

The time of our lives . . .

by Janet Fast, Judith Frederick, Nancy Zukewich and Sandra Franke

Like other resources, time is finite. Unlike other resources, time is shared equally by everyone. Each of us has only 24 hours in a day, so spending more time on one activity means that we must spend less time on others. The trade-offs we make between competing activities depend largely on the nature of our roles and obligations at each stage of life.

Have the time use patterns of Canadians changed over the past decade? This question can be answered using data from the 1986, 1992 and 1998 General Social Surveys. These surveys asked about 10,000 respondents aged 15 and over living in private households in the 10 provinces to complete a time use diary. The information collected in this way allows comparison of activities over the years.¹

The results of the surveys show that the general shape of time use over the life course has shifted somewhat over the past decade. Leisure activities — such as socializing, watching television, reading, going to events, playing sports and doing hobbies — are occupying a larger share of the day, but this is not necessarily because we are spending less time on the job. In fact, total work time — paid work, unpaid work and education — has increased for some, particularly for those with young families. Rather, the extra leisure time seems

to come from devoting less time to personal care activities like sleeping, eating, washing and dressing.

Gender has an impact on time use at virtually every stage of life. Compared to men, women continue to spend relatively less time on paid work and more time on unpaid work such as domestic chores, voluntary work, adult and child care. Women also tend to have less leisure time and to spend slightly more time on personal care activities.

Nevertheless, men have increased the amount of time devoted to unpaid work over the last 12 years. It has not, however, eliminated gender differences with respect to work, particularly for married women.

1. The 1992 and 1998 surveys were conducted over 12 months of the year, while the 1986 survey was carried out in November; for this reason, there may be some seasonality in the 1986 estimates.

15- to 24-year-olds without children

Students² today are spending less time studying and more time working for pay than they did a decade ago. On the other hand, they also have more leisure time, so that overall, the time they devote to total work has declined. Nevertheless, women still do more total work because they do about half an hour more unpaid work per day than men.

Employed³ young women and men 15 to 24 are spending less time at their paid work (including overtime and commuting time) than in 1986; instead, they are spending more time on unpaid work and leisure activities. Unlike students, young workers of both sexes spent about the same amount of time on total work in 1998, although paid and unpaid work were distributed differently.

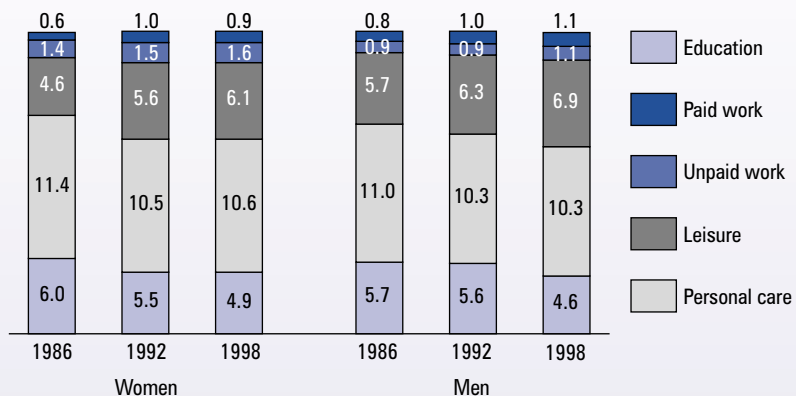
25- to 44-year-old singles, couples and parents

A far clearer image of the time constraints placed on people by their life roles emerges among adults aged 25 to 44. This is a time when people are building their careers and establishing families. Where does the time go? The lion's share of the day is devoted to working for pay and to personal care activities. It is in allocating the remaining time that most differences emerge when comparing those with and without children. For parents,⁴ the hours left in the day tend to go to unpaid work; for single adults, they go to leisure activities; for couples only, they are split between unpaid work and leisure.

The total workday of parents has grown by almost one hour over the past decade, as both parents cut back on personal care activities and fathers reduce their leisure time. Although the total workload is presently similar for both mothers and fathers, parenthood does result in a more pronounced gendered division

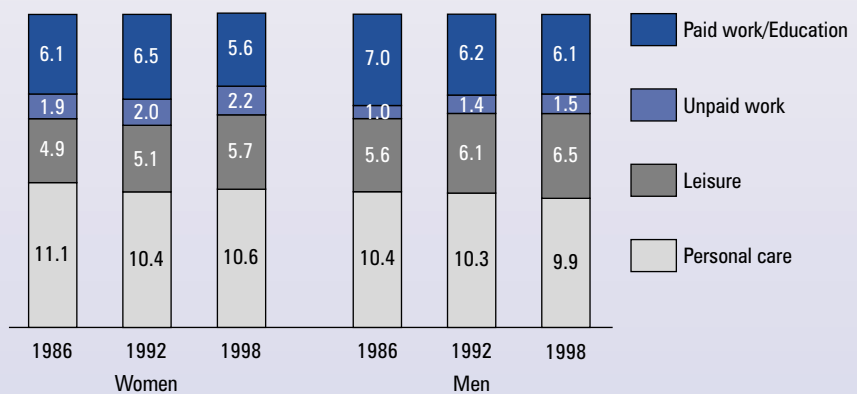
CST Students aged 15 to 24

Average hours per day



Employed aged 15 to 24

Average hours per day



Note: Total may not add to 24.0 hours due to rounding.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Surveys, 1986, 1992, and 1998.

of labour. For example, mothers devote 3 hours more than fathers to unpaid work and 3 hours less to paid work. However, the gap between time spent on paid and unpaid work has decreased over the past decade, due to mothers increasing time devoted to paid work and fathers increasing time devoted to unpaid work like child care, household maintenance and meal preparation.

