

◀ R E P O R T S I X ▶

WORK-LIFE CONFLICT

IN CANADA IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM



Key Findings and Recommendations from the 2001 National Work-Life Conflict Study



REPORT SIX

Work-Life Conflict in Canada in the New Millennium:

*Key Findings and Recommendations From The
2001 National Work-Life Conflict Study*

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The Blind Men and the Elephant by John Godfrey Saxe

It was six men of Indostan
To learning much inclined,
who went to see the Elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind

The first approached the Elephant
And happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side
At once began to bawl:
"God bless me! But the Elephant
Is very like a WALL!"

The second, feeling of the tusk,
Cried, "Ho! What have we here
So very round and smooth and sharp?
To me "'tis mighty clear
This wonder of an Elephant
Is very like a SPEAR!"

The third approached the animal
And happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands,
Thus boldly up and spake:
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a SNAKE!"

The fourth reached out an eager hand,
And felt about the knee
"What most this wondrous beast is like
Is mighty plain" quoth he,
"'Tis clear enough the Elephant
Is very like a TREE!"

The fifth who chanced to touch the ear
Said: "E'en the blindest man
Can tell what this resembles most;
Deny the fact who can,
This marvel of an Elephant
Is very like a FAN!"

The sixth no sooner had begun
About the beast to grope
Than seizing on the swinging tail
That fell within his scope,
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a ROPE!"

And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each were partly in the right,
And all were in the wrong?

What is work-life conflict? What can be done to reduce conflict between work and life? Why should we care? Much like the blind men and the elephant, conclusions about the prevalence, impact and reduction of work-life conflict depend very much on how it is defined. To get a comprehensive view of work-life conflict and to understand its effects, one has to examine the phenomenon from a number of different angles. Otherwise, just like the blind men in the poem above, we will jump to the wrong conclusions with respect to the prevalence of work-life conflict at this time within the Canadian workforce, its impacts on employees, their families and their employers, who is at risk and how it can be reduced.

Work-life conflict broadly defined in this study

We all play many roles: employee, manager, spouse, parent, child, sibling, friend, and community member. Each of these roles imposes demands on us that require time, energy and commitment to fulfill. Work-family or work-life conflict¹ occurs when the cumulative demands of these many work and non-work roles are incompatible in some respect, so that participation in one role is made more difficult by participation in the other role².

Various theoretical frameworks are used in the research literature to look at the relationship between work and life. The most well-known of these models includes role conflict and role spillover. Briefly, the role conflict model is based on the assumption that the more roles one occupies, the higher the potential for stress and strain due to the incompatibility of the demands imposed by the different roles and the fact that the different responsibilities compete for time and energy (i.e. role overload, role interference). Spillover theory, on the other hand, postulates that the experiences an individual has when performing one set of roles impacts their performance of other roles (i.e. work to family spillover). While spillover can, in theory, be either positive or negative, the majority of research in this area is based on the assumption that spillover is undesirable. This body of research frequently talks about 'role strain' which refers to the negative interference an employee experiences when the demands associated with one domain affect their performance in the other domain (e.g. caregiver strain).

This research conceptualizes work-life conflict broadly to include role overload, role interference and caregiver strain. A working definition for each of these constructs is given in Box 1.

Role interference is conceptualized in this study to consist of two factors: family interferes with work and work interferes with family. In the first case, interference occurs when family-role responsibilities hinder performance at work (e.g. a child's illness prevents attendance at work; conflict at home makes concentration at work difficult). In the second case, interference arises when work demands make it harder for an employee to fulfill their family responsibilities (e.g. long hours in paid work prevent attendance at a child's sporting event; preoccupation with the work role prevents an active enjoyment of family life; work stresses spill over into the home environment and increases conflict with the family).

In other words, work-life conflict is defined in this research as having two major components: the practical aspects associated with time crunches and scheduling conflicts (e.g. role interference), and the perceptual aspect of feeling overwhelmed, overloaded or stressed by the pressures of multiple roles (e.g. role overload, caregiver strain).

Objectives of Report Six

The 2001 National Work-Life Conflict Study and the reports produced from this research to date (see Box 2 for a list of the reports and where they can be found) have given business and labour leaders, policy-makers and academics an objective 'big picture' view of this issue. This report, the last in the series of six reports, provides a summary of the key findings and recommendations coming from this research program.

The goal of this report is to produce one document that summarizes key findings, conclusions and recommendations from these five reports. The reader who wishes to read about how the study was done and the methodologies used will find them in the reports listed in Box 2. This report was created to help key stakeholders understand and deal effectively with work-life conflict and make the business case for change. It does this in four ways. First, it quantifies the prevalence of the various forms of work-life conflict. Second, it quantifies the costs of each of these forms of imbalance to key stakeholders (i.e. employees, families, organizations, and governments).

¹ From the 1970s to the early 1990s, researchers studied work-family conflict. In the latter part of the 1990s the term was changed to 'work-life' conflict in recognition of the fact that employees' non-work responsibilities can take many forms, including volunteer pursuits and education, as well as the care of children or elderly dependents.

² We sometimes use the term work-life balance in this report to mean the opposite of work-life conflict. This reflects the fact that the concept of conflict and balance are frequently viewed as a continuum. Employees with low work-life conflict/high work-life balance are at one end of the continuum while those with high work-life conflict/low work-life balance are at the other.



Third, it identifies the key risk factors associated with the different forms of work-life conflict. Finally, it summarizes what key stakeholders can do to increase work-life balance. In other words, this report offers readers a primer on the four key forms of work-life conflict, by summarizing **what** we know about this conflict, **why** it needs to be reduced, **who** is most likely to experience it, and **what** can be done.

The report is divided into seven chapters including the introduction. *Chapter two* outlines what this study has told us about the men and women who work for Canada's largest employer. *Chapters three* (role overload), *four* (work interferes with family), *five* (family interferes with work) and *six* (caregiver strain) are each devoted to one of the four forms of work-life conflict considered in this research initiative. Each of these four chapters begins with a definition of the construct under consideration and then summarizes what we know about the prevalence of this type of work-life conflict. Data answering the following questions are then presented: What situations and conditions put employees at risk with respect to this form of work-life conflict? What are the costs associated with this type of work-life conflict? What can the various parties do to reduce this form of work-life conflict? *Chapter seven* provides a summary of key conclusions and recommendations arising from this substantive body of research.



CHAPTER TWO

What Does This Study Tell Us About Canada's Largest Employers and Their Employees?

The sample for the *National Study on Balancing Work and Family* was drawn from 100 Canadian companies with 500+ employees. Forty of these organizations operated in the private sector, 22 were from the public sector and 38 were from the not-for-profit (NFP) sector. Private sector companies from the following sectors were included in the sample: telecommunications, high technology, retail, transportation, pharmaceutical, financial services, entertainment, natural resources and manufacturing. The public sector sample included seven municipal governments, seven provincial government departments, and eight federal public service departments/agencies. The NFP sector sample consisted of 15 hospitals/district health councils, 10 school boards, eight universities and colleges, and five 'other' organizations that could best be classified as NFP/greater public service (e.g. social service, charity, protective services).

A total of 31,571 people responded to the survey. Just over half (55%) of the respondents are women. The sample includes employees from all sectors and is well-distributed with respect to job type. Just under half (46%) of the respondents work in the public sector. One in three work in the NFP sector and 20% are employed by a private sector company. Just under half (46%) work in managerial and professional positions, 40% work in non-professional positions (e.g. clerical, administrative, retail, production) and 14% work in technical jobs.

Approximately half of the respondents to the survey can be considered to be highly educated male and female knowledge workers. The majority of respondents are part of a dual income family and indicate that they are able to 'live comfortably' (but not luxuriously) on two full-time incomes. Respondents who belong to a traditional, male breadwinner family are in the minority (5% of total sample, 11% of the sample of men) and outnumbered by respondents who are single parents. The fact that the traditional families tended to be headed by highly paid male managers and professionals suggests that this family arrangement is restricted to those with higher incomes.

The typical respondent to this study have long tenure in their organization (the average respondent has been working at their present organization for an average of 13.9 years) and

have received little career development (been in their current job for an average of 7.3 years). These data would suggest that Canada's largest employers need to focus more on career development.

The sample includes a substantial number of employees who may be at risk with respect to work-life conflict. The mean age of the respondents to this survey was 42.8-years-old, which puts them in the mid-career/fast track stage of the career cycle, the 'full-nest' stage of the life cycle and the forties transition stage of adult development. Each of these stages is associated with increased stress and greater work and family demands. Three-quarters of the respondents to this survey were married or living with a significant other and 69% were part of a dual income family. Over half (56%) had dependent care responsibilities (i.e. spent an hour or more a week in either child care or elder care). Eleven percent were single parents. Twelve percent lived in rural areas with limited access to community services that support balance. One in three was a clerical or administrative employee with a lower level of formal education (i.e. reduced job mobility) and lower personal and family incomes. One-quarter of the respondents indicated that money was tight in their family; 29% of respondents earned less than \$40,000 per year and just over one-quarter lived in families with total family incomes that were less than the Canadian average. One in three of the respondents had a high school education or less.

This research initiative has culminated in the collection of a large, rich, comprehensive data set with which we can evaluate how Canadian employees, employers and families are doing. The 2001 study sample is well distributed with respect to age, region, community size, job type, education, personal income, family income, and the family's financial well-being. In many ways, the demographic characteristics of the sample correspond to national data suggesting that the results from this research can be generalized beyond this study. Accordingly, the rest of this chapter summarizes what the data from this study tell us about the employees of Canadian firms employing 500 or more people and the firms that employ them.

