

# Balancing work and family responsibilities

*Katherine Marshall*

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**M**ore Canadian couples than ever before are now juggling family and employment obligations. Alternative work patterns, such as part-time, flexitime, home-based, shift and weekend work, are a means of accommodating employees with family responsibilities. Indeed, according to the 1991 Survey of Work Arrangements (see [Data source and definitions](#)), work patterns do differ by the presence and age of children. But having children, particularly preschool children, does not have the same effect on the employment patterns of **both** parents.

This article looks at the work patterns of dual-earner couples (including common-law) where the wife is aged 25 to 44 and both spouses have paid jobs. [\(1\)](#) These 2.9 million workers form a sizeable portion of the labour force (28%). As well, they are in the prime child-rearing ages. Results from the Survey of Work Arrangements (SWA) reveal differences between the work patterns of those dual-earners who do and those who do not have children, particularly if the children are younger than six years (preschool).

## Children affect work patterns of dual-earner couples

The chances that husbands and wives in dual-earner couples will both work the same schedule are greatest if they have no children. The proportion of dual-earner couples with both spouses working full time was 86% for those with no children, but just 66% for those with preschool children at home ([Chart A](#)). The incidence of daytime, weekday employment is also lower if young children are present. Dual-earner couples with no children are the most likely to both work daytime schedules (64%) or weekdays only (60%). Couples with children under six at home have the lowest rates: 57% and 50%, respectively.



## Chart A **Dual-earner couples with preschoolers are less likely to work the same schedule.**

Source: *Survey of Work Arrangements, 1991*

Flexitime can enable one parent to start work later and see the children off to school, while the other parent starts work earlier in order to be home when the children return. But the proportion of couples working flexitime is (slightly) higher only among those with preschool children.

Dual-earner parents with preschool children are less likely to both work the same schedule. This suggests that at least one parent changes some aspect of employment. In most cases, that person is the mother.

### **Mothers more likely to alter employment patterns**

Tradition once held that when women married they usually left the workforce. Later, most women left only once they had children. Today, most married women, with and without children, remain in the labour force. However, many still do leave and others alter their work patterns. Men, on the other hand show the same employment patterns regardless of children (see [Men's work patterns](#)).

Although their labour force participation rates have increased sharply in recent years, women aged 25 to 44 with young children at home still have comparatively low participation. Just 68% of women with preschool children were in the labour force in 1991. This compares with 84% of women in this age group with older children at home and 90% of those without children.

For women, parenthood is also accompanied by an increase in part-time employment ([Chart B](#)). Close to a third (31%) of women with children under six at home work outside the home part time, more than three times the rate for those with no children (9%). As a result, women with preschool children averaged 32.7 hours of paid work per week in 1991, compared with 37.4 hours for women with no children at home ([Table 1](#)).



## Chart B **Almost a third of wives in dual-earner couples with preschoolers work part time.**

Source: *Survey of Work Arrangements, 1991*



## Table 1 **Work patterns of wives aged 25 to 44 in dual-earner families**

*Source: Survey of Work Arrangements, 1991*

But while women's labour force participation rates and hours of paid work are lower when there are children at home, their domestic workload and responsibility are greater. Thus, these women have substituted some paid work in the labour force for unpaid work at home (see [Unpaid domestic work](#)).

The likelihood of working only on weekdays also varies with the presence of children: 62% of women with preschool children work weekdays only, compared with 74% of those with no children. The relatively low rate of weekday work for the former group reflects their higher rates of varied work days (28%) and weekend work (10%).

### **Mothers' reasons for work patterns also vary**

Overall, 26% of women work an irregular schedule. Their reasons for doing so differ according to the presence and age of their children. Almost one-third (30%) of women who work an irregular schedule and have preschool children give child care as the reason; the figure is just 10% for those with children in the 6 to 15 age range.

A relatively small proportion (6%) of women in dual-earner couples with young children report doing some of their paid work at home. And again, the reasons why these mothers work at home are resoundingly different from those of other women. Well over a third (37%) of mothers who do paid work at home and have preschool children state child care as their reason for working at home; this compares with 12% of women with children aged 6 to 15.

### **Motherhood affects work patterns in all occupations**

Regardless of their occupation, women with young children are the most likely to have modified work arrangements. For example, 95% of childless women in managerial and professional occupations work full time, compared with 68% of women in similar jobs who have preschoolers ([Table 2](#)). Furthermore, in all occupational categories, except processing, machining and fabricating, proportionately fewer women with young children work a Monday-to-Friday schedule only.



## Table 2 **Work arrangements of wives aged 25 to 44 in dual-earner families by occupation**

*Source: Survey of Work Arrangements, 1991*

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## Conclusion

Dual-earner couples with young children are the most likely to have different work schedules, with at least one partner **not** working the traditional 9 to 5 or Monday-to-Friday work week.

