

## Spotlight on Canadians: Results from the General Social Survey

### Satisfaction with work-life balance: Fact sheet



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- .. not available for a specific reference period
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- 0 true zero or a value rounded to zero
- 0<sup>s</sup> value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded
- <sup>P</sup> preliminary
- <sup>r</sup> revised
- X suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*
- <sup>E</sup> use with caution
- F too unreliable to be published
- \* significantly different from reference category ( $p < 0.05$ )

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## Satisfaction with work-life balance: Fact sheet

Over the last four decades, the number and proportion of couples in which both parents work, especially full-time, have increased considerably (Uppal 2015). In 2014, 69% of couple families with at least one child were dual-earner families, up from 36% in 1976.

In this context of evolving professional and family roles, concerns about work-life balance have also grown. This is especially true for women.

Despite men's increased involvement in raising children and doing household chores, women continue to devote on average more time to both (Marshall 2011; Statistics Canada 2011). They are also more likely to be caregivers (Sinha 2013), which can have an impact on their time use—and possibly on their ability to balance work and family life.

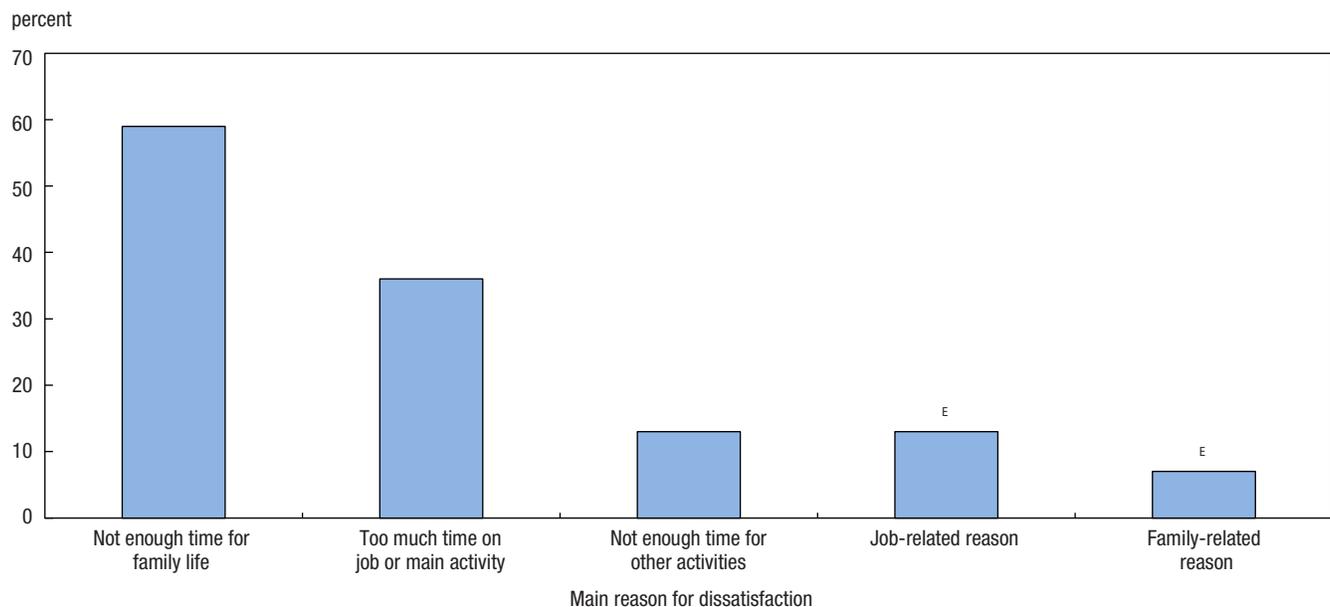
This fact sheet examines the satisfaction with work-life balance of mothers and fathers of children aged 17 and under who work full-time (i.e., 30 hours or more per week). The term “parent” will be used to designate both mothers and fathers. The data are taken from the 2012 General Social Survey.

### The majority of parents are satisfied with their work-life balance

Overall, most parents who work full-time are satisfied with their work-life balance. In 2012, 3 out of 4 parents said they were satisfied or very satisfied with this balance (75%). The others were “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied” (15%), “dissatisfied” (8%) or “very dissatisfied” (1%).

Of the parents who said that they were not satisfied, the most frequently mentioned reason for the dissatisfaction was not having enough time for family life (Chart 1). This was followed by spending too much time on their job or main activity, and not having enough time for other activities.