This chapter provides data on the variables considered elsewhere in the report. The information in this chapter can be used by organizations and policy-makers to benchmark how they and their employees are doing with respect to the key employee and organizational outcomes considered in this study. This Chapter summarizes what the 1991 and 2001 studies tell us about the expectations and demands Canadians face at work and articulates how such expecta-

tions have changed over time and why. The next section provides similar benchmark information with respect to demands at home, and uses the data from the 1991 and 2001 studies to summarize what we know about how Canadian employees feel about the organizations that employ them. Also included in this section are benchmark data on absenteeism within Canadian organizations. The next part reports on the mental health of Canadian workers, and summarizes what we know about the health of Canadian families. Benchmark data on the use of Canada's health care system are provided, and the next section evaluates the extent to which Canadian organizations can be considered to be 'family-friendly' and 'best practice' with respect to their policies and practices. The final two parts of this chapter provide benchmark data on how Canadian employees and Canadian families cope with stress and work-life conflict.

Work expectations and demands

What do we know about the work expectations placed on those who responded to the survey (and, by extension, the work expectations of Canadians who work for the nation's larger employers)?

Canadian employees devote a significant amount of time per week to work

The 2001 data with respect to work demands and expectations support the following conclusions:

- Canadian employees work extremely hard and extend their work day on a regular basis,
- Work expectations have increased to the extent that many Canadian employees cannot complete their work during regular work hours,
- Work requirements (especially with respect to job-related travel and overtime) do not support work-life balance, and
- Canadians devote considerably more time per week to paid employment than to their non-work roles

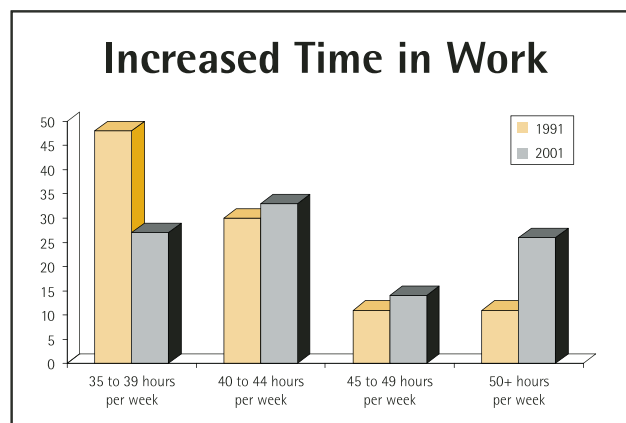
The typical full-time respondent to the 2001 survey spent 42.2 hours in work per week. One in four spent 50 or more hours in work per week. One in three worked an additional one-and-a-half days of paid overtime in the month prior to the survey being conducted, while half performed 2.5 days of unpaid overtime in the same time period. Fifty percent 'donated' 3.5 days of additional unpaid work per month to their employer by taking work home to complete in the evenings (supplemental work at home - SWAH). An

additional day per month was spent commuting to and from work. These long hours in work appear to be systemic as a substantial proportion of all respondents, regardless of job type, worked paid and unpaid overtime.

Furthermore, the data reviewed in this report suggests that many of Canada's largest employers still believe in the 'myth of separate worlds'. The expectation that an employee will spend both weekday and weekend nights away from home if required by their job appears to be quite prevalent, and many employees feel that they cannot refuse overtime work.

Time spent in work has increased over time

Comparisons done using the 1991 and 2001 samples suggest that time in work increased over the course of the past decade. Whereas one in ten respondents in 1991 worked 50 or more hours per week, one in four do so now; during this same time period, the proportion of employees working between 35 and 39 hours per week declined from 48% of the sample to 27%. This increase in time in work was observed for all job groups and all sectors. The data also reveal that during this same time period the proportion of employees who perform unpaid overtime has almost doubled - from just over one in four employees in 1991 to approximately one in two in 2001.



Many Canadian employees cannot get their work done during regular hours

Taken together these data (i.e. time in work has increased, employees regularly work paid and unpaid overtime and take work home to complete in the evening) imply that it has become more difficult over the past decade for Canadian employees (especially those working in managerial and professional positions) to meet work expectations during



regular hours. Further work is needed to determine why work demands have increased over the decade. Competing explanations for these phenomena drawn from the 2001 data include:

- 'organizational anorexia' (downsizing - especially of the middle manager cadre - has meant that there are not enough employees to do the work and managers to strategize and plan),
- corporate culture (if you don't work long hours and take work home you will not advance in your career or keep your job during downsizing; non-professionals fear that they will lose their jobs if they do not work overtime; professionals worry that their career will stagnate if they say no to work),
- increased use of technology (technology such as e-mail, laptops, cell phones and the Blackberry has increased expectations with respect to employee availability and response time as well as information overload),
- global competition and shareholder value (work hours have been extended to allow work across time zones, increased competition and a desire to keep costs down has limited the number of employees it is deemed feasible to hire), and
- the speed of change has increased to the point that many organizations have lost their ability to plan and prioritize - workloads increase when organizations practice crisis management.

One thing is clear from the data collected for this study - the strong link between hours in work and role overload, work interferes with family, burnout and physical and mental health problems means that these workloads are not sustainable over the long term.

Work expectations and demands increase with level

One in three of those who responded to the 2001 survey supervise the work of others. The 2001 data determined that the demands associated with supervision are substantive, as the typical supervisor has a very wide span of control (an average of 20 direct reports). This span of control is significantly higher than was observed in the 1991 sample (an average of six direct reports), a finding that is consistent with the fact that many organizations shed layers of management as part of their downsizing and restructuring initiatives. One consequence of this strategy is an increased workload for the supervisor who 'survived' the downsizing.

Non-work expectations and demands

Employees have responsibilities and demands other than those associated with paid employment. The 1991 and 2001 surveys give us the following information on the amount of time Canadian employees spend in non-work activities:

Canadians devote considerably more time to paid employment than to their non-work roles

In 2001 Canadian employees who answered our survey spent approximately 17 hours a week in non-work-related activities - a significantly lower amount of time than they spent in paid employment. Home chores consumed about 11 hours per week. Respondents with elder care responsibilities spent approximately 5.3 hours helping their elderly relative; and parents spent approximately 10.8 hours per week in child care. Those who volunteered spent just under four hours per week in volunteer activities.

Time spent in child care, home chores and leisure has declined over time

The amount of time working men and women devote per week to child care, home chores and leisure declined dramatically over the 1990s. A comparison of the 1991 and 2001 data sets indicate the decline in time spent in home chores and leisure over the decade was essentially the same for both men and women (20% less time in home chores and 40% less time in leisure in 2001 than in 1991). The decline in time spent in child care was, however, more precipitous for women than for men.

In many Canadian families, responsibilities for child care have shifted

In both 1991 and 2001 samples, the majority of men and women indicated that it was the female in their family who had the main responsibility for child care. While Canadian men spent relatively more time in child care in 2001 than they did in 1991, the data indicated that responsibility for this role still rests primarily with the women (i.e. men are 'helping' women with child care). This is an important observation as responsibility for a role has been found to have a stronger positive association with stress than has time spent in role-related activities.

In many Canadian families, however, a shift in responsibilities has occurred. This conclusion is supported by the fact that 44% of the men and 33% of the women in the 2001 sample indicated that in their family responsibility for child care is equally shared between partners. This finding is consistent

with our data that showed that in many Canadian families, men and women are now equal partners with respect to the amount of time they devote to child care.

Responsibilities at home are shifting – women are doing less and men more

A key finding from this research is that the role of 'caregiver' is not as strongly associated with gender as it was in the past. Traditionally, research in this area has determined that women spend more time in child care than men. Such was not the case in this study, as mothers and fathers in 2001, who engaged in child care, spent essentially the same amount of time each week in child care-related activities.

Detailed examination of the 1991 and 2001 results gives us a better understanding of how family dynamics have changed over time. The number of hours per week women spent in child care declined 33 percentage points between 1991 and 2001. During the same time period, the amount of time spent per week in child care by men dropped by only 15 percentage points. The women in our 2001 sample, in fact, reduced the amount of time they spent per week in child care to such an extent that there were essentially no gender differences in the amount of time devoted to this activity (the typical mother in the 2001 sample spent approximately 11.1 hours per week in child care, while the typical father spent approximately 10.5 hours). The women in the 1991 sample, on the other hand, spent significantly more hours in child care than their male counterparts (16.4 hours per week versus 12.7 hours per week). It would appear from these data that maternal employment has contributed, over the course of the past decade, to a redistribution of labour within Canadian families. It should be noted that this 'enlightened' attitude with respect to the distribution of 'family labour' does not extend to home chores, which still appear to be perceived by many to be 'women's work'.

This finding is consistent with the observations of Bianchi (2000) from American time use data. She attributes the decline in maternal time in child care and the lack of gender differences in time spent in child care to the following factors:

- the reallocation of mothers' time to market work outside the home,
- overestimations of maternal time with children in the past (it was assumed that time at home was all invested in child care, when in reality a large amount was given to home chores),

- smaller families have reduced the number of years with very young children,
- more pre-school children spend time outside the home in school-like settings regardless of their mothers' employment status,
- women's reallocation of their time has changed men's domestic roles and facilitated the increase in men's involvement in child rearing, and
- technology (i.e. cell phones, beepers) has made it possible for parents to be 'on call' while being physically present in the home.

In other words, the gender difference in time spent in child care has diminished as women spend less time and men spend more time in child care, and the need to spend high amounts of time in child care is reduced.

Employees are now challenged to balance work and the need to provide elder care

This study demonstrates that work-life issues are no longer the domain of employed parents. The percent of Canadian employees with elder care responsibilities has increased over time: from 5% of the sample in 1991 to almost one third (31%) of respondents in 2001. The ramifications of this trend are likely to be significant as the amount of time spent in elder care per week (approximately five hours per week) is not insignificant.