Single never-married women and men now have similar time use profiles. Total work time is about the same (8 hours) for both sexes, compared with 1986 when women did

about 1.4 hours more than men. Men increased their hours of paid work by cutting back on personal care; at the expense of personal care and paid work, women found more time for leisure activities like visiting friends, going out and attending movies or cultural events.

2. Main activity in the past seven days is going to school.
3. Main activity in the past seven days is working for pay or profit.
4. Having child(ren) refers to having at least one child under age 25 in the household.

Couples without children (married and common-law), particularly women, spend more time on the job and on leisure activities than in 1986. They have found this time by reducing personal care activities like sleeping and eating. As with single adults, total work time is about the same for both sexes. However, in 1998, married women devoted 1.2 hours more per day to unpaid work than married men, while single women spent only 0.6 hours more than single men.

45- to 69-year-olds

Older employed Canadians have increased their leisure time mainly by cutting back on personal care activities. Men have experienced the biggest change in time use patterns over the past decade, devoting about 30 minutes less to paid work and 40 minutes more to unpaid work. Despite this change, the total work-day is about the same now for women and men as it was in 1986.

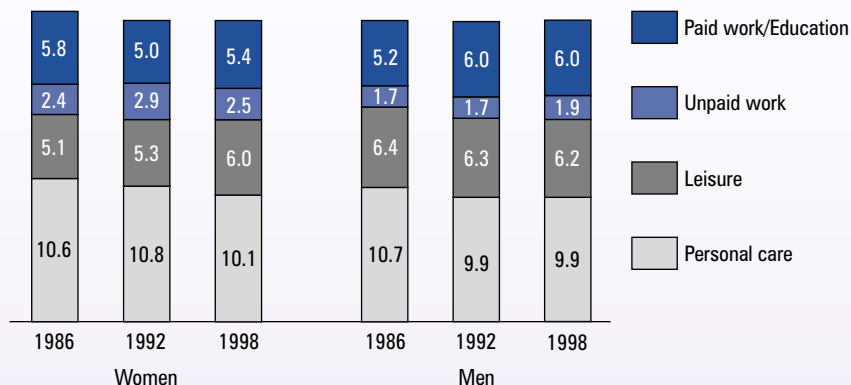
The pursuit of leisure activities occupies a growing place in people's lives upon retirement, as the balance of resources shifts from money to time. People aged 45 to 69 who are not employed spend nearly an hour more per day on leisure activities than they did in 1986. At this stage of life, the division of labour by gender translates into a difference in total work: women do about 1.5 hours more per day of unpaid work, time that men devote to leisure.

Adults aged 70 and over

Elderly people living with a spouse are spending more time on leisure and unpaid work, and less on personal care, than they did a decade ago. In particular, men increased their unpaid work time by almost one hour, while women gained one hour of leisure time. As a result, married elderly women now do only about a half an hour more total work per day than men, compared with over one hour more in 1986.