Of the two parents, it is almost always the mother who has a non-traditional work pattern. Compared with women without children, employed mothers with children at home spend fewer hours and days per week engaged in paid work. They are also more likely to work irregular schedules, varied days, and weekends. These arrangements are most common among mothers of preschoolers.

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## Men's work patterns

Men in dual-earner couples with children under 25 at home have almost identical work patterns to those of men without children. The age of children at home also has little impact on men's work patterns. When men become fathers, their role as breadwinner continues to predominate.

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Table

## **Work patterns of husbands with wives aged 25 to 44 in dual-earner families**

*Source:*

*Survey of Work Arrangements, 1991*

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## Unpaid domestic work

Data from the 1992 General Social Survey show that the presence of children, particularly young children, is associated with decreased hours of paid work for women. However, this reduction in paid work is offset by an increase in the amount of domestic work performed. For example, when there are preschool children at home, wives in dual-earner families spend an average of 7.3 hours per day on paid work and 6.9 hours on unpaid.



Chart

## **Average daily hours of paid work and unpaid domestic work\* by wives in dual-earner couples.**

*Source:*

*General Social Survey, 1992*

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*Includes housework, caregiving for household members and shopping.*

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## **Data source and definitions**

The Survey of Work Arrangements (SWA), a supplement to the November 1991 Labour Force Survey (LFS), collected data on the weekly work schedules of paid workers.

**Couples without children** - couples with no children under 25 living at home. They may have children living elsewhere or older children at home.

**Flexitime** - a flexible schedule that allows workers to choose their start and end times within the limits established by management. Usual start times tend to range from 7 a.m. to 9 a.m.; end times, from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.

**Full-time/part-time employment** - full-time employment comprises persons who usually work 30 hours or more per week, plus those who usually work less than 30 hours but consider themselves to be employed full time (for example, airline pilots). All other persons usually working less than 30 hours per week are part-time workers.

**Home-based work** - an arrangement where an employee does some or all of his or her paid work at home.

**Irregular schedule** - all employment that is not a regular day-time schedule; all forms of shift work are included.

**Paid worker** - any person who receives remuneration, usually in the form of a wage or salary or, very occasionally, in kind, from an employer.

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# Note

## Note 1

Information on work arrangements was asked only of persons with paid jobs (in the main job only). Self-employed persons were excluded.

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# References

- Akyeampong, E.B. "[Flexitime work arrangements.](#)" *Perspectives on Labour and Income* (Statistics Canada, Catalogue 75-001E) 5, no. 3 (Autumn 1993): 17-22.
  - Marshall, K. "[Employed parents and the division of housework.](#)" *Perspectives on Labour and Income* (Statistics Canada, Catalogue 75-001E) 5, no. 3 (Autumn 1993): 23-30.
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# Author

Katherine Marshall is with the Labour and Household Surveys Analysis Division of Statistics Canada.

# Source

*Perspectives on Labour and Income*, Spring 1994, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Statistics Canada, Catalogue 75-001E). This is the fourth of seven articles in the issue.

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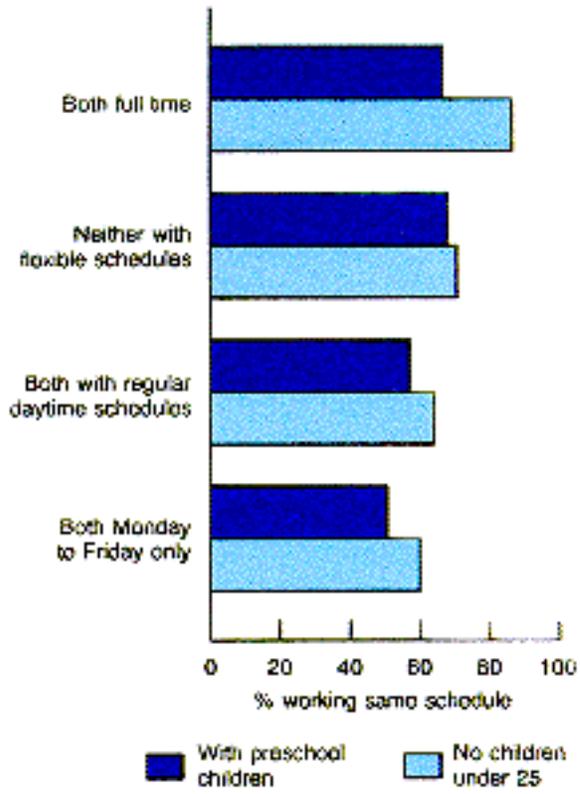
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Chart A

