

Was beeinflusst subjektiven Zeitwohlstand? Erkenntnisse aus dem COVID-19-Lockdown in Deutschland

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Abstract

In diesem Beitrag untersuchen wir anhand von First-Difference-Regressionen, wie sich Änderungen bei Zeitnutzung und Arbeitsbedingungen während des Lockdowns auf den subjektiven Zeitwohlstand ausgewirkt haben. Unsere Analyse basiert auf repräsentativen Paneldaten von 787 Beschäftigten in Deutschland, die im Februar und April 2020 erhoben wurden. Die Regressionen werden zusätzlich getrennt nach Geschlecht und systemrelevanter Beschäftigung durchgeführt. Unsere Ergebnisse zeigen, dass sich die Reduktion der Arbeitszeit und die Zunahme der Schlafdauer positiv auf den Zeitwohlstand auswirkten. Hinsichtlich der Arbeitsbedingungen finden wir positive Effekte durch geringeren Zeitdruck, höhere Autonomie bei der Gestaltung der Arbeitszeit und eine bessere Vereinbarkeit von Beruf und Familie.

Extended Abstract

The Corona pandemic has changed every-day life dramatically for the majority of people within only a short period of time. During the first lockdown in spring 2020, many people experienced so-far unprecedented changes in time-use patterns and working conditions. While especially essential workers experienced considerably higher workloads, for other groups of employees work hours decreased. In extreme cases they fell to zero, due to short-time work or lay-offs. The closing of schools and day-care facilities posed a particular challenge for working parents. Previous research shows that it was mostly women who had to bear the brunt of additional childcare (Hipp and Bünning, 2020; Kohlrausch and Zucco, 2020). Despite the onerous and emotionally stressful situation of the lockdown, the general pace of life slowed down. Instead of constantly rushing from one to the next appointment, many people experienced so-far unknown times of idleness and empty calendars (Eckhardt and Husemann, 2020).

In our contribution, we assess whether changes in time use and working conditions during the lockdown in spring 2020 have increased subjective time wealth. Our analysis draws on individual level panel data collected in February and April 2020, covering 787 employees in Germany. This data provides a unique opportunity to trace the changes in time use and subjective time wealth during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Wealth in time has repeatedly been discussed as an alternative measure of prosperity (e.g. Reisch, 2001; Rinderspacher, 2002; Schor, 2011). It is not only questionable whether ever-rising material wealth contributes to individuals' wellbeing (Diener and Seligman, 2004); high-income earners also have the highest ecological footprint (Moser and Kleinhüchelkotten, 2018). Concurrently, time scarcity may lead to unsustainable consumption patterns. This is because time-saving goods and services are often highly resource- and energy-intensive compared to its time-intensive counterparts, with mobility being a case in point (Knight et al., 2013). Against this backdrop, time wealth might not only enhance human well-being, but also reduce ecological degradation.

To measure time wealth, we draw on a recently developed scale by Geiger et al. (submitted). While this measurement instrument originally covers five dimensions, our analysis focuses on the dimension of free time. The latter has been identified as general reference dimension in a S-1 model, explaining a large proportion of variance of all items on time wealth. Regarding time use, we consider the number of hours individuals spend on different activities per day, such as paid work or sleep. Data on working conditions, such as time pressure or reconciliation with private life, was measured on a 5-point Likert scale. We also use data on whether a person was able to (predominantly) work from home during the lockdown.

In a first step, we provide a descriptive analysis on how the above-mentioned measures have changed during the lockdown. We find a small increase in subjective time wealth. Daily working hours have decreased, while time spent on night sleep, rest, housework, care, internet and media use has increased. Time wealth is in general lower for women and people working in essential occupations. On average, essential workers sleep less and work longer hours compared to other occupational groups. As expected, essential workers also had less possibilities to switch to remote work, and they saw their working conditions hardly improved. Women's disadvantage is mainly reflected in an exacerbated gender-care gap during the pandemic.

In a second step, we apply first-difference regressions to examine the change in time wealth between February and April 2020. First-difference models only consider the change in certain variables between two points in time, but neglect the level of these variables. Applied to our case, we examine which changes in time use and working conditions are related to changes in individuals' subjective time wealth. By restricting our analysis to changes within individuals over time, we are able to control for unobserved heterogeneity emerging from all observed and unobserved stable characteristics of one person (Wooldridge, 2012). To unveil differences in different subpopulations, regressions are also conducted separately for women and men, as well as for essential and non-essential workers.

Our results show that the decline in working hours and the increase in sleep duration had a positive effect on subjective time wealth. Regarding working conditions, we find that decreased time pressure, higher autonomy in organising one's working day, and improved reconciliation of work and family life positively affected time wealth. While most effects are similar for all considered subgroups, only non-essential workers seem to benefit from switching to remote work.

Drawing on a unique panel dataset surveyed shortly before and during the lockdown in Spring 2020, this analysis provides valuable insights on how changes in time use and working conditions affect time wealth. Our results suggest that a reduction in working hours as well as improved working conditions contributes to an improvement of subjective time wealth among employed persons.

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Eckhardt GM and Husemann KC (2020) How to maintain a slower pace of life after lockdown. Available at: <http://theconversation.com/how-to-maintain-a-slower-pace-of-life-after-lockdown-140088> (accessed 29 April 2021).

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