

Working in the same industry or occupation increases a couple's wellbeing

*The manifold consequences of working in the same industry or occupation as one's partner ('being work-linked') have largely been overlooked by previous research, argue **Juliane Hennecke** and **Clemens Hetschko**. Their study confirms the 'power-couple hypothesis': when they are work-linked, their wellbeing increases.*

Both working life and love life are crucial for individual happiness. The challenge is to balance the two. For many, this becomes more difficult as working from home becomes more common. In addition, digitisation makes everyone easy-to-reach, wherever they are. These developments, which blur the boundaries between private and professional life, have been extensively scrutinised by researchers. In contrast, research has so far largely overlooked the case of work-linked couples, for which the line between the job domain and the private domain has always been hard to draw. In our work, we examine how working in the same industry and occupation as one's partner affects the wellbeing of individuals, as compared to partners who work in different settings.

The problems such a work link between partners can create seem all too obvious. Partners may struggle to balance working life and private life if they have similar work demands and schedules, and the same issues are present at work and at home. As a result, being work-linked to one's partner may make it harder to rest and sleep well. Plus, you shouldn't put all your eggs in one basket, as they say. If both partners have the same occupation and work in the same industry, the risks to their income and job security are highly correlated. Just think of two partners working in the hospitality sector during a pandemic.

So, will the work link be costly for workers in terms of their wellbeing? A number of reasons suggest otherwise, although they might be less salient, or pay off only in the longer term. Partners who work in the same occupation or industry can support each other with information and networks. They may have a better understanding of the job demands of their partners and might be able to help each other with their work or to find jobs. As a result, they potentially support each other in climbing the career ladder, receive higher incomes and enjoy better job quality. Prominent examples come to mind: Özlem Türeci and Ugur Sahin, the copreneurial couple that invented the first Covid-19 vaccine, as well as lawyers Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Marty Ginsburg who greatly benefitted each other's careers.

Given the many possible consequences of a work link, we have turned to a survey on people's overall life satisfaction to measure the aggregate impact of a work link on workers' quality of life. In the process, we compare work-linked employees to workers whose partners are also employed but don't work in the same industry or occupation. The statistical challenge is to deal with the fact that work-linked couples appear more often in some settings than in others, such as teaching professions as compared to, for example, technical professions. Accordingly, the wellbeing of work-linked couples might differ from the well-being of non-linked couples for reasons that are unrelated to the link itself. Our representative and rich German dataset, the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), allows us to take these differences into account. Moreover, we can use the fact that the probability of being work-linked differs across industries and occupations to approximate the individual's probability to be work-linked as if it was determined independently of the individual's characteristics and preferences.

Our results indicate that the benefits of being work-linked in working life outperform the potential problems associated with it in terms of work-life balance: a work link benefits overall life satisfaction. The German survey also ascertains people's satisfaction with their jobs, income, leisure and family life. Income satisfaction seems to benefit the strongest from working in the same occupation and industry as one's partner. The analyses also point to higher job satisfaction in work-linked than in non-linked couples, especially for women. In contrast, no differences are found when it comes to the satisfaction with leisure and with family life.

Does this mean we should all work in the same industry, perhaps even for the same company, as our partners? A note of caution is warranted. Workplace romance raises multiple issues our study cannot take into account. Plus, when examining settings where the work link seems closest, such as in self-employed couples, the positive effects for the average work-linked couple can no longer be found. Hence, some distance between the working environments of partners still seems advisable. What is more, the positive well-being effect of being work-linked is concentrated on well-educated, high-income couples ('power couples'). So, it still depends on the individual's situation whether being work-linked to one's partner will actually pay off or not.

After all, happier workers are also more productive workers, which is why employers should care, too. When hiring highly demanded workers who need to relocate, firms often provide job search support for the partners. Given the wellbeing effects of being work-linked, employers should not look too far, if job opportunities for the partner of exceptional talents can be found in the same industry.



Notes:

- *This blog post is based on [“Do you really want to share everything? The wellbeing of work-linked couples”](#).*
- *The post represents the views of the author(s), not the position of LSE Business Review or the London School of Economics.*
- *Featured [image](#) by [Priscilla Du Preez](#) on [Unsplash](#)*
- *Featured [image](#) by [Raimond Spekking](#), under a [CC-BY-SA-4.0](#) licence*
- *When you leave a comment, you're agreeing to our [Comment Policy](#).*