

# Enjoying work: An effective strategy in the struggle to juggle?

by Judith A. Frederick and Janet E. Fast

**M**any Canadians feel they just don't have time to accommodate both paid and unpaid work in a busy schedule. They may also feel that neither their family nor their job is getting their best. The resulting stress is a concern for employees and employers alike since it may lead to burnout, poor health, dissatisfaction with life at home or on the job, lower productivity and employee turnover.<sup>1</sup> People with the most intense demands on their time (for example, employed mothers) are under the most stress.<sup>2</sup>

1. Koeske, Gary F., Stuart A. Kirk and Randi D. Koeske. 1993. "Coping with job stress: Which strategies work best?" *The British Psychological Society*. 319-335.

2. Frederick, Judith A. 1995. *As Time Goes By... Time Use of Canadians, General Social Survey, 1992*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 89-544E.

## CST What you should know about this study

The data for this article were drawn from the 1998 General Social Survey (GSS) on time use. Interviews were conducted over a 12-month period with more than 11,000 Canadians aged 15 and over living in private households in the 10 provinces. Respondents were asked to record their activities, and the amount of time spent on those activities, in a 24-hour diary. They were also asked whether they enjoyed doing certain activities, including their paid work and housework, and to describe how they perceived the balance between their work and family responsibilities, time pressures and their life as a whole.<sup>1</sup>

This study is based on the data collected from respondents with paid employment. Logistic regression analysis was used to estimate how time spent on paid work and housework and enjoyment of these activities were related to the three quality-of-life indicators. Models were developed separately for women and men because, despite similar attitudes to work, women and men experience work in different ways.

**Paid work:** employment in a job or business from which the respondent earned wages, salaries or income from self-employment.

**Housework/house cleaning:** indoor and outdoor cleaning, laundry, ironing, mending.

**Time crunch:** respondent answered "yes" to 7 of 10 questions designed to measure whether people perceive themselves as having insufficient time during the day to accomplish what they need to do.

**Satisfied:** respondent is very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the balance between work and family lives and with her or his life in general.

**Not satisfied:** respondent is somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

1. Parents were not asked whether they enjoyed providing child care; consequently, no assessment could be made of how this task affected parents' perceived quality of life.

However, there are big differences in the levels of stress reported by different groups of adults. Because stress is so problematic, understanding why people in similar situations experience different levels of stress is important. One explanation offered by research is exercising control over one's environment, which can buffer the negative effects of stress. But there is another possible answer: whether people like what they do. Some research suggests that people who enjoy the work they do tend to feel less stress and report a better quality of life than people who do not.<sup>3</sup> Does enjoying the things we do buffer the effect of intense demands on our lives?

This article uses information from the 1998 General Social Survey (GSS) on time use to determine whether enjoyment of paid work and household work influences our perception of quality of life as measured by three indicators: the perceived balance between work and family; perceived time pressure; and general life satisfaction.

### People happier with fewer hours of work

Nearly three-quarters of employed Canadians reported that they were satisfied with the balance they had achieved between work and family — 73% of women and 74% of men. About one-quarter can be described as time-crunched, although more women (27%) than men (22%) felt this way. Few workers reported that they were not satisfied with their life overall, at only about 9% of women and 7% of men.

Cutting back on time spent on paid work may help to alleviate the stress associated with increased home and family responsibilities.<sup>4</sup> The 1998 GSS data confirm that women who were satisfied with the balance between their paid work and their family demands spent less time on the job (34 hours) and on housework (6 hours) than those who were dissatisfied (38 hours and

	Women who are satisfied with their quality of life average less time on household work			
	Women		Men	
	Paid work	House cleaning	Paid work	House cleaning
	<b>Average hours/week</b>			
<b>Work-family balance</b>				
Satisfied	33.8	6.1	41.8	2.1
Not satisfied	37.7	6.8	49.0	2.4
<b>Time crunch</b>				
No	34.3	5.7	42.2	2.2
Yes	35.9	7.9	49.2	2.1
<b>Life satisfaction</b>				
Satisfied	35.1	6.1	43.6	2.2
Not satisfied	30.6	7.9	44.8	1.7

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1998.

