

Hard at work

Gary L. Cohen

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Do you remember the debate about the "leisure society"? And do you remember the concern that everyone would have to find more and more activities to fill their time as the length of the workweek diminished? Well, for an increasing proportion of Canadians, the opposite has occurred, as the number of persons working 50 or more hours per week has risen dramatically over the last 15 years.

Estimates from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) show that, in 1975, 611,000 of 7.3 million full-time paid workers usually worked 50 or more hours per week; in 1990, there were 972,000 out of a workforce of 9.1 million. [\(1\)](#) That is, while full-time paid employment rose 25% during this 15-year interval, the number of paid workers with long workweeks climbed 59%. [\(2\)](#)

Who are these people with such long workweeks? Where do they work and what do they do? Are they well educated? And, is money the main reason why they work so many hours?

Who works 50 or more usual hours?

In 1990, about 11% of all full-time paid workers usually worked 50 or more hours per week. These long workweeks were much more prevalent among men (14%) than women (6%). In fact, fully three-quarters of full-time paid workers with long workweeks were men (734,000 out of 972,000). For both men and women, there was relatively little difference in the incidence of long workweeks by age ([Table 1](#)).[\(3\)](#)



Table 1 Long workweeks by age and sex, 1990.

Source: *Labour Force Survey*

Fifteen years earlier, in 1975, men made up more than 85% of 611,000 such workers. The overall incidence that year was just over 8% (11% for men and a little more than 3% for women).

Between 1975 and 1990, the number of male full-time paid workers rose 9% compared with 54% for women. During this period, the number of men with long workweeks increased 40% compared with a 178% jump for women. Thus, women not only entered the workforce in ever increasing numbers, but the proportion with long workweeks rose much more rapidly for them than for men.

Where do they work?

Long workweeks are to be found in every sector of the economy. But by far the highest 1990 incidence was in the fishing industry (59%), followed by agriculture (37%), the real estate operator and insurance agent industries (24%) and forestry (23%). ⁽⁴⁾ The lowest rates were in government services and in health and social services (both 5%), closely followed by communication and other utilities and by manufacturing (both 7%) ([Table 2](#)).



Table 2 Long workweeks by industry, 1990.

Source: *Labour Force Survey*

This suggests that long workweeks are most likely to occur in industries where the working season can be severely affected by weather conditions, and particularly in those industries where the period of peak

activity may be quite brief. That is, in these industries, workers know that they must work as many hours as they can for as long as is practicable, because they may be "rained out" the following week. (The higher incidence in the primary sector, where the majority of workers are males, also explains part of the overall difference in rates between men and women.)

Between 1975 and 1990, the incidence of long workweeks declined substantially in agriculture (from 47% to 37%), but rose in all other industries, with the largest relative gains in communication and other utilities, forestry and mining.

... and what do they do?

The occupational distribution of workers with long workweeks resembles the patterns shown by industry. The highest 1990 rate (68%) was in fishing occupations, the lowest (3%) in clerical occupations. Nearly

60% of employees in religion occupations worked 50 or more hours per week ([Table 3](#)).

Between 1975 and 1990, the incidence of long workweeks climbed considerably for teachers (from 14% to 20%) as well as for managers and administrators (from 11% to 17%).

Where do they live?

Since long workweeks are so closely associated with the primary sector, especially agriculture, it is not surprising that the incidence is highest in provinces where the primary sector is a major source of employment. In 1990, Saskatchewan, Alberta and Prince Edward Island reported the highest rates.

The incidence of long workweeks was considerably lower in Quebec (7%) than in any other province; rates for both men (10%) and women (4%) were also far below the national averages.



Table 3 Long workweeks by occupation, 1990.

Source: *Labour Force Survey*

What about education?

On average, people who work 50 or more hours per week are better educated than other full-time paid workers. In 1990, only 15% of full-time paid workers had a university degree compared with 27% of paid workers with long workweeks. This reflects the fact that the incidence of long workweeks for workers with university degrees (19%) was double the rate recorded for workers with other levels of educational attainment.

The high incidence of long workweeks among university graduates is largely attributable to the rates for teachers and managers/administrators. These two occupation groups have above average incidences of long workweeks and both groups, but particularly teachers, have greater-than-average proportions of university graduates among their members.