**Chart 1**  
**Main reasons for dissatisfaction with work-life balance, 2012**



<sup>E</sup> use with caution

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2012.

Women were a little less likely than men to be satisfied. Specifically, 72% of mothers reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with their work-life balance, compared with 78% of fathers.

## The absence of a spouse is associated with lower satisfaction with work-life balance

Lone parents who work full-time must obviously assume more responsibilities; alone, they must prepare meals, transport children, help with homework, and so forth. This pressure may be even greater when the children are very young and the parents have little or no social support.

In 2012, 67% of lone parents reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with their work-life balance, compared with 76% of couple parents. Among individuals in couples, women were less satisfied than men, perhaps in part because they assume more family responsibilities than men (73% of women in couples reported being satisfied, compared with 78% of men).

Furthermore, parents with at least one child aged 0 to 4 years were less likely to report being satisfied with the balance between their job and home life (72%) than those whose children were all between 5 and 17 years of age (77%).

Among parents with at least one young child, 75% of fathers reported that they were nonetheless satisfied with their work-life balance, compared with 68% of women.

## Parents “sandwiched” between taking care of children and sick family members were less satisfied

Caregivers are people who provide care or assistance to a family member or friend with a chronic health condition, a disability or problems related to aging. The emotional investment and the time caregivers dedicate are often considerable and can have numerous psychological, physical and financial consequences (Sinha 2013; Turcotte 2013).

Parents with children at home who are also caregivers are sometimes described as being “sandwiched” between raising their children and caring for a sick family member or friend.

In 2012, parents who were also caregivers (in other words, “sandwiched”) were less likely to report being satisfied with their work-life balance (69% compared with 78% of their counterparts who were parents but not caregivers).

Several studies have shown that women are more likely than men to provide care to a family member or friend suffering from a long-term health condition. In addition, those caregivers provide more hours of care on average (Sinha 2013).

In that vein, it is not surprising to observe that among parents who were caregivers, mothers were even less likely (63%) than fathers (73 %) to be satisfied with their work-life balance.

## A higher level of education was not associated with greater satisfaction

People with a higher level of education often hold better jobs and have higher salaries. However, a higher level of education was not associated with greater satisfaction with work-life balance.

More generally, there was little difference in the level of satisfaction with work-life balance in the various occupational groups (Table 1). Nevertheless, women in professional occupations expressed a lower level of satisfaction than their male counterparts.

## Among parents who work more hours, fathers are more satisfied than mothers

Not surprisingly, parents who worked more hours each week were more likely to have difficulty balancing their professional and family life. Among parents who worked 50 or more hours a week, 66% reported being satisfied with their work-life balance, compared with 78% of those who worked 30 to 39 hours per week (Table 1).