	Adults who do not enjoy their work tend to score lower on the quality-of-life indicators		
	Not satisfied with work-family balance	Feeling time crunch %	Not satisfied with life overall
<b>Employed women</b>			
<b>Paid work</b>			
Enjoy	22	23	5
Dislike	53	41	21
<b>Housework</b>			
Enjoy	23	28	7
Dislike	30	28	8
<b>Employed men</b>			
<b>Paid work</b>			
Enjoy	20	18	5
Dislike	44	31	14
<b>Housework</b>			
Enjoy	24	23	8
Dislike	26	20	7

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1998.

almost 7 hours, respectively). Men who were happier with this element of their lives also spent less time on paid work but their satisfaction was not affected by time devoted to household chores.

The data reveal a similar pattern when stress due to time pressures is examined. Once again, housekeeping played a bigger role for women since housework was clearly related to time crunch for women but not for men.

- Robinson, John P. and G. Godbey. 1997. *Time for life: The surprising way Americans use their time*. University Park: Penn State Press.
- Fast, J.E. and J.A. Frederick. June 1996. *Perceived time stress: The role of demands and resources*. Paper presented at the annual conference of the Canadian Association for Research in Home Economics, St. Catharines.

	Employed women			Employed men		
	Satisfied with work–family balance	Feel time crunch	Satisfied with life overall	Satisfied with work–family balance	Feel time crunch	Satisfied with life overall
Like paid work	2.7	0.5	5.2	2.1	0.6	1.9
<b>Dislike paid work</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>
Additional hour of paid work	*	*	1.01	0.99	1.01	*
Additional hour if enjoyed paid work	0.99	1.01	*	*	*	*
Enjoy housework	1.3	*	*	*	1.4	*
<b>Dislike housework</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>
Additional hour of housework	0.99	1.04	*	*	*	*
Additional hour if enjoyed housework	*	*	*	*	*	*
Professionals/upper management	0.5	1.4	*	*	*	*
Semi-professionals/technicians/ middle management	0.6	*	*	*	*	*
Supervisors/forepersons	*	*	*	*	*	*
Skilled workers/farmers	*	*	*	*	*	*
Semi-skilled workers	*	*	*	*	0.7	1.6
<b>Unskilled workers</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>
Married	*	*	2.5	*	1.5	1.9
<b>Not married</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>
Child(ren) under 19 years	0.6	1.6	*	0.6	*	*
<b>No children</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>
Good or excellent health	2.9	0.5	3.4	2.0	0.4	6.4
<b>Poor or fair health</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>1.0</b>

\* Results not statistically significant from the benchmark group.

Note: This table presents the odds that an employed adult reports being satisfied as measured by three quality-of-life indicators, relative to the odds that a benchmark group will be satisfied (odds ratio), when all other variables in the analysis are held constant. The benchmark group is shown in boldface for each variable.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1998.

The data for life satisfaction tell a different story than the other two quality-of-life indicators. Women who were satisfied with life overall spent more time on paid work and fewer hours on cleaning the house. In contrast, men were more content if they worked fewer hours for pay and spent more time on housework.

### Enjoying work reduces stresses on time and on work–family balance

The question that arises now is whether a person’s enjoyment of work helps to reduce the negative effects of spending more time working. To answer it, a logistic regression model

was developed to calculate the odds of a person responding positively to each of the three quality-of-life indicators as the number of hours they work increases.<sup>5</sup> The results suggest that women and men could both benefit from adopting less traditional roles.

Compared with those who did not enjoy their paid work, both women and men who did enjoy it were over twice as likely to be satisfied with the balance between their job and family demands and half as likely to report being time-crunched. The same is true of overall life satisfaction, but the difference is particularly striking for women: the odds that a woman will

consider her life satisfactory were over five times higher for those who enjoyed their paid jobs than for those who did not.