The family dynamics of elder care are different from those of child care

The 2001 study determined that the family dynamics of elder care are quite different from the dynamics of child care in two important ways. First, men were almost three times more likely to have primary responsibility in their family for elder care than for child care. Second, men and women were both more likely to indicate that within their family, responsibility for elder care was shared more than with respect to child care. Furthermore, the men and the women in the sample with elder care responsibilities spent approximately the same amount of time per week in elder care activities (the typical man with elder care responsibilities spent 4.6 hours per week in their care while the typical woman spent approximately 5.2 hours). These findings are very important given the projected increase in the number of working Canadians with elder care responsibilities over the course of the next several decades.



Benchmark Data on Canadian Employers

The 1991 and 2001 national surveys support the following conclusions with respect to this issue:

The majority of Canada's largest employers are not best practice employers

The data from this body of research paint a disturbing picture for Canada's larger employers. The 2001 survey determined that only half of those employed by larger firms in Canada were highly committed to their employer, satisfied with their job and viewed their organization as 'an above average place to work'. One in three reported high levels of job stress and one in four thought of leaving their current organization once a week or more. Absenteeism (especially absenteeism due to physical and mental health issues) also appears to be a substantive problem for Canadian employers, with half of the respondents reporting high levels of absenteeism (defined as three or more days of absence in the six months prior to the study being conducted). One in four respondents missed three or more days of work in a six-month period due to physical health problems, while one in 10 missed a similar amount of time due to physical, mental or emotional fatigue.

Conditions within Canadian organizations have declined over time

To quantify the extent to which key organizational attitudes and outcomes changed in Canada over time, we compared findings from our 1991 national work-life study to those obtained in 2001. This comparison established that conditions within Canadian organizations declined during the 1990s. High job stress and absenteeism due to ill health became more problematic. Almost three times as many respondents reported high job stress in 2001 (35%) than in 1991 (13%). More than half (56%) of those in the 1991 sample did not miss work due to ill health in the six months prior to the study being conducted, while just under one in four (24%) missed three or more days. In 2001, the number of respondents missing three or more days of work due to ill health had increased to 28% of the sample while the proportion reporting zero days' absence due to ill health had declined to 44%.

During the same time period, job satisfaction and organizational commitment also declined. Whereas almost two-thirds of employees in 1991 were highly satisfied with their jobs (62%) and committed to their organization (66%), approximately half reported high satisfaction (46%) or high organizational commitment (53%) in 2001. Such findings are not surprising, given that workloads and work-life conflict

also increased over the same time period. Taken as a whole, these findings suggest that many of the management practices instituted by Canada's larger organizations over the past decade (i.e. downsizing, re-engineering, focus on hours not output, pay freezes, restructuring) have had a negative impact on how Canadian employees perceive their jobs and their employers. Such workplace conditions diminish Canada's ability to compete globally and will make it harder for Canadian organizations to recruit and retain the 'best and the brightest' as the labour market tightens.

Benchmark Data on Canadian Employees

The 1991 and 2001 national surveys support the following conclusions with respect to this issue:

Many Canadians working for Canada's largest employers are in poor mental health

What does our data tell us about the mental health of Canadian employees? Extrapolation of key findings from the 2001 study to the Canadian workforce as a whole suggests that approximately half of the surveyed employees suffer from high levels of perceived stress, one in three report high levels of depressed mood and one in three are at risk of burnout. Furthermore, only 41% of those in the 2001 sample said that they were satisfied with their lives. One in five was dissatisfied. These data are disturbing as they can be considered to be a 'best case scenario', because these data reflect the mental health status of employed Canadians, many (if not virtually all) of whom can be considered to have 'good' jobs in one of the 'best countries to live in the world'. This begs the following question: if a substantial number of employed Canadians can be considered to be in poor mental health, what is the prevalence of mental health problems in those groups that are considered to be at risk with respect to stress, depression, and poor physical health (i.e. contingent workers, the unemployed, those on social assistance, etc.)?

The physical and mental health of Canadian employees has deteriorated over time

Overall, the 1990s appears to have been a tough decade for Canadians working for Canada's larger organizations. Comparison of the 1991 and 2001 samples indicates that the prevalence of high levels of perceived stress and depression increased in the Canadian labour force over this time period. For example, 44% of the respondents to our 1991 survey reported high levels of perceived stress – a substantially lower proportion than the 55% with high stress in 2001. Similarly,

36% of those in our 2001 reported high levels of depressed mood – a substantial increase from the 24% with high depressed mood in the 1991 sample.

Given these findings and the link between mental health and life satisfaction, it is not surprising to find that the life satisfaction of our respondents (and by extension that of Canadians employed by medium and large organizations) also declined over the decade (45% with high life satisfaction in 1991 versus 41% in 2001). This decline in life satisfaction is consistent with the rise in perceived stress and depressed mood. Taken as a whole, these data suggest that the increase in the work demands of Canadian employees, as well as the proliferation of work-life conflict over the decade, are having an impact on the mental health of employees.

Benchmark Data on Canadian Families

The 1991 and 2001 national surveys support the following conclusions with respect to this issue:

Many Canadian employees live in families that cannot be considered 'healthy'

The research findings paint a mixed picture with respect to the 'health' of the families in which Canadian employees live. On a positive note, in 2001 the majority of respondents were satisfied with their families and their performance as parents; that is, they engaged in behaviours associated with positive parenting several times a week or more. On a more cautionary note, only 38% of respondents were satisfied with their family's well-being and only one in four frequently engaged in activities that have been linked to family stability. Unfortunately, the fact that data on the health of Canadian families was not collected in 1991 means that we cannot draw any conclusions on how these outcomes have changed over time.

Many Canadian employees 'off shift' so they do not need child care

The 2001 study also showed that one in three employed parents in Canada arrange their work schedule so that they and their partner can share child care (i.e. work a different shift from their partner so that they do not need to arrange any kind of child care). While such arrangements may be beneficial to children, how they affect marriages and work-life conflict is still largely unknown.

Benchmark Data: Use of the Canadian Health Care System

The 2001 survey supports the following conclusions with respect to this issue:

The physical health of Canadian employees has deteriorated over time

How do Canadian employees view their physical health? While just under half of the respondents to the 2001 survey (48.4%) indicated that their health was very good or excellent, almost one in five (16.6%) perceived their health to be fair or poor. This is a significantly lower proportion of respondents perceiving that they were in very good to excellent health (and not surprisingly a higher proportion reporting that they were in fair to poor health) than was reported by Statistics Canada (1999) for Canadians aged 12 or older.

While some of this difference might be explained by the age differences in the two samples (younger Canadians can be expected to enjoy better health than older Canadians) it is also likely that working conditions and job-related stress are taking their toll on Canadian employees' health status. These numbers are also a wake-up call for employers, as they provide a conservative estimate of the proportion of the Canadian workforce that may be negatively impacting Canadian productivity through ill health, high absenteeism, and greater benefit costs.

Linking physical and mental health to use of Canada's health care system

Employed Canadians routinely seek medical care from their physicians and other health care professionals. Data from the 2001 study determined that in the six months prior to the study being done:

- just over half (54%) of the respondents sought care from their physician for reasons other than a routine check-up or maternity follow-up. These employees made an average of 5.7 physician visits per year.
- one in three (29.3%) visited a hospital or clinic on an outpatient or day use basis for medical tests or procedures. These employees made an average of 3.8 outpatient visits per year.
- one in three (31.8%) of the respondents sought medical care from a medical/health practitioner other than a physician. These employees made an average of 10 visits per year to other health care professionals.



- just over one in ten of the employees in the sample (13%) sought medical care at a hospital's emergency department for a personal health problem. These employees made an average of 3.2 visits per year to an emergency department.
- just over one in ten (10.6%) of the respondents sought help from a mental health professional. These individuals made an average of 8.2 visits per year to a mental health professional.
- almost 6% of the respondents required inpatient hospital care (i.e. stayed overnight in the hospital). These employees stayed in hospital for an average of 4.6 nights per year.

Linking physical and mental health to prescription drug use

How much do Canadian employees spend on prescription medicine? The 2001 study determined that the typical Canadian employee in our sample spent approximately \$164 per year on prescription medicine for personal use. While 44% of employees did not purchase any prescription drugs, one in five (19%) spent more than \$300 per year. The rest of the respondents (37% of the sample) spent between \$100 and \$300 per year on medications. In 80% of these cases, these prescription drug costs are borne by the employer. The high degree of correspondence between the data on prescription drug expenditures and perceived health (i.e. respondents who spent \$300 or more on prescription medication also rated their health as fair or poor) increases our confidence in these findings.

Canada spends more per person on drugs (approximately \$15.5 billion per year) than most other countries. In fact, prescription and non-prescription medications were estimated to account for 6.3% of the total economic burden of illness in Canada (Statistics Canada, 1999). The Government of Canada (and hence all taxpayers) pay almost half (43%) of these costs. The rest is paid by private insurance companies and individuals. The findings from this study suggest that these drug costs can be reduced substantially if governments and organizations were to successfully address the issue of work-life conflict.

Benchmark Data: Family-Friendly Policies and Practices in Canadian Organizations

The 1991 and 2001 national surveys provide excellent benchmark data on the supports available within Canadian organizations. The efficacy of these various policies and practices at reducing the various forms of work-life conflict considered in this analysis are evaluated later in this report.