Multiple jobholding and long workweeks

Long workweeks are linked to multiple jobholding. (A multiple jobholder is a person employed at two or more jobs simultaneously.) On average, there were 473,000 paid-worker multiple jobholders in Canada during 1990, that is, about 1 out of every 23 paid workers. [\(5\)](#) While just 5% of full-time paid workers

had more than one job, 23% of paid workers with long workweeks were multiple jobholders.

Some 51% of full-time paid workers who were multiple jobholders usually worked 50 or more hours per week. This was nearly six times greater than the incidence of long workweeks (9%) among single jobholders. The rate for persons holding two (or more) paid jobs was 46%, while 62% of those who were paid workers in their main job and self-employed in their second job worked 50 or more hours per week.

Among paid-worker multiple jobholders, the incidence of long workweeks for men (63%) was considerably higher than for women (36%). This compares with rates of 12% for men and 5% for women among single jobholders. [\(6\)](#)



Chart Long workweeks by province, 1990.

Source: Labour Force Survey

What about money?

A comparison of income patterns for persons with long workweeks to those of full-time paid workers who work less than 50 hours per week suggests that money may be an important incentive for some people with long workweeks.

On average, paid workers with long workweeks have higher incomes than full-time paid workers who work less than 50 hours per week. Some 26% of all full-time full-year paid workers (persons who work 49 or more weeks during the year) reported that they had incomes of \$40,000 or more in 1989, while 13% had incomes of less than \$15,000. In contrast, 42% of full-time full-year paid workers with long workweeks reported incomes of \$40,000 or more, and just 10% had incomes of less than \$15,000. [\(7\)](#)

But money may not be the only factor underlying the long workweek phenomenon. For example, consider the effects of single and multiple jobholding.

For single jobholders, especially women, the incidence of "high" incomes (\$40,000 or more) was much greater for persons with long workweeks than for fulltime workers who worked less than 50 hours per week. Similarly, the incidence of "low" incomes (less than \$15,000) was lower for persons with long workweeks ([Table 4](#)).

The situation for multiple jobholders was not so clear. Multiple jobholders, both men and women, were less likely to have high incomes and more likely to have low incomes than single jobholders. Among

multiple jobholders, men with long workweeks were somewhat more likely to have high incomes than men who did not work 50 hours per week, but the difference was smaller than that observed for single jobholders. And for women, the incidence of high incomes was actually lower for those with long workweeks than for those working less than 50 hours per week. On the other hand, the incidence of low incomes was much lower among multiple jobholders (especially women) with long workweeks.



Table 4 **Long workweeks and income, 1989.**

Source: Survey of Consumer Finances

What about education?

These patterns of high and low income suggest that income considerations may be a particularly important incentive for those persons who work 50 or more hours per week because they have more than one job.

But, on the other hand, these results suggest that money may not be the critical issue for those single jobholders who put in long workweeks. Single jobholders with long workweeks may, for instance, work at jobs that are especially demanding in terms of hours, or they may simply enjoy working many hours. Further research would be required to explore the complex interrelationship between long workweeks and income.



Chart **Long workweeks by education, 1990.**

Source: Labour Force Survey

Conclusion

The long workweek phenomenon has been growing. Over the last 15 years, Canadians who usually work 50 or more hours per week have increased rapidly, both in numbers and as a percentage of the total workforce. But the reasons for such labour market behaviour may vary considerably from person to person, from one labour market situation to another.

For workers in the primary sector, time and weather constraints may be the critical considerations; meanwhile, for multiple jobholders, the need to acquire additional income may be the major factor that impels them to work so many hours.

For some people, including teachers and managers/administrators, long workweeks may be an expected part of the work environment, or they may be a requirement of the job. Alternatively, this phenomenon may reflect the fact that some people choose to put in a lot of hours at work.

And of course, for the growing legion of the self-employed, long workweeks are a natural aspect of entrepreneurial risk-taking.

Long workweeks among the self-employed

The self-employed (persons who own and operate a business, farm or professional practice) numbered 1.8 million in 1990, counting for 14% of all workers. More than 1.5 million worked full time and, of this latter group, some 734,000 or 49% reported that they usually worked 50 or more hours per week. The incidence of long workweeks was higher for self-employed men (53%) than for women (34%).

