

Studying and working: The busy lives of students with paid employment

by Sandra Franke¹

This article is an adaptation of the forthcoming Statistics Canada publication *Transition from School to Paid Work: Event to process*.

The passage from school to paid work used to follow a relatively simple path — education, career and subsequent lifestyle were closely linked. Since the 1980s, however, this path has become more complex as a result of profound changes in the labour market (for example, employment instability, highly specialized work, non-traditional jobs) as well as rising tuition fees and higher student debt.² In addition, the incomes of young Canadians — unlike those of older people — have decreased steadily over the past 20 years, diminishing their ability to become independent.³

These circumstances give rise to new school-to-work transitions. Researchers estimate that the transition now takes approximately eight years to complete,⁴ and includes alternating periods of attending school and working at a paid job, or working and studying at

the same time.⁵ How do young people manage to juggle the myriad of activities they engage in during their transition to self-sufficiency? They study, play sports, hang out with friends, and take time for their personal and family life. Many also hold down part-time jobs.

Much has been written about the consequences of working for pay while in school, such as stress, time spent on homework, academic achievement, absenteeism and the risk of dropping out. Most studies claim that employment starts having a negative effect at 15 to 20 hours per week.⁶ Some researchers have called for a public debate on the regulation of paid work hours for students, while others argue that such a solution may encourage students to abandon their studies in order to become financially self-sufficient.⁷ Using data from the 1998 General Social Survey (GSS), this

article examines what happens to the time use of young people when they add a job to their daily schedule.

About 15% of young Canadians combine school and work

In 1998, approximately half of young Canadians aged 15 to 29 had finished their education and completed their transition to the labour market. Just under one-quarter were students who did not work for pay.⁸ A considerable proportion (14% of women and 9% of men) had left school, but did not have a job. Approximately 15% had started their transition to the working world by combining paid work and school.⁹ Male high school students were more likely to have paid jobs than their female counterparts, while the opposite was true of postsecondary students. In general, male students also devoted more time to paid work.¹⁰

Data for this article come from the 1998 General Social Survey (GSS), which provides information on the time use and quality of life indicators for a sample of 1,376 young women and 1,195 young men between the ages of 15 and 29. The analysis focuses on the partial school-to-work transition in which young people work for pay but their main activity is studying.

Because young people experience a variety of significant life transitions, the study population was restricted in order to better isolate the school-to-work transition. For example, those living with a conjugal partner and those with children have been excluded from the analysis and no distinction was made between those living with their parents and those who had already left the parental home.¹ Lastly, the school-to-work transition from high school is restricted to those aged 15 to 24 but at the postsecondary level encompasses those aged 15 to 29.

1. It should be noted, however, that preliminary analysis revealed that this event appears to intensify most of the effects that can be attributed to the transition to paid work, primarily because the transition to self-sufficiency usually involves an increase in the number of paid working hours.

Male high school students reduce leisure time, while female students sleep less to accommodate a paid job

Young people whose primary activity is attending high school devote, on average, over 4 hours a day to their education and between 7 and 8 hours to entertainment. Women spend about half an hour less per day than men on leisure, and about half an hour more on unpaid work. Compared with other age groups, high school students have quite a lot of time for personal care, including sleeping for 9 hours a night.

Needless to say, adding a paid job to high school studies has a considerable impact on a student's time. Among those with paid employment, male students spend a daily average of over one hour more than female students on their jobs (1.9 hours versus 0.7 hours per day). To accommodate their entry into the labour market, male high school students reduce their daily leisure time by 1.5 hours,

while female students sleep about one hour less. However, both sexes devote nearly the same amount of time to productive activities (paid work, unpaid work and studies), since female high school students do about half an hour more unpaid work — for a total of 1.4 hours per day — than their male counterparts.

The number of working hours impacts on students' lives

"Light" paid jobs of 15 or fewer hours per week do not appear to drastically change the time high school students spend on their studies; however both male and female students sleep about one hour less per day and male students also cut back their daily leisure time by over one hour. Leisure time for female students does not change, although they substitute over one hour of TV-watching for other types of activities. A more demanding job (over 15 hours per week) reduces sleep time for high school women

(1 hour less) and cuts down on leisure activities for both sexes. Both women and men spend less time watching television (about 1.5 hours less for women and 1 hour less for men) and women eliminate nearly all sports from their schedule.

By most life quality measures, high school students are not highly time-stressed. Close to 5 hours per day, or 70% of their leisure time, is spent on activities such as watching television and socializing. Yet few admit to having free time during the day.

Working at a paid job while attending high school appears to have different effects on young women than on young men. For example, young women are more likely to have less time and to feel rushed; they report being less satisfied with their free time, and are over twice as likely as young men to worry about not spending enough time with family and friends. In contrast, working while pursuing high school studies has a positive influence on the quality of male high school students' lives. These young men are more likely to say they are happy and satisfied with their life in general, and are also more likely to be satisfied with their finances and studies.¹¹

Male and female postsecondary students have similar time use patterns

The time use patterns of college and university men and women with paid employment are very similar, a situation that occurs relatively rarely in other realms of life. For example, both male and female postsecondary students devote approximately 2 hours per day to their paid work and about 5 hours to educational pursuits. To accommodate a paid job, male and female students alike reduce their time spent on personal care by about half an hour per day. Young men also decrease their greater amount of leisure time by 1.5 hours, mainly by

	Women			Men		
	No job	Job	Difference	No job	Job	Difference
Average hours per day						
High school						
<i>Time spent on:</i>						
Personal care	11.2	10.3	-0.9	10.9	10.5	-0.4
Leisure	6.8	6.5	-0.3	7.7	6.2	-1.5
Paid work	0.2	0.7	0.5	0.1	1.9	1.8
Education	4.4	4.8	0.4	4.4	4.4	0.0
Unpaid work	1.4	1.7	0.3	0.9	1.1	0.2
Postsecondary						
<i>Time spent on:</i>						
Personal care	10.1	9.4	-0.7	10.1	9.4	-0.7
Leisure	5.3	5.5	0.2	7.0	5.6	0.8
Paid work	0.4	2.6	2.2	0.8	2.3	1.5
Education	6.4	5.1	-1.3	4.8	5.1	0.3
Unpaid work	1.8	1.6	-0.2	1.2	1.5	0.3

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1998.

cutting out socializing and sports. Finally, both men and women spend a total of 8.4 hours per day on productive activities (paid work, unpaid work and studies), resulting in busier days than if they spent their time on school work only.