The use of alternative work arrangements in Canada is relatively low at this time

Canadian firms look much like they did a decade ago with respect to the use of alternative work arrangements. In 2001, just over half (59%) of the employees in our sample worked a 'regular' work day (i.e. little to no formal flexibility with respect to arrival and departure times; no work location flexibility). Just under one in four (23%) used flextime, 14% worked a compressed work week and 4% worked a part-time arrangement. Formal job sharing and telework programs were rare as only 1.3% of the 2001 sample were able to job share while 1% formally worked from home. It would appear that, despite the talk, employers' willingness to implement flexible work arrangements lags behind employees' need for a diversity of work schedules. In fact, for many Canadian employees, work schedule flexibility has declined over time as the percent of the workforce who worked schedules known to increase work-life conflict and stress (i.e. rotating shifts, fixed shifts, atypical work arrangements) increased between 1991 and 2001.

Paradoxically employees with the greatest need for flexible work arrangements are the least likely to get them

Access to flexible work arrangements is not evenly distributed throughout the Canadian workforce. Examination of the 2001 survey data indicate that those employees who have the greatest need for flexible work arrangements (i.e. parents and employees with elder care responsibilities) do not have access to them. This suggests that despite all the talk about 'family-friendly' and 'employer of choice' employers, many of Canada's largest employers still ascribe to 'the myth of separate worlds'. Organizations that insist on regular work schedules have the same expectations of employees (regardless of family situation) and fail to recognize the impact of the work domain on the family domain.

While some Canadians enjoy high levels of work-time and location flexibility, many do not

Our previous research in this area observed a large gap between how an employee's work day was actually arranged (i.e. flextime) and the amount of flexibility an employee perceived that they have. The data paint a mixed picture with respect to this issue. Accordingly, the 2001 study included measures that made it possible for us to examine the amount of flexibility Canadian employees perceived that they actually had about when and where they worked. While a plurality (39%) of the employees in our 2001 sample had moderate levels of informal flexibility and one in three respondents had high flexibility (33%), a substantial percent of the sample (29%) felt that they had little to no control over when and where they worked.

Examination of the items that make up the perceived flexibility measure give us additional information on areas where improvement is needed.

While many employers have made progress ...

Approximately half of the employees in our 2001 study indicated that it was easy for them to take holidays when they wanted, interrupt work for personal/family reasons and then return, take a paid day off when their child was sick, be home from work in time to have meals with their family, and vary their work hours. These findings indicate that many of the companies in our sample have introduced progressive programs to help employees with their parenting responsibilities.

Many organizations still see work-life balance issues through a child care lens

The data testify to the fact that in 2001 a plurality of Canadian organizations still saw work-life balance issues through a child care lens and had not made substantive progress with respect to the issue of elder care. Just under half of the employees indicated it was difficult for them to get paid time off to deal with elder care concerns - twice the number that found it hard to get paid time off to deal with a sick child. This finding is unfortunate given the aging of the Canadian population and increased need for employed Canadians to care for elderly dependents.

Employers talk career development but make it hard for employees to take time off work for this purpose

Only one in three of the employees in the 2001 sample reported that it was easy for them to take paid time off work to attend a course or a conference (one in three found

it very difficult). It would appear that career development is not seen as a shared responsibility in many Canadian organizations, despite the fact that many of them claim to be a 'learning organization.' Unfortunately, by not looking at career development through a work-life lens, many organizations jeopardize the career advancement opportunities of employees with child care and elder care responsibilities, because their ability to attend training activities in the evening or on weekends is more constrained. The lack of flexibility in this area is likely to be increasingly problematic in a seller's market for labour.

Many Canadian organizations persist in operating under the 'myth of separate worlds'

Almost 40% of the employees who answered the 2001 survey stated that they found it difficult to arrange their work schedule to meet personal or family commitments. These employees worked for an organization that ascribes to the 'myth of separate worlds.' While such a view might have been defensible when the typical Canadian family consisted of a male breadwinner with a wife and children at home, it is untenable in Canada today where the dual-income family is the norm.

Employees can work from home on their time but not on their employer's time

The fact that 70% of the 2001 sample said it was difficult for them to perform telework implies that organizations are still reluctant to increase employees' work-location flexibility. The lack of movement in this area is hard to reconcile with the fact that many factors (i.e. advances in technology, the increase in the number of Canadian knowledge workers, the number of Canadian employees who perform unpaid overtime work at home outside of regular office hours) suggest that such work-location flexibility is not only possible but could also offer a competitive advantage in a tighter labour market. It is also difficult to reconcile with the fact that 12% of the employees in the 2001 sample engaged in guerrilla telework (i.e. unsanctioned, informal work at home). Taken together, these findings indicate that work at home is possible (i.e. work can be done outside of the regular office environment) and that employees do want to use such arrangements. It would appear, then, that the key barriers to telework exist at the organizational rather than at the individual level.



For many Canadian employees the school day does not mesh with the work day

Three-quarters of the Canadian employees in our sample stated that it was very difficult for them to be home from work when their child gets home from school – a concrete example of how work interferes with family in today's society. Employers and government policy-makers need to expand their discussion of child care beyond the relatively narrow domain of daycare to include before- and after-school care. As this study shows, the need for child care does not end when the children start school.

Approximately half of the Canadians employed in firms of 500 + people report to a supportive manager

Our research has shown that the behaviour of an employee's immediate manager is a more important predictor of employee physical and mental health as well as key work attitudes and outcomes, than the policies in place within the organization. The 2001 survey allows us quantify the prevalence of supportive management in Canada's larger organizations. On a positive note, almost half of these employees (47%) considered that their managers were supportive (i.e. frequently engaged in the nine management behaviours that employees find to be supportive). On a more challenging note, just over one in three respondents (37%) worked for 'mixed managers' who were not consistent with respect to the extent to which they engaged in supportive behaviours (i.e. exhibit some behaviours but not others) while approximately one in five (16%) worked for managers who rarely undertake any of the supportive actions included in the supportive manager measure.

The data paint a mixed picture with respect to the availability of family-friendly benefits

Data from the 2001 study allow us to benchmark the availability of a number of 'family-friendly' benefits and supports in Canadian organizations. Five benefits were widely available in Canada's larger firms in 2001: unpaid leave of absence (LOA, 84%), psychological/health counselling (EAP, 83%), the ability to take an unpaid emergency day off work (76%), the ability to take time off work instead of overtime pay (75%) and the ability to take short-term personal/family leave without pay (66%). These five benefits share two characteristics. First they are reactive in nature (i.e. employees can only use them after they have experienced problems). Second, they are very cost effective for the employer as the employee is not paid when they have to take time off work to deal with personal/family issues.

Progressive benefits are less widely available

Less positive is the fact that progressive benefits such as flexible work arrangements (49%), part-time work with pro-rated benefits (45%), supportive relocation policies (44%), personal days off with pay (42%), and telework (20%) were available to fewer than half of the employees in the 2001 sample. Furthermore, virtually none of Canada's larger employers helped employees deal with dependent care obligations (i.e. only 8% of employees had access to employer that provided on-site day care, while 7% were offered child care referral services and 6% were given elder-care referral).

So – how supportive are Canadian firms?

The following conclusions can be drawn from the 2001 *Balancing Work, Family and Lifestyle National Study* regarding the dominant organizational view of work-life issues in Canada at this time. Canadian organization's approach to this issue tends to be:

- reactive rather than proactive (i.e. focused on reducing the symptoms associated with high work-life conflict and dealing with the manifested issues rather than the identification and elimination of the underlying causes of the stress),
- employer- versus employee-centric,
- built on the 'myth of separate worlds', and
- designed to manage the 'abuser' – the employee who takes advantage of supportive policies and programs – rather than the vast majority of employees who can be trusted to use the policies when appropriate

This view of work-life balance economically penalizes both the employee who cannot balance competing work and family demands, and the company that is faced with having to deal with the same sorts of work-life issues over and over again.

It is important, however, to note that some progress can be observed in terms of the type of benefits available within Canadian organizations. A number of firms have concretely recognized that employees have responsibilities outside of work and support their need for balance by offering flexible work arrangements, pro-rated benefits for part-time work, supportive relocation policies and personal days off with pay. This last benefit, in particular, is worthy of note as it is based on mutual trust and the premise that the employee and the employer are partners with respect to dealing with work-life conflict. The fact that only half as many employees can take

a paid day off to deal with a personal emergency as are able to take unpaid LOA again speaks to the dominant view of work-life held by employers today.

Benchmark Data on the Use of Personal Coping Strategies in Canada

The 2001 national survey gives us important information on the personal strategies Canadian employees use to cope with stress. The effectiveness of these various strategies, which are aimed at reducing the various forms of work-life conflict that are considered in this analysis, are evaluated later in this report.

Canadian employees use a myriad of strategies to cope with stress

Canadian employees use four kinds of personal strategies to cope with stress, anxiety and depression:

- social support (i.e. talk to colleagues and/or family, seek help from colleagues and family),
- active coping techniques aimed at the reduction or elimination of the sources of conflict (i.e. prioritize, schedule, organize and plan, delegate),
- avoidance (try and forget about it, find another activity to take one's mind of things), and
- reactive coping techniques that focus on alleviating the symptoms of stress (i.e. have an alcoholic drink, take prescription drugs, work harder, reduce the quality of things one does).

The majority of Canadians use active coping strategies to cope with stress

Many employed Canadians use active coping strategies to cope with work-life conflict. A majority (69%) of employees indicated that they frequently coped with stress by prioritizing. Almost half (47%) of employees frequently coped by scheduling, organizing and planning their time more carefully. Unfortunately, these findings are not as positive as they appear on the surface for the following reasons. First, employees who try and cope by prioritizing and scheduling, organizing and planning, typically rank order their different role activities to focus on the most important ones. Our data shows that most Canadians who use these coping mechanisms give a higher priority to work than to family, a strategy that is not sustainable in the long term. Second, the third coping strategy within this grouping, delegation, is not widely used (i.e. only 27% of the sample frequently delegate work to others while 55% rarely delegate). While it is hard

to determine why the use of delegation is low, it may be that Canadian employees have no-one to delegate to in the time-crunched workplace.