It is certainly not surprising that the incidence of long workweeks is so high among the self-employed. Most entrepreneurs own small businesses, and the time they commit to that business is likely one of their most important sources of capital.

In 1975, there were 1 million self-employed in Canada; 918,000 worked full time and 54% of these persons worked 50 or more hours per week. The rates of long workweeks that year were 58% for self-employed men and 32% for women.

In part, the overall decline between 1975 and 1990 in the incidence of long workweeks for the self-employed reflects the 5 percentage point drop in the rate for men. (This drop for men was due to the substantial dip in the incidence of long workweeks in agriculture.) But the decline also reflects the very large increase in the proportion of self-employed women, as the incidence of long workweeks is lower among women. (During this 15-year period, the number of self-employed men rose by 50%, while the number of women jumped 173%.)

The 49% incidence for the self-employed did not vary much provincially, except in Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island, where it exceeded 60%. The highest rates by industry were in accommodation, food and beverage services (72%), fishing (70%), agriculture (63%) and transportation and storage (61%). In sharp contrast to paid workers, there was virtually no difference in the incidence of long

workweeks by education among the self-employed.

Also in contrast to paid workers, there was relatively little difference between the income distribution of self-employed persons usually working 50 or more hours per week, and those working full time but devoting less than 50 hours per week to their business. For both groups, about 25% of persons with one job, and about 20% of multiple jobholders, had incomes of \$40,000 or more in 1989. At the other end of the scale, about one-quarter of single jobholders, and one-third of multiple jobholders, had 1989 incomes of less than \$15,000.

Definitions and limitations

This study looks at those persons who usually work 50 or more hours per week. In the Labour Force Survey (LFS), the term "usual hours" refers to the number of hours usually (regularly) worked at **all** jobs in a typical week. Usual hours are used primarily to distinguish between full-time workers (mainly those persons having usual hours of 30 or more per week) and part-time workers.

Usual hours worked may not be the same as scheduled, actual or even paid hours worked. For example, someone who has a scheduled workweek of 35 hours, but who customarily works an additional 5 hours per week (whether paid or unpaid, at the work site or at home) would report 40 usual hours. This same person would still report 40 usual hours even if he or she had actually worked only 30 hours in any specific week (for example, as a result of illness or vacation).

This article focuses on full-time paid workers. The growing incidence of part-time work over the last 15 years would distort the long-term trend in long workweeks if "part-timers" were included in the analysis. (Between 1975 and 1990, the number of part-time paid workers rose 96%, while full-time paid employment increased just 25%.)

This study treats the self-employed as a separate group (see [*Long workweeks among the self-employed*](#)). This is necessary because the motives for long workweeks may be quite different for the self-employed than for paid workers, and because, not surprisingly, the incidence of long workweeks is much higher among the self-employed than it is for other workers. In addition, since the growth of self-employment has exceeded other employment growth over the last 15 years (73% compared with 32% for paid employment), including the self-employed in the main analysis would also bias the findings of the study.

Notes

Note 1

Unless otherwise specified, all data shown are annual averages.

Note 2

A total of 1.7 million workers put in 50 or more hours per week on the job in 1990. In addition to 972,000 paid workers, there were 734,000 self-employed with long workweeks, plus some 12,000 unpaid family workers (persons who worked without pay in a business, farm or professional practice owned and operated by another family member living in the same dwelling).

Note 3

The incidence of long workweeks refers to paid workers with long workweeks as a proportion of all full-time paid workers.

Note 4

During peak periods of activity, the incidence of long workweeks in the primary sector, especially agriculture and fishing, would undoubtedly be substantially higher than the overall annual average.

Note 5

For persons holding more than one job, the class of worker status is determined by the main job. In addition to the 473,000 paid-worker multiple jobholders, there were some 130,000 other multiple jobholders in Canada in 1990; the vast majority of these persons were self-employed in their main job. The incidence of long workweeks was 75% for persons having two (or more) self-employment jobs, while 65% of those who were self-employed in their main job and paid workers in their second job worked 50 or more hours per week.