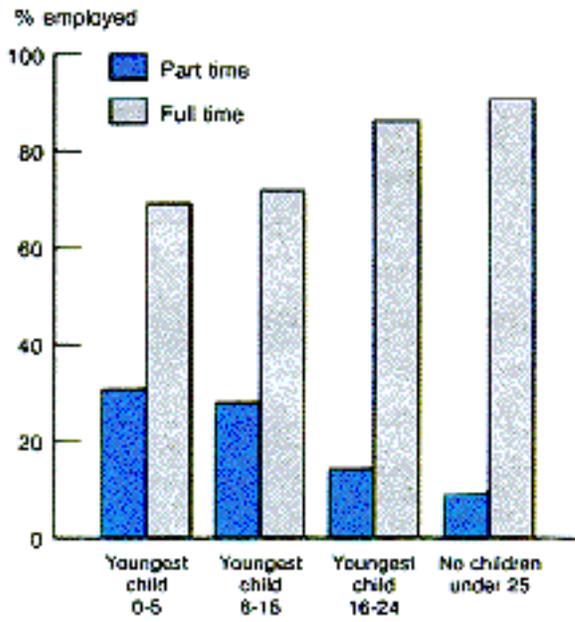
**Dual-earner couples with preschoolers are less likely to work the same schedule.**



Source: Survey of Work Arrangements, 1997

Chart B

**Almost a third of wives in dual-earner couples with preschoolers work part time.**



Source: *Survey of Work Arrangements, 1991*

Table 1

**Work patterns of wives aged 25 to 44 in dual-earner families**

	Total	Age of youngest child			No children under 25
		0-5	6-15	16-24	
Participation rate (%)	77	68	78	84	90
Average hours worked per week	34.5	32.7	33.6	36.1	37.4
Total employed ('000)	1,464	492	499	94	379
Full time (%)	77	69	72	86	91
Part time (%)	23	31	28	--	9
Percentage working:					
Weekdays only	67	62	67	68	74
Weekends	6	10	5	--	--
Flexible schedule	18	19	15	19	19
Some paid work at home	7	6	6	--	7
Irregular schedule	26	27	26	28	23

*Source: Survey of Work Arrangements, 1991*

Table 2

**Work arrangements of wives aged 25 to 44 in dual-earner families by occupation**

	Average hours worked per week		% working full-time		% working Monday-to-Friday only	
	Youngest child 0-5	No children under 25	Youngest child 0-5	No children under 25	Youngest child 0-5	No children under 25
All occupations	32.7	37.4	69	91	62	74
Managerial and professional	32.6	38	68	95	63	75
Clerical	32.1	36.4	69	91	71	87
Sales	33.4	37.6	72	82	48	62
Service	31.5	34.7	57	72	34	46
Processing, machining and fabricating	37.7	39.3	94	98	86	80
Other*	--	--	79	76	77	74

*Source: Survey of Work Arrangements, 1991*

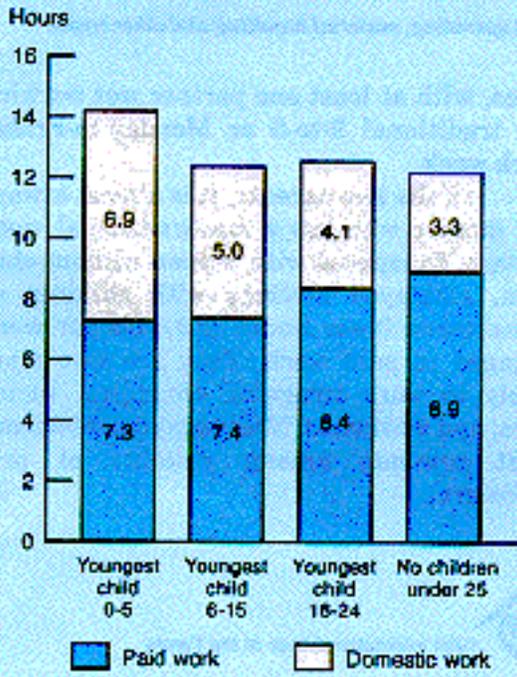
*\* Includes primary occupations, construction, transport equipment operating, material handling and other crafts*

**Work patterns of husbands with wives aged 25 to 44 in dual-earner families**

	Total	Age of youngest child			No children under 25
		0-5	6-15	16-24	
Participation rate (%)	94	95	95	93	94
Average hours worked per week	41	40.9	40.9	41.5	41.1
Total employed ('000)	1,464	492	499	94	379
Full time (%)	99	99	99	99	98
Percentage working:					
Weekdays only	76	75	79	75	72
Weekends	7	7	5	--	9
Irregular schedule	23	24	22	24	23

*Source: Survey of Work Arrangements, 1991*

### Average daily hours of paid work and unpaid domestic work\* by wives in dual-earner couples



Source: General Social Survey, 1992

\* Includes housework, caregiving for household members and shopping.