**Table 1**  
**Satisfaction with work-life balance, parents of children under the age of 18 who work full-time, 2012**

	Satisfied or very satisfied with their work-life balance		
	Total	Men	Women
	percentage		
<b>Total</b>	75	78	72 <sup>†</sup>
<b>Age group</b>			
Under 35 (ref.)	76	82	70 <sup>†</sup>
35 to 44 years	74	75*	73
45 years and older	76	78	72
<b>Presence of a spouse or partner</b>			
No (ref.)	67	73	66
Yes	76*	78	73* <sup>†</sup>
<b>Age of children</b>			
At least one child aged 0 to 4 years (ref.)	77	79	74 <sup>†</sup>
All children aged 5 to 17 years	72*	75	68* <sup>†</sup>
<b>Province of residence</b>			
Newfoundland and Labrador	81*	77	85*
Prince Edward Island	90*	87*	94*
Nova Scotia	73	76	69
New Brunswick	78	72	83*
Quebec	79*	83*	74 <sup>†</sup>
Ontario (ref.)	72	74	71
Manitoba	70	68	74
Saskatchewan	74	82*	62 <sup>†</sup>
Alberta	80*	85*	71 <sup>†</sup>
British Columbia	73	76	70
<b>Educational attainment</b>			
High school diploma (ref.)	76	78	74
Postsecondary certificate or diploma	75	78	72 <sup>†</sup>
University degree	74	77	71 <sup>†</sup>
<b>Occupation</b>			
All occupations (ref.)	75	78	72 <sup>†</sup>
Management	72	73	69
Professional occupations	75	79	70 <sup>†</sup>
Technical occupations, technicians and technologists	77	79	75
Clerical staff	74	73	74
Sales and services	74	78	70
Trades, transport and equipment operators	75	76	65
Occupations unique to the primary industry	76	77	F
Processing, manufacturing and utilities	87*	89*	82
<b>Caregiver situation</b>			
Does not provide care (ref.)	78	79	76
Provides care to a parent, friend or other person	69*	73*	63* <sup>†</sup>
<b>Number of hours per week</b>			
30 to 39 hours (ref.)	78	85	74 <sup>†</sup>
40 to 49 hours	78	80*	74 <sup>†</sup>
50 hours or more	66	69*	60*
<b>Work schedule</b>			
Normal schedule (ref.)	77	80	73 <sup>†</sup>
Shift work	69*	70*	68
<b>Job category</b>			
Employee (ref.)	75	78	71 <sup>†</sup>
Self-employed or unpaid family worker	75	75	76
<b>Flexible schedule<sup>1</sup></b>			
No (ref.)	73	76	69 <sup>†</sup>
Yes	79*	81	75* <sup>†</sup>
<b>Possibility of taking advantage of a flexible work schedule without a negative impact on career<sup>1</sup></b>			
No (ref.)	71	74	67
Yes	80*	83*	76* <sup>†</sup>
<b>Possibility of taking leave without pay to care for children<sup>1</sup></b>			
No (ref.)	67	71	61
Yes	77*	79	73* <sup>†</sup>
<b>Possibility of taking leave without pay to provide care to a spouse, partner or other family member<sup>1</sup></b>			
No (ref.)	68	72	64
Yes	78*	81*	75* <sup>†</sup>
<b>Possibility of taking leave without pay for personal reasons<sup>1</sup></b>			
No (ref.)	70	76	59* <sup>†</sup>
Yes	77*	79	74* <sup>†</sup>

Table 1 (end)

**Satisfaction with work-life balance, parents of children under the age of 18 who work full-time, 2012**

	Satisfied or very satisfied with their work-life balance		
	Total	Men	Women
	percentage		
<b>Does telework at least occasionally<sup>1</sup></b>			
No (ref.)	74	78	70 <sup>†</sup>
Yes	78	78	78*

1. Paid employees only

\* significantly different from the reference category ( $p < 0.05$ )<sup>†</sup> significantly different from the estimate for men ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2012.

Men are more likely than women to be in the category of people working 50 or more hours a week. However, this does not explain the differences in satisfaction by sex. For example, regardless of the number of hours worked, fathers were more likely than mothers to report being satisfied with the balance between work and family life: 69% of fathers who worked 50 or more hours a week reported being satisfied or very satisfied with this balance, compared with 60% of mothers.

## Shift work and work-life balance

In addition to the number of hours worked, when these hours are worked could also make a difference. According to other studies, individuals who work shifts are less satisfied with their work (Shields 2006), run increased health risks (Shields 2002) and show a higher level of stress (Williams 2003).

In 2005, shift workers were less likely than those with a regular daytime schedule to report being satisfied with their work-life balance (Williams 2009). These results were still true in 2012. According to the GSS data, 69% of parents who worked shifts were satisfied with their work-life balance, compared with 77% of those with a regular daytime schedule.

## For employees, a flexible work schedule is associated with a higher level of satisfaction

In an effort to attract and retain the best candidates, some employers have implemented a variety of measures to offer a better work-life balance. But are these measures really effective? More specifically, do those who benefit from these measures report a higher level of satisfaction?

According to the 2012 GSS, having a flexible schedule that enables individuals to choose when their work day starts and ends was associated with slightly greater satisfaction. In fact, 79% of employees with a flexible work schedule reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with their work-life balance, compared with 73% of those whose schedule was not flexible.

The perception that benefitting from a flexible work schedule, without having a negative career impact, could also make a difference. As such, 80% of parents who considered the possibility of taking advantage of a flexible work schedule, without it negatively impacting their career, were satisfied with their work-life balance, compared with 71% of those who said the opposite (Table 1).

The other measures associated with greater satisfaction with work-life balance include the possibility of taking leave without pay 1) to care for children; 2) to provide care to a spouse, partner or other family member; 3) for personal reasons.