The majority of employed Canadians do not rely on social support networks for help

The 2001 study showed that the majority of employed Canadians try and deal with stress on their own - they do not rely on social support networks for help. The following can be used to illustrate this observation. First, two-thirds of the respondents indicated that they rarely turned to their colleagues at work for help as a way to cope with stress, anxiety and depression. While a third of the sample said that they talked to colleagues at work as a way to alleviate their stress, only half this number (16%) asked their colleagues for help. Similarly, while 45% of respondents indicated that they attempted to cope with stress by talking with family and friends (half did not), only one in four actually sought help from friends. Compare this with the fact that just over half of the sample said that they never coped with stress by seeking help from family and friends.

These findings are unfortunate as the use of social support has been found to be an effective way of coping with stress and work-life conflict. Why are Canadian employees reluctant to seek support from others? Again, we can only surmise why the use of these coping techniques is not widespread. On the work front, these findings may reflect the fact that people are just too busy at work to build the relationships necessary for social support. Alternatively, the culture of hours that dominates many organizations may mean that employees do not ask for help because they fear that it will affect their image and their career advancement. On the family side of the equation, these results may be due to the fact that all of the employee's friends and family are in the same situation as they are and have little time or energy to support others. Regardless of the root cause, these findings are unfortunate as many employees find the same types of things (i.e. heavy workloads, non-supportive managers, non-supportive work cultures) stressful. It is also unfortunate as this limits the sharing of effective coping strategies between employees and friends.

A substantive number of Canadian employees rely on escapist coping strategies

On a positive note, relatively few Canadians use emotion-focused avoidance strategies to cope with stress. Less positive is the fact that the number of employees who frequently use escapist strategies to cope with stress is substantial (i.e. one in three frequently seek out other activities to try and take



their mind off the stressor, one in five frequently 'just try and forget about it'). These findings are unfortunate as such strategies are typically less effective at reducing stress as the stressor typically remains unchanged and hence problematic.

One in 10 Canadian employees uses reactive coping strategies

The data from this study suggest that many employed Canadians do cope effectively with stress, although the means of coping may be questionable. For example, approximately one in 10 coped with stress by using frequently (i.e. several times a week, daily) reactive coping strategies such as having an alcoholic drink (12%), using prescription, over-the-counter, or illegal drugs (11%), and reducing the quality of the things they did (10%). These strategies are reactive ways of dealing with the emotions aroused by stress, and problematic both socially (linked to greater physical illness, costs to the health care system, and family dysfunction) and economically (related to reduced productivity and increased absenteeism). While it is good news indeed that the majority of employed Canadians rarely use such strategies, the numbers who regularly rely on reactive coping techniques is still cause for concern. Of particular concern is the fact that approximately half of the respondents to the 2001 survey (43%) frequently used the fourth reactive strategy included in this study, and tried to cope by 'just trying to do it all/working harder'. This finding is consistent with the fact that few Canadians ask for help and reinforces our contention that the active coping strategies discussed earlier are directed towards getting more things done rather than eliminating an activity or role.

Employed Canadians cope by limiting their family size

The 2001 study suggests that the decline in Canada's birth rate over the past several decades can be linked to higher levels of work-life conflict. This claim can be substantiated by the fact that one in four of the employed Canadians surveyed stated that they had had fewer children because of demands at work. A further 28% indicated that they had delayed starting a family/decided not to have a family because they could not balance the demands of their career with a family³. In other words, just over half of the employed Canadians who participated in this research initiative had used family planning strategies to cope with work-life conflict. These findings need

to be put in the appropriate context. All of the respondents to this study were employed and the majority (70%) lived in families with incomes of \$40,000 per year or more. In other words, most of the individuals who used these coping strategies were economically well positioned with respect to having children but had chosen to limit their family size in an attempt to cope with work-life conflict. These findings imply that governments who wish to increase their birth rates need to deal with the issue of work-life conflict.

One in three employed Canadians coped by working different hours from their spouse

Almost one third of the survey respondents (31%) indicated that they 'off-shifted' with their partner in order to better manage work and family responsibilities. In other words, they worked different hours from their partner so as to reduce their reliance on (or need for) formal child care.

Coping with Work-life Conflict: What Can Canadian Families Do?

The 2001 national survey gives us important information on the strategies Canadian families use to cope with stress. The effectiveness of these various strategies, which are aimed at reducing the various forms of work-life conflict considered in this analysis, is evaluated later in this report.

Many Canadian employees involve their families in their attempts to cope with stress

Canadian families use five different sets of coping strategies in their attempt to deal with work-life conflict:

- restructure and redefine family roles (i.e. encourage children to help each other, get children to help with household tasks, cover household responsibilities for each other, try to be flexible, plan family time together),
- put family first (limit job involvement to allow time for family, modify work schedule, plan work changes around family needs, identify one partner as responsible for family, leave work problems at work),
- sacrifice personal needs and standards (leave things undone around the house, get by on less sleep, cut down on outside activities, buy more goods and services),
- seek social support (rely on extended family or rely on friends for help), and

³ It should be noted that none of these individuals had children at the time they completed the survey. It should also be noted that the average age of the respondents in this group was 36.

- procure outside help (i.e. hire help to care for the children, or for elderly dependents).

Eight of the eighteen family coping strategies were used by the majority of the sample. Tellingly, 88% of these high-use family coping strategies fall into two main groupings: restructure family roles and sacrifice personal needs.

The majority of Canadians cope by re-restructuring family roles and sacrificing their personal needs

Approximately three-quarters of the employed Canadians in our sample attempted to cope with work-life issues by engaging in three activities that typify restructuring family role expectations: 76% tried to be flexible, 72% covered household responsibilities for each other and 71% encouraged their children to help each other. Half coped by participating in the other two behaviours in this grouping: getting children to help with household tasks (53%) and planning family time together (48%).

Likewise, just over three-quarters of the respondents in 2001 coped with work-life issues by sacrificing their personal needs (77%) and leaving things undone around the house while half coped by cutting down on outside activities (56%), getting by on less sleep (54%) and buying more goods and services (45%). All of the coping strategies in this second group involve the employee dealing with work-life conflict by sacrificing their personal needs.

These strategies all have one thing in common - employees who use them try and cope with work-life issues by making accommodations within their personal and/or family lives. The fact that these two sets of strategies are commonly used substantiates our contention that the first line of defence against high levels of work-life conflict is to put work first - to meet work demands at the expense of family and/or personal life.

Many Canadian families try and buy work-life balance

Many of the Canadians in our 2001 sample attempt to deal with work-life conflict issues by purchasing help from outside the family unit. Just under half (42%) hired help from outside to care for their children and bought goods and services (45%). Just over one in four (26%) hired help to care for elderly dependents. It is interesting to note that Canadians are more likely to try to 'buy' balance than they are to ask extended family (30%) or friends (17%) for help. These data are consistent with those noted earlier in conjunction with

social support and reinforce the need for governments to provide the services to cope with competing work and family demands.

One in three Canadian employees copes by putting family first

A substantive minority of respondents seem to buck the trend of expecting family members to adapt to their work situation and instead use coping strategies that put family first. In 2001 they did this by trying to leave work problems at work (i.e. 50% tried to psychologically separate their work and non-work domains), limiting their job involvement to give time to the family (37%), planning work changes around family needs (36%), identifying one partner as being responsible for household tasks (31%) and by modifying their work schedule to accommodate their family schedule (24%). While laudable, these strategies may limit the employee's promotion opportunities as they run counter to the dominant cultural norms in Canadian organizations.



CHAPTER THREE

Role Overload: A Primer

This Chapter provides a primer for interested readers on one of the four forms of work-life conflict examined in the *2001 Balancing Work, Family and Lifestyle National Study* – role overload. The chapter begins by defining role overload and quantifying its prevalence in Canada at this time. The chapter then goes on to identify the demographic and organizational factors that place employees at risk with respect to role overload, articulate the consequences of high levels of role overload on employers, employees, families and Canadian society and look at how this form of work-life conflict can best be reduced.

Definition

Role overload can be defined quite simply as having too much to do and not enough time in which to do it. It is feeling rushed and time-crunched, feeling physically and emotionally exhausted and drained, and not having enough time for oneself. Academically, role overload is defined as the perceptual aspect of feeling overwhelmed, overloaded or stressed by the pressures of multiple roles.

Prevalence

A majority of the Canadians working at larger firms are overloaded

High levels of role overload have become systemic within the population of employees working for Canada's largest employers. In our 2001 survey of over 30,000 Canadians, we found that the majority of survey respondents (58%) reported high levels of role overload. Another 30% reported moderate levels while only 12% reported low levels.

The percentage of the workforce with high role overload has increased over time

Fifty-eight percent of the respondents to the 2001 survey report high levels of role overload – an increase of 11% compared to what was observed in the 1991 sample. This increase in role overload is consistent with the fact that employees in the 2001 sample spent more time in work-related activities per week than their counterparts in the 1991 sample. Other data from the 2001 survey suggest that much of this increase in role overload can be linked to new information and communication technology, organizational

norms that still reward long hours at the office rather than performance, and organizational anorexia (downsizing has meant there are too few employees to do the work).

Who is at risk with respect to role overload?

The following key conclusions about the occurrence of role overload can be drawn from this study.