Note 6

The incidence of long workweeks for multiple jobholders showed little variation by age (although the rate for men aged 15 to 24 was somewhat lower than for other groups). In contrast, among single jobholders, the rate increased substantially as age rose (especially for women); this reflects, in part, the fact that the incidence of self-employment rises rapidly as age increases.

Note 7

Income data are derived from the Survey of Consumer Finances (SCF), a supplementary survey to the Labour Force Survey (LFS) that is conducted each April and collects data for the previous calendar year (that is, the April 1990 SCF collected 1989 income data). Labour force characteristics (class of worker, full-time status, single and multiple jobholding, and usual hours worked) originate from the LFS and refer to a respondent's employment status in April 1990.

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Source

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This is the first of five articles in the issue.

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Table 1

Long workweeks by age and sex, 1990

| | Paid workers with 50 or more usual hours | Incidence* |
|-------------------|--|------------|
| | '000 | % |
| Both sexes | 972 | 11 |
| 15-24 | 128 | 9 |
| 25-34 | 315 | 11 |
| 35-44 | 280 | 11 |
| 45-54 | 174 | 11 |
| 55-64 | 67 | 9 |
| 65 and over | 8 | 15 |
| Men | 734 | 14 |
| 15-24 | 95 | 12 |
| 25-34 | 239 | 15 |
| 35-44 | 211 | 15 |
| 45-54 | 129 | 14 |
| 55-64 | 54 | 11 |
| 65 and over | 7 | 19 |
| Women | 237 | 6 |
| 15-24 | 33 | 5 |
| 25-34 | 76 | 6 |
| 35-44 | 69 | 6 |
| 45-54 | 45 | 7 |
| 55-64 | 14 | 6 |
| 65 and over | -- | -- |

Source: Labour Force Survey

** Paid workers with long workweeks as a proportion of all full-time paid workers.*

Table 2

Long workweeks by industry, 1990

| | Paid workers with 50 or more usual hours | Incidence* |
|--|--|------------|
| | '000 | % |
| All industries | 972 | 11 |
| Agriculture | 37 | 37 |
| Fishing and trapping | 9 | 59 |
| Logging and forestry | 11 | 23 |
| Mining | 26 | 15 |
| Manufacturing | 127 | 7 |
| Construction | 77 | 15 |
| Transportation and storage | 76 | 18 |
| Communication and other utilities | 27 | 7 |
| Wholesale trade | 56 | 12 |
| Retail trade | 91 | 10 |
| Finance and insurance | 33 | 8 |
| Real estate operators and insurance agents | 39 | 24 |
| Business services | 51 | 11 |
| Government services | 40 | 5 |
| Education services | 110 | 16 |
| Health and social services | 44 | 5 |
| Accommodation, food and beverage services | 54 | 12 |
| Other services | 64 | 15 |

Source: Labour Force Survey

** Paid workers with long workweeks as a proportion of all full-time paid workers.*

Table 3

Long workweeks by occupation, 1990

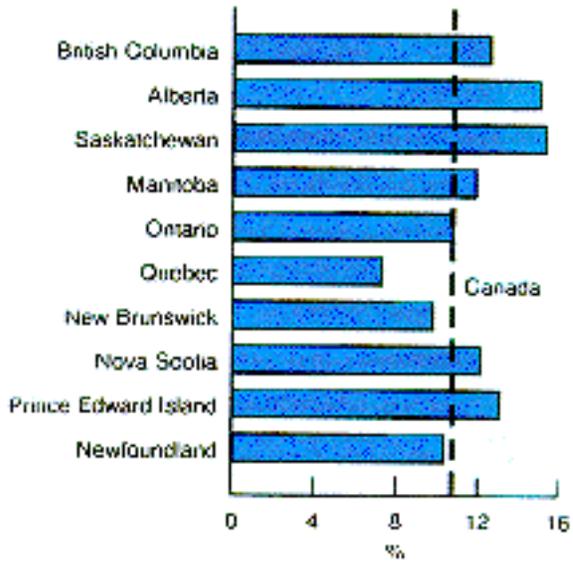
| | Paid workers with 50 or more usual hours | Incidence* |
|---|--|------------|
| | '000 | % |
| All occupations | 972 | 11 |
| Managerial and administrative | 231 | 17 |
| Natural sciences, engineering and mathematics | 31 | 8 |
| Social sciences | 26 | 14 |
| Religion | 17 | 57 |
| Teaching | 88 | 20 |
| Medicine and health | 27 | 6 |
| Artistic, literary and recreational | 15 | 13 |
| Clerical | 54 | 3 |
| Sales | 95 | 15 |
| Service | 74 | 8 |
| Farming | 36 | 31 |
| Fishing and trapping | 9 | 68 |
| Forestry and logging | 8 | 21 |
| Mining | 11 | 20 |
| Processing | 19 | 6 |
| Machining | 11 | 5 |
| Product fabricating, assembling and repairing | 47 | 5 |
| Construction trades | 64 | 12 |
| Transport equipment operating | 90 | 25 |
| Material handling and other crafts | 18 | 5 |