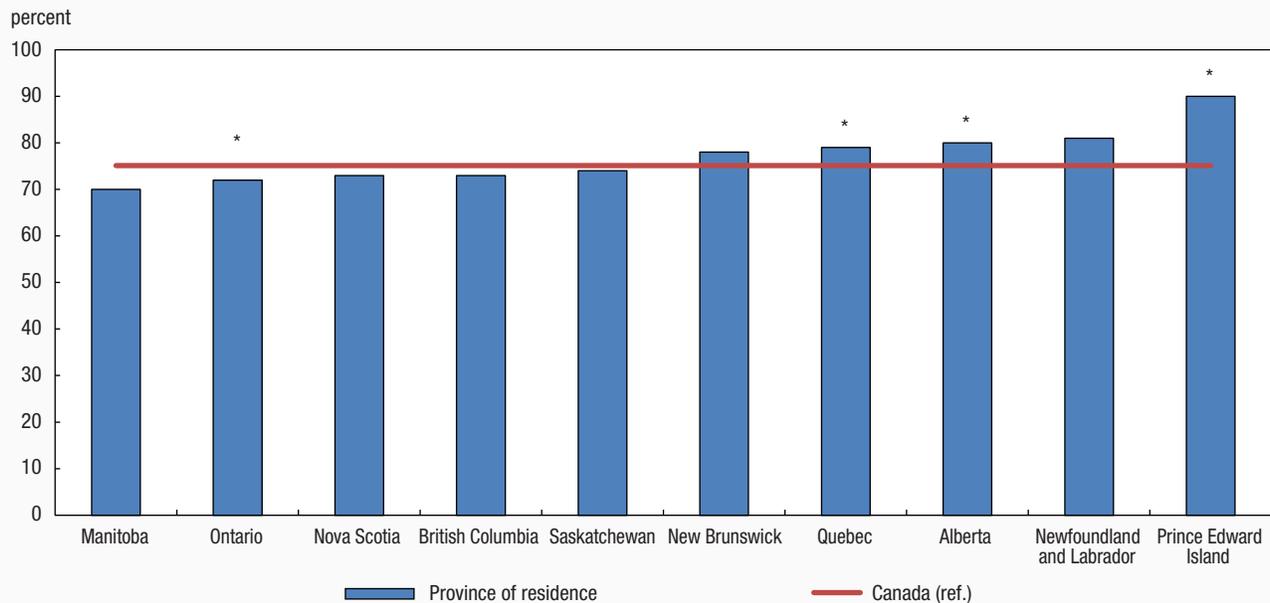
The possibility of taking an extended leave for personal reasons was especially linked to the level of satisfaction of mothers: 74% of those who had this possibility were satisfied with their work–life balance, compared with only 59% of those who did not have this possibility. Among fathers, there was no difference between those who had the possibility of taking an extended leave for personal reasons and those who did not.

It should be noted that telework, sometimes presented as a measure to promote work–life balance, was not associated with different levels of satisfaction for men. Nonetheless, women who at least occasionally performed part of their paid work at home were more likely to report being satisfied with their work–life balance than others (78% and 70% respectively).

## Regional differences in work–life balance

At the regional level, parents in Prince Edward Island were the most satisfied with the balance between job and family life. The least satisfied were parents in Manitoba (Chart 2).

**Chart 2**  
Percentage of parents who reported being satisfied or very satisfied with the work–life balance, by province of residence, 2012



\* significantly different from reference category ( $p < 0.05$ )

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2012.

Despite several similarities, the extent of the differences in satisfaction with work–life balance between men and women varied by province. In Ontario, there was no statistically significant difference between women (71%) and men (74%). However, in Saskatchewan, only 62% of mothers reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their work–life balance, compared with 82% of fathers. The differences in satisfaction between mothers and fathers were also higher than the average in Alberta and Quebec<sup>1</sup> (Table 1).

1. In Alberta, 71% of mothers had reported being satisfied with their work–life balance, compared with 85% of fathers. In Quebec, the corresponding proportions were 74% for mothers and 83% for fathers.

## Summary

The majority of Canadian parents report being satisfied with the balance between their job and home life. Mothers were more likely than fathers to express dissatisfaction with their work-life balance. This conclusion remained valid in general when taking into consideration all job characteristics. For example, among those who worked 50 or more hours a week, mothers were less satisfied with the work-life balance.

In addition, when all the factors in this fact sheet were held constant, in a multivariate analysis, women remained less likely to report being satisfied than men (results not presented). Data on the distribution of household chores and care for children between fathers and mothers are not available in the 2012 GSS. A study that would also take these factors into account could potentially help enrich the understanding of the differences between fathers and mothers regarding work-life balance.

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