Nevertheless, more hours were not necessarily beneficial to women who enjoyed their paid work. With each additional hour on the job, they were marginally less likely to be satisfied

5. Variables in the model were hours spent on paid work, hours spent on housework, enjoyment of paid work and housework, whether enjoyment of an activity mediated the effect of spending more time on it, occupation, marital status, presence of children, age and health.

with their work–family balance and more likely to feel time pressured.

Nor did enjoyment of paid work mitigate the relationship between the time men spent on the job and any of the quality of life indicators. Whether they liked their job or not, more time at paid work decreased their satisfaction with the work–family balance.

If a woman enjoyed doing housework, she was 30% more likely to be happy with the balance between work and family demands than if she did not. On the other hand, the small proportion of men who enjoyed housecleaning had 40% higher odds than other men of feeling time pressured. Nevertheless, devoting more time to housework produced lower scores on some quality-of-life measures. With each additional hour per week spent on housecleaning, the odds that women were satisfied with their work–family balance dropped 10% and their feeling of being time-crunched rose 4%.

### Professional and managerial women less satisfied than other workers

Of course, other factors more particular to an individual than work hours and work enjoyment can affect perceived quality of life. For example, women in middle and upper professional, technical or managerial positions might be expected to experience less stress because they have more control over their work lives than unskilled workers. Instead, it appears that adding the demands of a professional job to family responsibilities compounds stress and dissatisfaction. When all other variables in the model are held constant, women in higher level jobs had only half the odds of being satisfied with the balance between their work and family lives, and 40% higher odds of being time-crunched than women in unskilled jobs.

Having some support and companionship at home also is important to people's quality of life. Compared with

unmarried women and men, wives (2.5) and husbands (1.9) had considerably greater odds of being satisfied with life. But while women were just as pressed for time whether they were married or single, among men husbands felt more time-crunched than single men.

All other factors being equal, both mothers and fathers had lower odds than women and men without children of feeling satisfied with their work–family balance; mothers also had 60% higher odds of being time-crunched than other women.

The idea that good health is an important determinant of emotional well-being is strongly borne out by the data. Workers who reported they were in good to excellent health had much greater odds of scoring high on satisfaction with work–family balance and life overall than those whose self-assessed health status was fair or poor.

### Summary

The effect of work enjoyment on respondents' reported quality of life was universally beneficial. Both women and men who enjoyed paid work were happier with their work–family balance and with life overall and also felt less time-crunched. Similarly, enjoying housework improved women's sense of balance in their work–family relationship. These findings are consistent with Lowe's observation that quality of work is even more important to Canadians than earnings.<sup>6</sup>

But two of the most important findings were not expected. First, women who enjoyed their paid jobs did not report greater improvement in their quality of life as their hours increased. Second, men who enjoyed housework were more likely to be time stressed than those who did not.

Despite their increased participation in the workforce, women still retain primary responsibility for family care and household work; moreover, these tasks tend to be inflexible and unrelenting, and as such may interfere with women's

freedom to devote as much time and attention as they want to their preferred activity. Similarly, men who enjoy housework, and consequently do more of it, may be more time stressed because they have less time for their paid job to which they feel they should be fully committed. These findings are entirely consistent with an earlier study that shows women and men are equally committed to both paid work and family roles and that assigning them traditional gender responsibilities does both sexes a disservice.<sup>7</sup>

Greater satisfaction for both women and men might lie in a mutual exchange of tasks. It appears that women may be better off if they spent less time on housework and more on paid work, while the data clearly suggest that men would be happier if they spent less time on the job. Workplace policies that facilitate meeting simultaneous paid work and household obligations may achieve greater equity with respect to work and family demands for both women and men.

6. Lowe, Graham S. 2000. *The quality of work*. Don Mills: Oxford University Press.

7. Fast, J.E., B.J. Skrypnik and L.D. Burnstad. June 1994. *Men's and women's relative commitment to work and family roles*. Paper presented at the annual conference of the Canadian Association for Research in Home Economics, Calgary.



**Judith A. Frederick** is a senior analyst in the Housing, Family and Social Statistics Division, Statistics Canada, and **Janet E. Fast** is a professor in the Department of Human Ecology, University of Alberta.