Work culture is the key determinant of role overload for both men and women

Work culture is a powerful predictor of role. In fact, the unwritten rules, norms and expectations placed on an employee by the organization in which he or she works (i.e. organizational culture) is a better predictor of role overload than objective circumstances at work (i.e. job type, position), circumstances at home (i.e. family type, life-cycle stage) or the actual amount of time spent in work or family roles. For both men and women, the single most important aspect of work culture with respect to the prediction of role overload was the extent to which the employee believed the organization promoted a culture that was supportive of work-life balance (supportive cultures serve a protective function, as the more supportive the environment, the lower the levels of role overload reported). Two other types of cultures prove to be predictive of role overload: a culture of hours and a culture of work or family. With respect to the culture of hours, employees who perceive that it is not acceptable for them to say no to more work, and that an inability to work long hours would limit their career advancement, are more likely to report higher levels of role overload regardless of their gender. Working for an organization that promotes a culture of work or family (i.e. one in which employees feel they have to choose between their family and career advancement, and that family responsibilities and taking family leave limit advancement) is also linked to higher role overload, perhaps because employees in such circumstances try to do it all. There are no gender differences in these findings. Organizational cultures that are non-supportive of balance, that emphasize hours and being present, and link career advancement to putting work first, are linked to increased role overload for both men and women.

Role overload goes 'hand in hand' with increased work demands

Work demands are strongly associated with role overload. Our analysis determined that the most important determinants of role overload for both men and women include the amount of time spent in unpaid overtime a month (the most important

predictor of role overload for both men and women) and the total number of hours spent in work per week (second most important predictor of overload for men, fourth most important predictor for women). For the men in the sample, other key predictors of role overload included whether or not they had to supervise the work of others, and the number of hours per week spent in supplemental work at home. For the women in the sample, on the other hand, role overload increased dramatically with the amount of time spent in job-related travel (i.e. hours per week spent commuting to and from work, weekend nights away from home per month on business, week nights away from home per month on business). Taken together, these findings indicate that the relationship between role overload and work demands has a slightly different root cause for men than women.

Role overload is more about work demands than non-work demands

Role overload is more about demands generated from the work domain than from the non-work domain. The relationship between non-work demands and role overload, while statistically significant, is not substantial and is overshadowed by the relationship observed between work demands and role overload.

An employee's demographic circumstances are not a good predictor of the amount of role overload they are likely to face

Analysis of the 2001 data is unequivocal: objective facts about an employee's family, community or work situation do not tell us much about the amount of role overload that person is likely to face. This finding challenges many of the assumptions made with respect to the risk factors of role overload (e.g. that mothers are more overloaded).

The key predictors of role overload hold across gender

With relatively few exceptions, the key predictors of role overload hold across gender. There are, however, two important caveats to this conclusion. First, we are able to explain slightly more of the variation in role overload levels of women by knowing about their life circumstances than we are of men. Second, for men it appears that the amount of support they receive (or do not receive) from their spouses has very little impact on the levels of role overload they will experience (i.e. fathers in traditional families and single-parent fathers have the same levels of overload as fathers in dual-income families and men in dual-income families with elderly dependents).

For women, on the other hand, having a spouse who stays at home to look after the children (women in non-traditional families) is predictive of lower levels of role overload.

What are the consequences of high levels of role overload?

Just under 60% of the respondents to the 2001 survey reported high levels of role overload. What impact do these high levels of role overload have on employers, employees, families and Canadian society? Answers to these questions are summarized below.

What is the impact of high levels of role overload on Canadian organizations?

Compared to their counterparts with low levels of role overload, employees with high role overload were:

- 5.6 times more likely to report high levels of job stress,
- 3.5 times more likely to have high levels of absenteeism due to physical, mental or emotional fatigue,
- 2.4 times more likely to miss work due to child care problems,
- 2.3 times more likely to report high intent to turnover, and
- 1.6 times more likely to have high levels of absenteeism all factors considered, and to miss three or more days of work in the past six months due to ill health.

Details on each of these key findings are given below.

Onerous work expectations reduce employees' level of job satisfaction.

As noted above, overloaded employees are half as likely as those with lower levels of overload to be satisfied with their jobs. More detailed examination of the data helps us to understand these findings. This analysis determined that, when compared to their counterparts with low levels of role overload, employees with high role overload were:

- 2.4 times more likely to be dissatisfied with their workloads,
- 1.8 times more likely to be dissatisfied with the number of hours they work,
- 1.6 times more likely to be dissatisfied with their ability to meet their career goals and their opportunities for career development, and
- 1.4 times more likely to be dissatisfied with their work schedules.



Role overload negatively impacts an organization's ability to recruit and retain employees

Employees with high levels of role overload were 2.3 times more likely to be thinking of leaving their organization. Again, closer examination of the data helps us understand why this might be the case. Compared to those with low role overload, employees with high role overload were:

- 12.5 times more likely to say they would leave because expectations were unrealistic,
- 4.7 times more likely to say they would leave because they wanted more time for their family and/or themselves,
- 3.5 times more likely to say they would leave because they were frustrated with their work environment and because their work environment was non-supportive,
- 3.0 times more likely to say they would leave because their values were not the same as their organization, and
- 2.6 times more likely to say they would leave because they perceived that they were not recognized for their efforts.

In other words, overloaded employees were more likely to say they would leave to escape unrealistic workloads, frustrations at work, and to gain more balance and time. When taken in concert, these data suggest that role overload may negatively impact an organization's ability to recruit, retain and motivate highly qualified employees – factors which will all show up on their bottom line.

Cost of absenteeism due to high role overload is almost \$3 billion dollars per year

Absence from work is strongly linked to role overload. Employees with high role overload missed 8.8 days of work per year in 2001 while those with low role overload missed only 5.6 days. The direct costs of absenteeism due to high role overload were calculated to be approximately \$3 billion per year. Conservative direct and indirect costs of absenteeism due to role overload were estimated to be between \$4.5 to \$6 billion per year (see Report Three). Other calculations indicate that employers could reduce absenteeism in their organizations by 23% if they eliminated high levels of role overload.

Overload negatively impacts the organization's bottom line

Employees who have high role overload are less committed to their organization, report higher work stress, are less satisfied with their jobs (due largely to dissatisfaction with workloads, hours worked and work schedules), are more likely

to be absent from work (due largely to physical and mental health problems), are more likely to be thinking of leaving the organization (to escape frustrating and non-supportive work environments and to get more time for themselves and more recognition for their efforts), and have a less favourable view of their employer. In other words, organizations that have a higher proportion of their workforce with high levels of this form of work-life conflict are likely to have difficulties recruiting and retaining employees and to face increased costs associated with poor physical and mental health (i.e. greater absenteeism, higher prescription drug costs, increased EAP use).

These findings suggest that the downsizing strategies followed by many employers throughout the 80s and 90s and the concomitant increase in employee workloads (noted in Chapter Two) have backfired. The data reviewed in this study indicate that the savings in payroll costs (i.e. salary and benefit dollars) obtained through downsizing may be offset by substantial increases in dollars lost due to higher absenteeism for the 'survivors'. It would appear that employers who consistently overload their employees pay a price (whether they recognize this or not), and the costs associated with this strategy are substantial and affect their bottom line. These costs include:

- \$3 to \$6 billion per year in absenteeism costs alone,
- difficulties recruiting and retaining employees, and
- costs associated with poorer physical and mental health (i.e. greater absenteeism, higher prescription drug costs, greater EAP use).

What is the impact of high levels of role overload on Canadian employees?

Compared to their counterparts with low role overload, employees with high role overload were:

- 12 times more likely to report high levels of burnout,
- 3.5 times more likely to report high levels of perceived stress,
- 3.4 times more likely to report high levels of depressed mood,
- half as likely to report high levels of life satisfaction, and
- 3.1 times more likely to report that they were in poor physical health.

In other words, role overload is positively associated with high stress, high burnout, and high depressed mood and negatively associated with life satisfaction and perceived physical health.

Assuming that this is an accurate portrayal of Canadian employees' actual physical and mental health status we can anticipate that overloaded employees will be more likely to use prescription drugs, take advantage of their employer's benefit plan, be absent from work, and be more likely to seek help from Canada's health care system. In other words, high levels of work-life conflict are likely to have a negative impact on employers' bottom lines and increase demands on Canada's health care system.

The 2001 survey data indicate that the physical and mental health of employed Canadians would be significantly improved if organizations reduced the levels of role overload in their workforce. The data on the key predictors of role overload reviewed earlier suggest that employers could do this by making work demands more manageable (i.e. hire more staff, reduce travel demands, put limits on the use of technology to support after-hours work) and changing their culture to one that recognized and rewarded results rather than hours at work. The findings with respect to burnout point to the fact that the long hours that employees are devoting to paid employment (and that are expected by many employers) are not sustainable over time.

What is the impact of high levels of role overload on Canadian families?

Role overload has a negative impact on Canadian families. The 2001 survey data determined that employees with high levels of role overload were less satisfied with their family life and their ability to parent, were less likely to feel that their families were well (i.e. report lower family adaptation), were less likely to feel that their families were stable and worked together, and were more likely to be concerned about the well-being of their family. The extent to which role overload impacts family function can be appreciated by noting that employees with low role overload were 1.4 times more likely than their counterparts with high role overload to report high levels of family life and parental satisfaction and family integration, and twice as likely to perceive high levels of family adaptation. Family adaptation occurs when family members use their capabilities to reduce the demands of a situation, promote the individual development of members, and achieve a sense of congruency in family functioning. Families high in adaptation have a general sense of physical and psychological family health that is referred to as

family well-being. It would appear from this research that employees who are rushed and exhausted (largely due to their heavier work demands) do not have the time to enjoy their family lives or engage in activities to enhance their family experiences.

What is the impact of high levels of role overload on Canadian society?

To answer this question we looked at the impact of role overload on the use of Canada's health care system and the decision to have children.