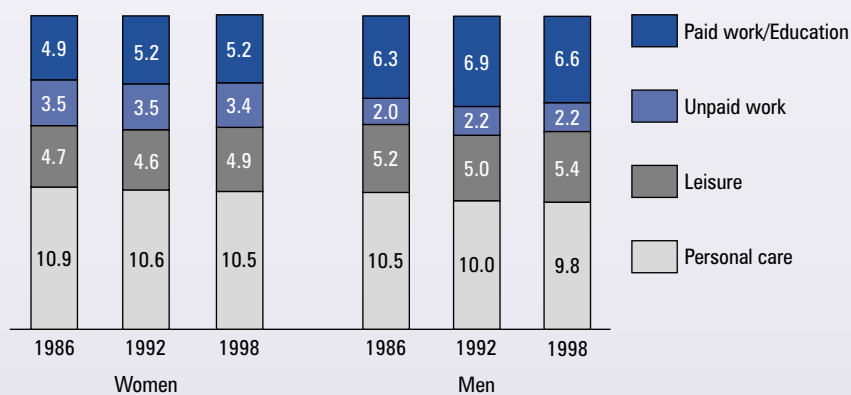
CST Single aged 25 to 44, no children

Average hours per day



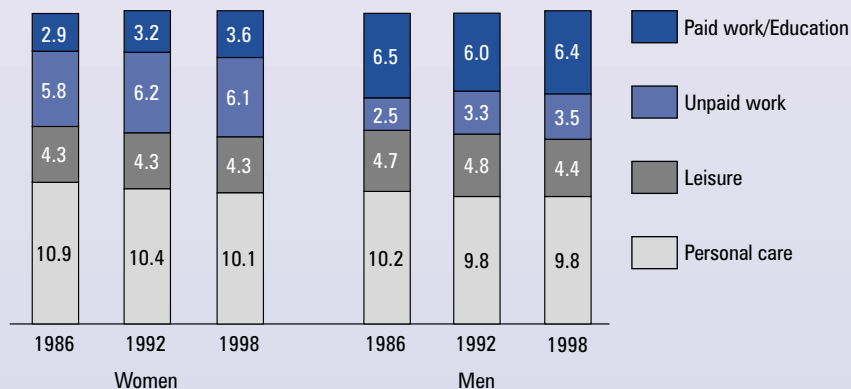
Married aged 25 to 44, no children

Average hours per day



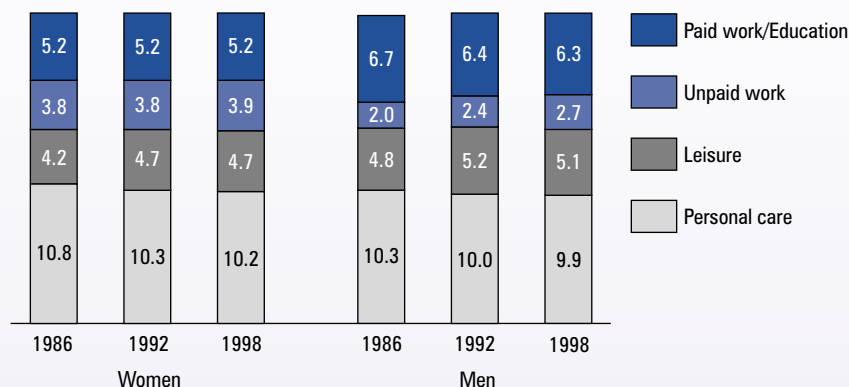
Parents aged 25 to 44, with children under 25

Average hours per day



Note: Total may not add to 24.0 hours due to rounding.
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Surveys, 1986, 1992, and 1998.

Average hours per day



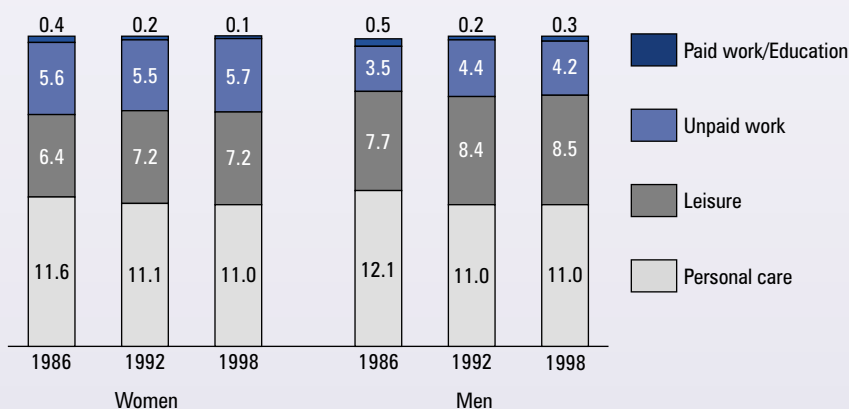
The time use patterns of elderly widows and widowers living on their own have not changed substantially over the past decade. Living alone means less unpaid work than living with a spouse: women do 3.5 hours per day of unpaid work and men do 3.3. Since 1986, widows have increased leisure time at the expense of personal care, while widowers now do about one hour more of unpaid work.



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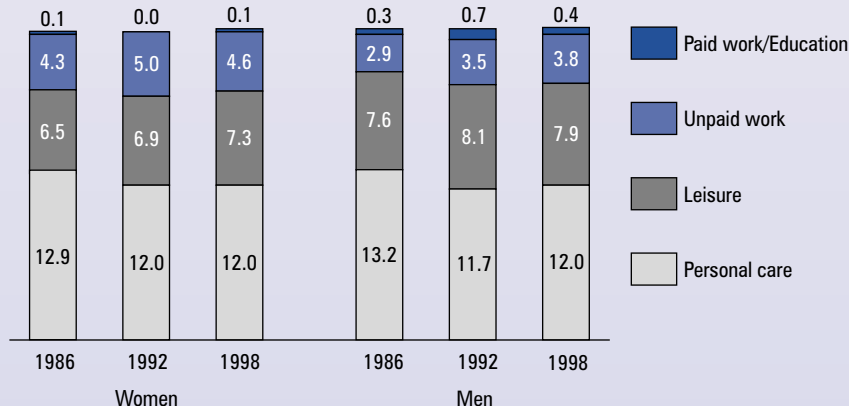
Not employed aged 45 to 69

Average hours per day



Married aged 70 and over

Average hours per day



Note: Total may not add to 24.0 hours due to rounding.
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Surveys, 1986, 1992, and 1998.