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## The effect of work arrangements on perceived work-family balance

Research Brief No. 12

Population Change and Lifecourse  
Strategic Knowledge Cluster



### Summary

The combined demands of the modern work world and raising a healthy family have many Canadian struggling to find enough time. Canadians are working more and more hours while wages largely remain stagnant. In order to address this growing concern, alternate work arrangements have been increasingly used to help employees strike some degree of work-family balance and decrease related issues of absenteeism and turnover in the workplace. This research explores the effect of three unique work strategies — flexible schedules, shift work and self-employment — on men and women in dual-earner families. It examines each arrangement's impact on reported satisfaction with balance between family and work lives. Results indicate that using flexible schedules and increasing employees' enjoyment of their work can help promote work-family balance.

### Key Findings

- Roughly 65% of both men and women reported being satisfied with their work-family balance in 1998, while 70.7% of women and 77.6% of men did so in 2005.
- The use of flexible schedules significantly increased women's perception that their work and family lives were balanced. In 2005, women with some control over their work schedules were 75% more likely to say they had positive work-family balance. Use of flexible schedules also rose between 1998 and 2005, but were used more commonly by men in both years.
- Enjoying one's work had a major impact on respondents' ability to juggle work and family lives. Women who enjoyed their paid work were more than eight times more likely to say they had positive work-family balance, while men who enjoyed their work were six times more likely to say so.
- Both men and women with some post-secondary education were more likely to be dissatisfied with their work-family balance than those without.
- With every additional minute of paid work, women were less likely to respond positively about their work-family balance.
- Men who took part in shift work and men who were self-employed were half as likely to be satisfied with balance in the realms of family and work.

### Method and Data

A nationally representative sample of Canadian women and men aged 18-64 in dual-earner families with children was taken from the 1998 and 2005 cycles of the Statistics Canada General Social Survey focusing on time use. For the survey, a randomly-selected respondent in each household was asked to provide a detailed account of their time use over the last 24-hour day. Data were collected each day of the week over the calendar year. Approximately 77.6% of 13,860 households responded to the 1998 survey, while 58.6% of 33,470 homes responded in 2005. Respondents were also asked about their time use over the previous week, but this study focused on responses regarding the last 24 hours. This should prove a more accurate account.

The dependent variable for the analysis was the response given to a question regarding satisfaction with work-family balance, coded '1' for positive answers, and '0' for negative responses. The three key independent variables were the use of flexible schedules, shift work and self-employment, but there were also variables to control education, enjoyment of work, household income, etc. A logistic regression analysis was applied to determine the effect of work arrangements on satisfaction with work-family balance.

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## Work-family balance

### Background

Previous research has shown absenteeism in the workplace, decreased work performance, and the intention to leave one's job can occur when employees struggle to juggle work and family. This can cause decreased productivity and financial performance for an organization. Absenteeism alone costs \$4.5 billion annually in Canada, according to a 2001 study. On a more personal level, lack of work-family harmony can leave employees with low life satisfaction and health concerns such as psychological strain, fatigue, depression, alcohol abuse and more. Meanwhile, flexible work schedules and supportive work environments have proven helpful in improving this balance. Because a functional society relies on families to produce workers and support the paid labour force, we have a vested interest in encouraging and nurturing work-family balance.

Over the past 25 years, Canadian men and women have spent an increasing amount of time on paid work. While Canada provides more generous support to working parents than the United States, its policies lag behind those of many Nordic countries. A 2001 Health Canada study found just 10% of Canadians responded positively about their work-family balance, while 50% responded negatively.

Women are increasingly present in the workforce, with 82% of Canadian women participating in the

labour force in 2011 — just 9 percentage points less than men. However, women still spend more time on unpaid, family-oriented work than their male partners (averaging 4.3 hours per day compared to 2.7 for men.) Thus, they suffer more stress than men when juggling work and family life. Women are also more likely to adjust their work lives to accommodate the needs of the family, frequently leaving the work world or dropping to part time.