Overloaded employees make greater use of Canada's health care system – especially services linked to mental health care

The findings from this body of research are unequivocal: employees with high levels of role overload made greater use of Canada's health care system than those with low levels of role overload. Consider the following: compared to their counterparts with low levels of role overload, employees with high levels of role overload were:

- 2.6 times more likely to have sought care from a mental health professional,
- 2.4 times more likely to have received care on an outpatient basis three or more times,
- 1.8 times more likely to have seen a physician three or more times,
- 1.6 times more likely to have sought care from another type of medical provider four or more times,
- 1.5 times more likely to have had to spend at least one night in the hospital, and
- 1.4 times more likely to have visited a hospital emergency room.

Employees with lower levels of role overload, on the other hand, were 1.3 times less likely to visit their physician in the past six months, and made the lowest use of all of the dimensions of health care examined in this report.

Taken together, these data support our contention that the health of Canadians (especially their mental health) would improve if overload could be reduced. These data also provide a further incentive for governments and policy-makers to focus on reducing role overload in our population: lowering demands on Canada's health care system. Such a reduction



would require both organizations and governments to address the issue of workloads and the use of office technology, and to support employees with child care and elder care demands.

One way to reduce demands on family physicians is to tackle role overload

Employees with high role overload made an average of 1.74 visits to a physician in a six-month period, while those with low role overload made only 1.11 visits. In other words, the relative risk of physician visits associated with high role overload is 1.58. The direct cost of physician visits due to high role overload was calculated in Report Three to be approximately \$1.8 billion per year. These calculations also determined that visits per year to the family physician could be reduced by approximately 25% if the percentage of the population experiencing high levels of role overload could be reduced. In other words, strategies to reduce role overload should help Canada deal with its current physician shortage.

High role overload increases the costs associated with inpatient hospital care by close to \$4 billion per year

As noted previously, there is a strong positive association between role overload and the need for inpatient hospital care. In Report Three we calculated that the number of days spent in the hospital that can be attributed to high role overload cost Canadian tax payers just under \$4 billion per year. Furthermore, the data indicate that the number of days spent in hospital could be reduced by approximately 17% if role overload could be reduced. Such a strategy would likely reduce the problems many hospitals have with respect to non-availability of beds.

Emergency department visits could be reduced by 23% if high levels of role overload could be dropped

Employees with high levels of role overload are 1.5 times more likely to seek care at a hospital's emergency department than their counterparts with low role overload. This increased use of the hospital's emergency department costs the health care system approximately \$250 million per year. Emergency department visits could be reduced by 23% if high levels of role overload could be reduced. Such actions could substantially reduce wait times at hospitals and demands on health care personnel.

Overloaded employees spend more on prescription drugs

Employees with high levels of role overload spend an average of \$93 every six months (or \$186 per year) on prescription drugs. This is significantly higher than the \$75 in six months

(\$150 per year) spent by those with moderate levels of role overload and the \$69 in six months (\$138 per year) spent by those with low role overload. Extrapolation of these data suggest that companies who pay for 100% of their employees' prescription drug expenditures (80% of the companies in the 2001 sample) could save an average of \$36 per employee per year if they reduced role overload levels from high to moderate levels, and they could save almost \$50 per employee per year if they could further reduce levels from moderate to low level.

The relative risk data can be used to make a similar case. Employees with low levels of role overload were 1.3 times more likely to have spent nothing on prescription drugs in the six months prior to the study being done than were employees with high levels of role overload. Employees with high levels of role overload, on the other hand, were almost twice as likely as those with low role overload to have spent \$150 or more in a six-month period on medications. These data reinforce our conclusion that there are significant bottom line costs to overworking employees - increased benefit expenditures.

Strategies to reduce role overload will also alleviate demands on Canada's health care system

What is the link between high work-life conflict and demands on the health care system? Could we reduce system demands if we could reduce role overload? The data reviewed in this study support a resounding yes! By implementing workplace and population health strategies targeted at reducing role overload, Canada would likely reduce the problems many hospitals have with respect to available beds, substantially reduce wait times at hospitals and demands on health care personnel.

These data also indicate that employers who overwork their employees (i.e. place a high reliance on unpaid overtime) will pay a price - increased benefit expenditures. Companies who focus on reducing role overload would reap a number of benefits to their bottom line including reduced absenteeism and lower benefit costs.

These findings support our contention that the downsizing strategies implemented by many employers throughout the 80s and 90s and the concomitant increase in employee workloads have backfired. The data reviewed in this study indicate that the savings in payroll (i.e. salary and benefit dollars) realized by corporations and public sector employers through downsizing may be offset by substantial increases in costs to the health care system. It would appear that work-life

conflict is not only a moral issue – it is a productivity and economic issue, a workplace issue and a social issue, and it needs to be addressed as such.

Fertility decreases as overload increases

This study implies that some of the decline in Canada's birth rate may be attributed to the increases in role overload and workloads that we have seen over the course of the past several decades. We found a very strong, positive association between role overload and the decision to have fewer children because of work demands, and the decision to delay having children or not to have children because of career demands and role overload. This makes intuitive sense – why would overloaded individuals decide to add another set of demands to their already full plates? Children, as we all know, and as the data confirm, increase the number of role demands on their parents.

The female managers and professionals in the sample who were overloaded were more likely than other groups of employees to agree that they had decided to have fewer children, delay starting a family and/or to forgo motherhood altogether. These findings suggest that one way for Canada to address declining fertility levels is to reduce role overload. This can be done by decreasing expectations at the work end, and/or by providing supports within the community that reduce demands at the parenting end. It is important to note that employees who are overloaded by elder care demands are also more likely to elect not to have children. This indicates that it is not just support for parenting that is required to alleviate role overload and increase Canada's birth rate. Employees also need support in the community to help them with elder care demands.

What can we do to reduce role overload?

What can employers, employees and their families do to help reduce the percent of the population at risk of high role overload? Answers to these questions are summarized below. Things that can be done by employers are addressed first. This is followed by strategies that can be employed by employees and their families.

Employers who want to reduce role overload need to increase perceived flexibility

What can organizations do to help employees cope with role overload? The answer from this study is quite clear – increase the amount of flexibility and control that employees perceive that they have over their work hours. The data from the 2001

study show that two forms of flexibility in particular seem to be fundamental to the ability to cope with role overload: the ability to arrange one's work schedule to meet personal or family commitments, and the ability to interrupt one's workday to deal with a personal or family matter and then return to work.

What makes these forms of flexibility so effective? While it is impossible to say for certain from the survey data collected in this study, it can be observed that both of these forms of flexibility increase an employee's ability to deal with family or personal issues (both scheduled and unanticipated) during work hours. In other words, they give employees more control over their work-life balance. Researchers such as Karasek (1979) have shown that increased levels of control are important to helping employees deal with high demands.

The importance of increasing perceived flexibility within the organization, as a strategy to reduce role overload, is further illustrated by the fact that all employees, regardless of their gender, their job type or their dependent care status, experience a reduction in role overload when they have higher levels of perceived flexibility. Analysis done in Report Five allows us to rank order various forms of flexibility with respect to their expected ability to reduce role overload. To reduce role overload, therefore, organizations need to undertake the following actions (rank ordered from most to least effective at reducing role overload):

- increase employees' ability to take their holidays when they want.
- increase employees' ability to get home from work in time to have meals with their family.
- provide paid days off for employees who need to care for elderly dependents.
- provide paid days off for employees who need to care for a sick child.
- give more flexibility with respect to work hours.
- make it possible for parents to be home when their children get home from school.

There is a strong association between role overload and opportunities for career development

Higher levels of one other form of perceived flexibility, taking time off to attend a course or a conference, is also strongly associated with lower levels of role overload. This result is a little more difficult to interpret. It could be that people with lower levels of role overload are more able to find the time



for career development activities. Alternatively, it may be that employees who attend such courses learn ways to work more effectively or efficiently, which, in turn, reduces role overload. In either case, the strong association between the ability to participate in career development opportunities and overload is worthy of note, given the importance of such activities to professional workers and younger employees. These findings give organizations another incentive to deal with the issue of role overload: an increased ability to recruit and retain talent.

Employers who want to reduce role overload need to reduce non-supportive management

Our analysis demonstrates that a focus on management behaviour in general, and on reducing non-supportive management in particular, should yield substantial reductions in employee role overload. Examination of the 2001 data indicates that all employees, regardless of their gender, their job type or their dependent care status experience an increase in role overload at higher levels of non-supportive management. The data point to one management behaviour, in particular, that is strongly associated with increased role overload: having a manager who has unrealistic expectations with respect to work. Decreasing the extent to which such behaviour occurs within the organization should, therefore, be a high priority in organizations who wish to address role overload.

The importance of developing strategies to reduce non-supportive management behaviours within the organization can be further illustrated by noting the association between increased role overload and working for a manager who puts in long hours and expects their employees to do the same, makes the employee feel guilty about time off work for personal or family reasons, and focuses on hours of work instead of output.

Employers who want to reduce role overload need to increase supportive management

Organizations who wish to reduce role overload could also achieve their goals by increasing the number of supportive managers within their organization. Specifically, they need to increase the extent to which managers in their organization are effective at planning the work to be done, make themselves available to answer their employee's questions, make expectations clear, listen to their employees concerns, and give recognition for a job well done.

Flexible work arrangements do little to help employees cope with role overload

Most organizations implement flexible work arrangements as a way to help employees balance work and family. Unfortunately, the 2001 data show that, with one exception, flexible work arrangements by themselves have little impact on employee role overload. That being said, employers who do wish to tackle the issue of employee role overload may consider offering part-time work arrangements to employees with dependent care responsibilities. This work arrangement seems to be particularly effective at reducing role overload for men (rather than women) which is interesting given the fact that women are more likely than men to work part-time.