Being employed in a job with “light” hours (20 hours per week or less) does not have a major effect on the way postsecondary women students divide up their time. Men, however, lose some leisure time (particularly sports, which fell by approximately 0.5 hours per day). Nonetheless, young men continue to enjoy more leisure time than young women, including watching an extra half-hour of television per day.

When a postsecondary student takes on a more demanding job (more than 20 hours per week), the impact is greater, but different for the two sexes. Women students cut the time they spend on their studies from 6.4 hours per day to 2.9 hours and eliminate practically all their active

leisure pursuits. Male students with similar work hours experience a dramatic drop in leisure time — almost 4 hours per day — by cutting back on sports and other active leisure but mainly by slashing time spent on social activities and watching television.

Male postsecondary students much happier with their studies than they were in high school

Young men are more likely to be satisfied with their studies when they reach the postsecondary level — 28% in postsecondary versus 18% in high school — but women are no more pleased than they were in high school (approximately 30%). However, a busier schedule in college or university results in increased stress levels from high school days. Young women reported feeling higher levels of time stress than young men: 43% versus 24%.

Somewhat surprisingly, adding a job to postsecondary studies does not seem

to affect perceptions of time pressure or quality of life for either sex. Neither male nor female students are more likely to feel severely time-crunched, rushed or stressed because of their busier schedule. Perhaps this is because the overwhelming majority of young women and men reported that school, rather than work, was their primary source of stress. In fact, having paid work appeared to contribute to a better quality of life, particularly in the case of young men. Male postsecondary students with paid work reported higher self-esteem, more happiness and greater life satisfaction than did those without paid work. As in high school, having a job does not appear to be as beneficial to young women as to young men.

Summary

Working while being a student does not consist solely of substituting study hours for paid work. Other activities are also rescheduled. Most often, time is shaved from sleep and

leisure, including physical activities. Moreover, quality of life issues also emerge, with different effects on men and women.

The various realities experienced by today's young Canadians have important implications for the education sector. This is all the more true since the transition to the labour market increasingly encroaches on other important life transitions, such as leaving home, union formation or having children. There are also important health issues related to the stress and to the effects of schedule conflicts on sleeping patterns and levels of physical activity that young people experience.



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Endnotes

- In collaboration with Janet Fast, professor in the Department of Human Ecology, University of Alberta, and Judith Frederick and Nancy Zukewich, senior analysts in Housing, Family and Social Statistics Division, Statistics Canada.
- Little, D. 1997. "Financing universities: Why are students paying more?" *Education quarterly review* 4, 2 (Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 81-003): 10-26; Plager, L. and E. Chen. 1999. "Student debt from 1990-91 to 1995-96: An analysis of Canada Student Loans data." *Education quarterly review* 5, 4 (Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 81-003): 10-35; Crysedale, S. & al. 1999. *On Their Own? Making the Transition from School to Work in the Information Age*. Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press; Sales, A., R. Drolet and I. Bonneau. 2001. "Academic Paths, Ageing and the Living Conditions of Students in the Late 20th Century." *The Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 38, 2: 167-188; McGrath, S. 1996. "Correlates of Post-secondary Participation." *Youth in Transition : Perspectives on Policy and Research*. B. Galaway and J. Hudson (eds.) Toronto: Thompson Educating Publishing.
- Young people, particularly men, now live with their parents longer. Boyd, M. and D. Norris. Spring 1999. "The Crowded Nest: Young Adults at Home." *Canadian Social Trends*. p. 2-5.
- In 1998, the transition process was believed to start at the age of 16 and end at around 23. Statistics Canada. Autumn 1999. "Youths and the labour market, 1998-99." *Labour Force Update* 3, 4 (Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 71-005-XPB). However, the student population is ageing. Students 25 years and up now represent one-quarter of full-time students in Canada. Sales et al., 2001: 168.
- The number of working hours per week has been increasing among adolescents since the late 1980s, unlike among other age groups. Furthermore, working hours are continually added to time spent on studying. "Working Teens." *Canadian Social Trends*. Winter 1994. p. 18-22. More and more students consider paid work as part of their lifestyle and not just one of their activities. Sales et al., 2001: 180.
- Stone, J.R. and J.T. Mortimer. 1998. "The Effect of Adolescent Employment on Vocational Development: Public and Educational Policy Implications." *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 53 : 184-214. p. 199; Wegman, D.H. and L.K. Davis. 1999. "Protecting Youth at Work." *American Journal of Industrial Medicine* 36: 579-583; *Canadian Social Trends*. Winter 1994.
- Statistics Canada, 1999: 20.
- Students are defined as those who declared studies as their main activity, even if on a part-time basis (the proportion of which is low).
- The GSS does not distinguish between summer jobs and jobs held during the school year.
- This may in part explain why men delay pursuing postsecondary studies longer than women: only 27% of men at the college or university level are under 20 years of age, compared with 38% of women.
- The sample size for questions on quality of life were too small to permit analysis based on the number of hours of paid work.

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