Large numbers of Canadians are turning to self-employment in recent years, but the trend does not translate equally for men and women. Self-employed women spent more time on family responsibilities, while self-employed men spent the bulk of their time on paid work.

Voydanoff (2005) provided a useful definition of work-family balance as "a global assessment that work and family resources are sufficient to meet work and family demands such that participation is effective in both domains."

### Results

The use of flexible schedules rose between 1998 and 2005 among both Canadian men and women, although men were more likely to utilize these alternate work arrangements in both years. However, the authors' expectation that using flexible schedules would significantly impact work-family balance was true only for women in 2005. Overall, a similar percentage of men and women reported being satisfied with their work-family balance. About 65% of all

#### Box 1: A review of alternate work arrangements which can influence perception of work-family balance

**Flexible schedules:** This refers to an arrangement where employees can choose the beginning and ending time of their work days, within parameters set by their employers. It has been shown to help employees strike a balance between family and work by allowing them to schedule family obligations around their work duties and vice versa.

**Shift work:** Includes set shifts which fall outside the standard 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., five day per week schedule. Shift work has been utilized to facilitate family life, and studies indicate parents working non-traditional shifts spend more time with their children. But data show shift work also leads to negative health effects including obesity, sleep disorders and physiological and physical illness. Previous research indicates shift work can result in lower work-family balance among men, and it may increase the likelihood of the traditional division of household labour.

**Self-employment:** The number of Canadian men and women who are self-employed has steadily increased over the past decade. In 2010, 16% of the Canadian workforce was self-employed. Self-employment can offer more freedom and independence than other arrangements, but is often linked with long work hours and higher degrees of stress. Mothers are often choosing self-employment options to help meet family demands, which can mean downshifting and underemployment.



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respondents reported they were satisfied with the balance in 1998, while 70.7% of women and 77.6% of men said so in 2005.

In 2005, women's satisfaction with their work-family balance was significantly related to time spent on paid work, educational attainment, household income, enjoyment of paid and unpaid work and having a flexible schedule. With every additional minute of paid work, women were marginally less likely to be satisfied with this balance. Women who enjoyed domestic work were 60% more likely to report positively. Perhaps most tellingly, women with access to flexible scheduling were 75% more likely to report they were pleased with their work-family balance.

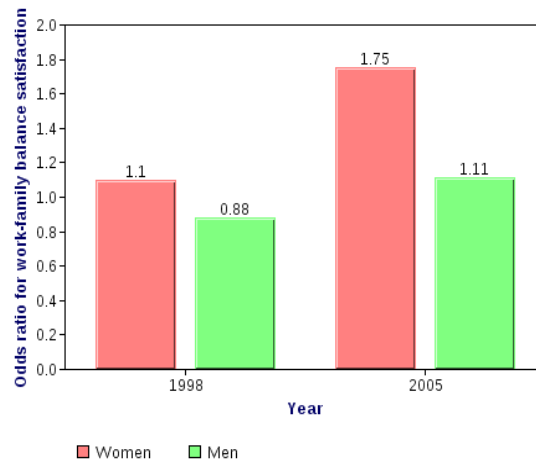
In that same year, Canadian men's ability to juggle their work and family lives was tied to educational attainment, amount of time spent on paid work, and enjoyment of paid work. When men enjoyed their work, they were six times more likely to be satisfied with their work-family balance. Shift work and self-employment decreased the odds of satisfaction by 45% and 48%, respectively. This confirms the authors' hypothesis that shift work would negatively correlate to work-family satisfaction.

In 1998, caring for adults in the household (disabled, ill, etc.) was a contributing factor for women. As in 2005, shift work was a strong negative force affecting work-family balance for men, as men who worked non-standard shifts were half as likely to be satisfied than those on a regular schedule.