Source: Labour Force Survey

** Paid workers with long workweeks as a proportion of all full-time paid workers.*

Long workweeks by province, 1990

The incidence of long workweeks is lowest in Quebec.



Source: Labour Force Survey

Table 4

Long workweeks and income, 1989

| | Proportion of full-year workers* | | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| | Men | | Women | |
| | Less than \$15,000 | \$40,000 or more | Less than \$15,000 | \$40,000 or more |
| | % | | | |
| Paid workers | | | | |
| All full-time workers | 8 | 37 | 21 | 11 |
| With less than 50 hours | 8 | 36 | 21 | 10 |
| With 50 or more hours | 8 | 47 | 17 | 26 |
| Single jobholders | 8 | 37 | 21 | 11 |
| With less than 50 hours | 8 | 36 | 21 | 10 |
| With 50 or more hours | 7 | 50 | 15 | 33 |
| Multiple jobholders** | 12 | 31 | 30 | 8 |
| With less than 50 hours | 16 | 25 | 33 | 9 |
| With 50 or more hours | 10 | 35 | 24 | 7 |
| Self-employed workers | | | | |
| All full-time workers | 22 | 31 | 49 | 13 |
| With less than 50 hours | 23 | 31 | 49 | 13 |
| With 50 or more hours | 22 | 31 | 48 | 12 |
| Single jobholders | 22 | 32 | 49 | 13 |
| With less than 50 hours | 23 | 31 | 50 | 13 |
| With 50 or more hours | 21 | 32 | 47 | 12 |
| Multiple jobholders** | 24 | 25 | 47 | -- |
| With less than 50 hours | 20 | 32 | 40 | -- |
| With 50 or more hours | 26 | 23 | 53 | -- |

Source: Survey of Consumer Finances

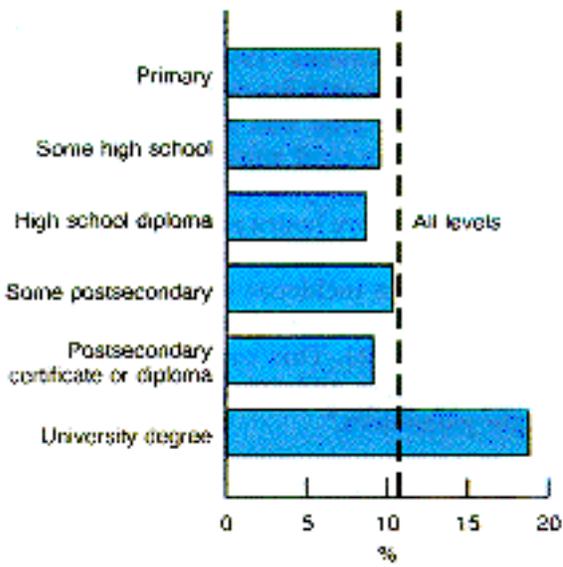
** Includes only those persons who worked full-year in 1989 (49 or more weeks); other labour force characteristics (class of worker, full-time status, single and multiple jobholding, and usual hours worked) originate from the*

Labour Force Survey and refer to a respondent's employment status in April 1990.

****** *For multiple jobholders, class of worker status refers to the main job.*

Long workweeks by education, 1990

Almost 1 in 5 university graduates usually work 50 or more hours per week.



Source: Labour Force Survey