Behaviour at UWE Bristol, said: "While longer commute times were found to reduce job satisfaction, it is also clear that people take on longer commutes partly to increase their earnings, which in turn improves job satisfaction. This raises interesting questions over whether the additional income associated with longer commutes fully compensates for the negative aspects of the journey to work."

Other findings from the 18-month study include:

- Those who walk or cycle to work do not report reductions in leisure time satisfaction in the same way as other commuters, even with the same duration of commute.
- Bus commuters feel the negative impacts of longer commute times more strongly than users of other modes of transport.
- Longer duration commutes by rail are associated with less strain than shorter commutes by rail.
- Longer commute times reduce women's job satisfaction more than that of men's.

Dr Chatterjee said: "The findings indicate that longer journeys to work have adverse subjective wellbeing effects, particularly through loss of free time.

"On the other hand, longer commute times were not found to have a large impact on life satisfaction overall. This is because people take on longer commutes for good reasons relating to improving their employment, housing and family situations and these factors serve to increase [life satisfaction](#). This does not mean that the negative subjective

wellbeing impacts of longer commutes can be disregarded. The acceptance that a long commute is a price to pay may only persist if it is considered unavoidable and a social norm."

The average commuting time per day in England has risen from 48 minutes to 60 minutes over the past 20 years, with one in seven commuters now spending at least two hours a day travelling to and from work.

Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, the UWE Bristol study was undertaken to better understand the impact of commuting on people's lives.

Researchers used data from Understanding Society an innovative world-leading study about 21st century life, in which members of 40,000 households are surveyed every year. The data was used to examine how changes in subjective wellbeing from one year to the next were related to changing commuting circumstances.

The findings showed working from home, walking to work and shorter commute times increase job satisfaction and that shorter commute times make it more likely that an employee will remain in their job.

Researchers found job satisfaction decreases with the amount of time spent travelling to work, with an additional 20 minutes of commuting to and from work each working day being associated with the equivalent effect on job satisfaction as a 19 percent reduction in personal income.

Dr Chatterjee, who worked on the study with UWE Bristol academics Dr Ben Clark, Dr Adrian Davis and Dr Deirdre Toher together with Dr Adam Martin from the University of Leeds, said: "One finding that we did not fully anticipate at the study outset is the clear link between longer duration commutes, commuting mode and job satisfaction.

"An important message for employers is that job [satisfaction](#) can be improved if workers have opportunities to reduce the time spent commuting, to work from home, and/or to walk or cycle to work – such commuting opportunities are likely to be good news for employee wellbeing and retention and hence reduced costs to businesses."

Provided by University of the West of England

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