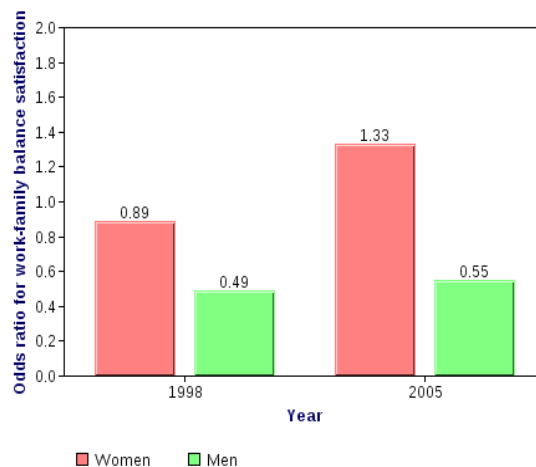
A parent's level of educational attainment seemed to have a major impact on their perception of balance between their family and work domains. Parents in dual-earner households who had attended a post-secondary institution in some form were twice as likely to say they were unsatisfied with work-family balance than those topping out at a high school education or less. This may stem from the types of jobs performed by those with post-secondary educations, which can be more time-consuming and prone to causing stress.

These figures show the impact of three work arrangements on perceived work-family balance among Canadians, with odds over 1.0 indicating a positive impact on perceived balance.

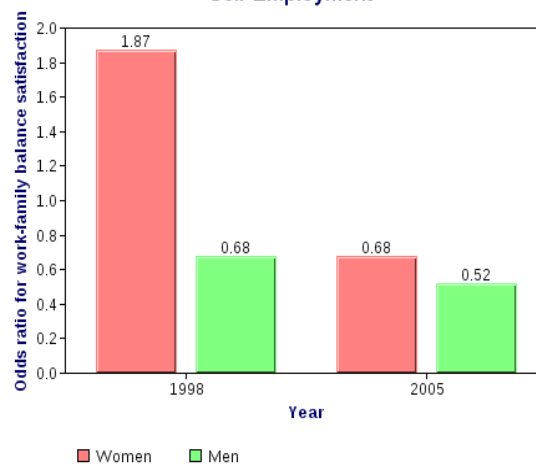
**Flexible Schedules**



**Shift Work**



**Self-Employment**





## Work-family balance

### Conclusions and Considerations

Women with flexible schedules were 75% more likely to be satisfied with their work-family balance in 2005, indicating that employers who offer flex-time when possible could make life easier for working mothers. This, coupled with previous literature on the subject, should show employers the potential organizational benefits of letting mothers choose their own schedule. A working mother who can adjust scheduling to avoid family conflicts is less likely to leave and perhaps more willing to put in extra effort. Promoting work-family balance and thus holding onto employees can help reduce the costs of turnover and absenteeism, bolstering a business' bottom line.

Flexible schedules didn't rate as importantly for men in dual-earner households. It may be more beneficial for women — traditionally the primary caregivers for children. The negative correlation between shift work and family-life balance for men is of concern, especially considering shift work's potential impacts on health and wellness.

Self-employment also appeared to be linked with a struggle to balance both aspects of life for men.

The more time a parent spent on paid work and the more advanced their education, the less they reported being able to successfully juggle their work and family worlds. Perhaps this comes from a societal value shift where home and family are becoming increasingly important as compared to career goals. Since employees who enjoyed their work also experienced more harmony between their job and their family, efforts to create a more positive work atmosphere could pay off with increased employee morale and commitment.

The use and impact of the three alternate work arrangements explored in this study changed from 1998 to 2005, as did the economic context and governmental policy. These data should be further tracked and analyzed, incorporating other segments of the population. For employers and legislators, a flexible approach to workplace policy is recommended to encourage work-family balance among employees for the benefit of both families and organizations.

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### About the Policy Brief

This policy brief is based on Karen A. Duncan & Rachael N. Pettigrew (2012): The effect of work arrangements on perception of work-family balance, *Community, Work & Family* 15(4): 402-423. This brief was prepared by Daniel Punch. For more information, contact Karen Duncan at karen.duncan@ad.umanitoba.ca.

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