



## FAST FACTS

# Questions and Answers About the Effects of Commuting Strain on Job Performance and Home Life

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### What is commuting strain?

- **Fact 1:** “Commuting strain can be defined as the negative affective and cognitive reactions to threats, demands, and challenges in the commute environment that are experienced by the commuters during commute.” (Zhou, et al 2017:892).

### What contributes to commuting strain?

- **Fact 1:** “Experiences of daily commute stressors are positively related to commuting strain, which, in turn, impairs employee’s self-regulation at work.” (Zhou et al 2017:912).
- **Fact 2:** “We define commuting stressors as conditions and events during commute that evoke the stress process and induce strain. These events and conditions reside in the environment, are external to a person’s psychological processes, and can vary across time, situations, and individuals. These conditions and events are driven by a wide range of factors (e.g., road condition, weather, schedules of other commuters, etc.) and are unlikely to share a common cause.” (Zhou et al 2017:895).
- **Fact 3:** “Stress-inducing factors include longer travel time, low predictability, parental duties (here: dropping off/collecting children), and to some extent transport mode” (Denstadli et al 2017:92).

### What are the effects of commuting strain on job role performance?

- **Fact 1:** “On days with a strenuous ride from home to work, commuters indicated higher irritability and lower concentration capacity at work.” (Wiese et al 2020:132).
- **Fact 2:** “Longer commutes are related to lower commitment and lower perceived well-being. In line with conservation of resources theory, a longer commute means using more personal resources and energy which can then no longer be used for other purposes.” (Emre and Spiegeleare 2021:2459).
- **Fact 3:** “Our current finding suggests that self-regulation at work is sensitive to stressful experience such that even less work-relevant stressors (e.g., commuting stressors) may impair individuals’ regulatory capacity at work when competing demands for self-regulation from the non-work domain (e.g., family interference with work) exist.” (Zhou et al 2017:908).

### What are the effects of commuting strain on family role performance?

- **Fact 1:** “Commute satisfaction is more influential than any of the seven “general” predictors of work-family balance (e.g., hours worked per week working and work flexibility), which previous research has highlighted as key determinants for individuals' satisfaction with work-family balance.” (Denstadli et al 2017:93).
- **Fact 2:** “Stress effects of commuting on irritability at home seemed to be slightly stronger than on irritability at work.” (Wiese et al 2020:132).
- **Fact 3:** “On average, long-distance commuter couples have a 40 per cent higher risk of separating than do non-commuting couples (14 per cent of the long-distance commuting couples separated compared with 10 per cent of the non-commuting couples).” (Sandow et al 2014:534).
- **Fact 4:** “The stress perspective provides a framework for understanding the health impacts of commuting. This perspective argues that commuting long distances is harmful because it increases the incidence of disruptive negative events (e.g., unexpected delays, interactions with belligerent persons), reduces capacity to manage other life demands, and limits opportunities for leisure and recovery.” (Rüger 2017:104).
- **Fact 5:** “Commutes impose considerable costs on the traveler in terms of money (fuel, vehicle maintenance, and depreciation); the opportunity cost of time which could be put to other uses; possible emotional costs such as stress, frustration, and boredom during and even after the trip; and danger, for example due to the chance of a car crash.” (Morris and Zhou 2018:101).

- **Fact 6:** “The descriptive analysis reveals strong gender inequalities between men’s and women’s engagement in household tasks, especially when there is less (leisure) time because of long daily commutes.” (Stenpaß and Kley 2020:284).
- **Fact 7:** “In cases where the woman is a daily long-distance commuter, 53% of the couples share housework equally (54% childcare). However, in couples where the man commutes long distance daily, only 23% share housework and childcare equally.” (Stenpaß and Kley 2020:284).

### How can individuals offset the impact of commuting strain?

- **Fact 1:** “Although commuting stressors are difficult to avoid, they do not necessarily have to impair work. It is possible for commuters to weaken the negative effects of commuting strain on self-regulation at work by identifying and recognizing the importance of their tasks, and proactively preventing family interference with work.” (Zhou et al 2017:909).
- **Fact 2:** “Employees should consider the potential health impacts when choosing a commuting arrangement. When faced with a very long commute, individuals might consider moving closer to their place of employment or, if such a move is not possible, arrangements to reduce their required commuting frequency (e.g., telecommuting several days a week or establishing a secondary residence closer to their workplace). Individuals could also attempt to make their commutes less stressful, for example by choosing easier modes of transport.” (Rüger 2017:106).
- **Fact 3:** “The significant and positive impact of “opportunities to work” indicate that utilizing travel time for work-related or other productive tasks to some degree compensate for the negative impacts of travel time.” (Denstadli et al 2017:92).
- **Fact 4:** “When commuters had high confidence in their primary transportation means in term of delivering them to work safely and on time, their self-regulation at work was less negatively impacted by the commute stress experience.” (Zhou et al 2017:912).

### How can organizations/workplaces offset the negative impacts of commuting strain?

- **Fact 1:** “Organizations can support flexible work models, such as flexible annual work hours, personalized daily work hours, telecommuting, and compressed work weeks. Such arrangements can reduce the number of days employees must commute, allowing employees to better align commuting demands with their family and life responsibilities and to schedule their commutes to avoid heavy traffic, unexpected delays, or other stressful aspects of commuting.” (Rüger 2017:106).

- **Fact 2:** “Another way to help employees recover from resource depletion due to commute is to allow them to take a short break between commute and work, which encourages a temporary psychological detachment from commute. In addition to sleep and short breaks at work, longer breaks from commute (e.g., telecommute on Fridays).” (Zhou et al 2017:909).
- **Fact 3:** “the negative effects of commuting are partially mediated by work-life balance. This suggests that companies could compensate for workers’ long commutes by providing other means to increase their work-life balance such as introducing flexi-time and telework and providing social support.” (Emre and Spiegeleare 2021:2462).

### How can policy makers offset the negative effects of commuting strain?

- **Fact 1:** “At the public policy level, commuting infrastructure should be designed to permit faster, more flexible, and more comfortable transit between work and home. For example, layout and wayfinding in transit stations can be designed to optimize passenger flow, and car traffic control systems can be optimized to increase speed and reduce stopping. Public transit systems can also be designed to service more areas and be faster, more reliable, and more comfortable. Such enhancements can reduce commuting’s direct negative stressors (e.g., delays, crowding, noise), as well as its indirect impacts (e.g., employees could use a long ride on a comfortable train to complete work tasks, manage non-work demands, or simply as a time for personal recovery).” (Rüger 2017:106).
- **Fact 2:** “commuting is valued when there are few interruptions and concerns for unexpected changes and/or interruptions, emphasizing that a reliable transport system is vital for reducing commuters’ stress levels.” (Denstadli et al 2017:92).
- **Fact 3:** “For many commuters mode choice is related to economic and infrastructure conditions created by planning, policy, and funding decisions. This study suggests that one element that might be taken into account by transportation and planning agencies in making these decisions is the impact of commuting mode on stress. Choices that reduce travel time and effort and/or increase predictability may have important benefits to the worker and to the public at large. Reduction in stress could be another benefit of enhanced public transit infrastructure in addition to well documented environmental benefits.” (Wener and Evans 2011:115).

### References

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