Family-friendly benefits do little to help employees cope with role overload

This study showed that supportive benefits, by themselves, have little impact on employee role overload. This conclusion is supported by the fact that the association between the use of family-friendly benefits (such as on-site day care, elder care referral services, flexible work arrangements, telework, supportive relocation policies, emergency days off, unpaid LOA, paid personal days off work, time off in lieu of overtime, and short-term personal leave) and the incidence of role overload was not significant.

Many of the strategies individuals use to cope with role overload do little to help

Unfortunately, the findings from this study support the idea that the majority of the individual coping strategies used by Canadian employees do little to help employees cope with role overload. Specifically, our analyses support the following conclusions: social support does not help individuals deal with role overload. Nor does trying to find another activity to take one's mind off things, scheduling, planning, and organizing, having an alcoholic drink, or off-shifting work with a partner. Finally, when job type is taken into account, there is no relationship between role overload and attempts to cope by prioritizing, delegating, just trying to forget about things, and using prescription medicine.

Employees with higher levels of role overload cope by working harder

Just under half (43%) of the sample copes with stress by just working harder. Unfortunately, the results from this study attest to the futility of such an approach as levels of role overload increase concomitant with the use of this strategy. The relationship between working harder and role overload is

very strong and does not depend on the gender, job type or dependent care status of the individual. The cross-sectional nature of the data makes it difficult to determine the direction of causality of these findings. The results may reflect the fact that people who are overloaded cope by working harder to get things done. Alternatively, they may mean that people who attempt to cope by working harder experience diminishing returns in productivity at higher hours of work (i.e. make more mistakes, work less effectively and efficiently). This then increases rather than decreases their levels of overload - resulting in the need to continue to work harder. In either case, working harder is associated with higher, rather than lower, levels of role overload - suggesting that this strategy does not alleviate overload.

Employees with higher levels of role overload cope by reducing the quality of their work

A little more than one in four (28%) of employees in the 2001 sample say they cope with stress by reducing the quality of the things that they do. The fact that the association is, with one exception, positive indicates that employees increase their use of this strategy in response to higher levels of role overload. While the causality of this finding is difficult to ascertain (i.e. people who are overloaded may reduce quality in an attempt to cope, and/or people who cope by reducing quality experience an increase in role overload because they have to re-do some tasks) the conclusion one arrives at in either case is the same: this strategy does not help employees deal with role overload. It also implies that organizations who overload their employees in an attempt to 'do more with less' will not realize significant productivity gains.

Reducing the quality of the things they do helps employees with dependent care cope with role overload

Employees with dependent care responsibilities, who cope by reducing the quality of the things they do, experience a moderate decline in role overload. Unfortunately, this finding is not entirely positive as examination of the data determined that employees with child and/or elder care responsibilities reduce their overload by lowering their standards (and hence how much they do) at home. This interpretation is consistent with the fact that employed Canadians are more likely to let work interfere with family than vice versa

Prioritizing helps women with dependent care responsibilities cope with role overload

The incidence of role overload was significantly associated with the use of three other individual coping strategies examined in this study: forgetting about it, prioritizing/delegating, and using prescription medicine. The following conclusions can be drawn regarding the effectiveness of these different strategies at reducing role overload.

First, the relationship between role overload and the use of escapist coping strategies such as just trying to forget about one's problems is substantive and positive (i.e. employees with higher role overload are more likely to use this strategy than those with lower levels) suggesting that this strategy is not particularly effective at alleviating overload.

Second, prioritizing and delegating appears to be a very effective way for women with child and/or elder care responsibilities, and men with dependent care responsibilities, to cope with role overload. Further examination of the data indicates that those with dependent care responsibilities reduce role overload by delegating family tasks rather than work tasks.

Finally, the data show that moderate use of prescription medicine is associated with a reduction of role overload. Those who make daily use of prescription medicine do, however, experience significantly higher levels of role overload.

Many of the strategies that individuals use to cope with role overload do little to help

Generally speaking, there is no relationship between role overload and attempting to cope by strengthening/restructuring family roles or by seeking social support. Other family coping strategies, not associated with role overload in either the job type or dependent care analysis, include hiring help to care for elderly dependents, identifying one partner as responsible for household chores, and limiting one's job involvement. Two additional family coping strategies have no relationship with role overload when job type is taken into account: cover household responsibilities for each other and plan work-related changes around the family.

How do Canadian families cope with role overload? Generally speaking, they use three sets of strategies: sacrifice their personal needs (i.e. get by on less sleep, leave things undone around the house, cut down on outside activities, buy more goods and services), put their family first (i.e. leave work problems at work, modify their work schedules) and procure help from outside the family (i.e. hire help to care for the



children). They also cover family responsibilities for each other. The good news is that two of these strategies (put family first, and cover family responsibilities for each other) appear to help employees cope with role overload. A third, hiring help to care for children, also helps employees cope when used in moderation.

Unfortunately, the challenge is that employees who attempt to cope with role overload by sacrificing their personal needs, experience higher rather than lower levels of role overload. Also of cause for concern is the fact that twice as many Canadians cope by sacrificing their personal needs rather than coping by putting family first. Details on these findings are provided below.

Employees who cope by sacrificing their personal needs report higher levels of role overload.

The relationship between two of the strategies included in the grouping of sacrificing personal needs (getting by on less sleep, and cutting down on outside activities and role overload) is very straightforward: the greater the use, the higher the overload, regardless of the employees' gender, job type or dependent care responsibilities. The relationship between the third strategy in this grouping (leaving things undone around the house) and role overload depends on both the gender and the dependent care status of the employee. For men and women without dependent care responsibilities, higher use of the strategy is associated with increased role overload. This strategy does, however, help men and women with dependent care to cope with role overload when used in moderation.

Employees who put family first are better able to cope with role overload

The data indicate that role overload decreases as the use of the two strategies associated with coping by 'putting family first' (i.e. leave work related problems at work and modifying work schedule) increase. Who benefits the most from using these strategies? From the data we can conclude the following:

- leaving work problems at work is a more effective coping strategy for men than for women.
- modifying one's work schedule is a more effective coping strategy for male managers and professionals than for men in other positions who do not experience any decline in role overload when using this strategy.

- modifying one's work schedule also helps females, employees, regardless of their job type, cope with role overload. The benefit is not, however, as great as that observed for male managers and professionals.

Moderate use of hired help to care for children helps employees cope with role overload

The findings with respect to the relationship between the use of hired help to care for one's children and role overload are very interesting as, they suggest that this strategy helps employees (regardless of gender or job type) cope with role overload, but only when used in moderation. Employees who do not use hired help to care for their children, as well as employees who use help on a daily basis, both report higher levels of overload while those who employ help once or twice a week report significantly lower levels of overload. These findings raise the question: Why is daily use of child care associated with higher levels of role overload? While our data cannot answer this question specifically, we can suggest a number of reasons for these findings. One possibility is that employees with a high reliance on daycare are overloaded by the tasks associated with delivering and picking up children, and that employees with a moderate reliance on daycare tend to either work part-time or off-shift care with their spouses.

Employees with a partner who covers family chores for them are more able to cope with role overload

Men and women with dependent care responsibilities, who live in families where partners or spouses are willing to cover family responsibilities for each other (i.e. egalitarian families), are more able to cope with role overload than their counterparts who are not able to count on such assistance. These findings make sense and suggest that one can meet heavy expectations at work when someone is available to help out at home. Unfortunately, many families are time-crunched today - and such assistance may come at a cost to the obliging partner.



CHAPTER FOUR

Work Interferes with Family: A Primer

This chapter provides a primer for interested readers on the second of the four forms of work-life conflict examined in the *2001 Balancing Work, Family and Lifestyle National Study* – work interferes with family. The chapter begins by defining the concept of work interferes with family and quantifying its prevalence in Canada at this time. The chapter then goes on to identify the demographic and organizational factors that place employees at risk with respect to work interferes with family, articulate the consequences of high levels of this form of interfere on employers, employees, families and Canadian society and looks at how this form of work-life conflict can best be reduced.

Definition

This form of work-life conflict arises because employees cannot be physically and mentally in two different places doing two different things at exactly the same time. People who experience this type of work-life conflict resolve competing role demands by giving work priority over family/personal demands. In other words, they meet work demands at the expense of time for themselves and/or their families (i.e. bring work home to do in the evening, stay late at work, or miss family events due to work demands).

Prevalence

One in four respondents reports high levels of work interferes with family

A plurality of the working Canadians in our 2001 sample (38%) report moderate levels of work interferes with family. While just over one in four of the respondents (28%) report high interference from work to family (i.e. perceive that the demands they face at work make it very difficult to satisfy their non-work responsibilities), 35% are currently experiencing little work interferes with family.

Work interferes with family has remained fairly stable over time

A comparison of the percentage of the 1991 sample with high work interferes with family to the percentage with high interference in 2001 shows that the proportion of Canadians with high work interferes with family has remained fairly constant over the decade. While in some senses this is a

positive finding (this form of interference has not increased), it is also cause for concern as it indicates that little has been done to address this issue.

Who is at risk with respect to role overload?

A number of conclusions with respect to the prediction of work interferes with family can be drawn from this body of research. From most to least important, the key determinants of work interferes with family are the organizational culture, work demands, sector of employment, socio-economic circumstances, characteristics of work and the community in which the employee lives. Key details on these and other conclusions are summarized below.

Work culture is the key determinant of role overload for both men and women

The most important predictor of work interferes with family for both genders is the culture of the organization for which they work. The power of the work culture to predict work-life conflict can be appreciated when one considers that our measure of culture is a better predictor of work interferes with family than work factors (i.e. job type, position), family conditions (i.e. family type, life cycle stage) or work and non-work demands. Specifically, this report identified the following cultures as being associated with increased levels of this form of work-life conflict:

- a culture of hours: employees who work for organizations with this culture perceive that it is not acceptable within their organization to say no to more work, and that their career advancement will be limited if they do not work long hours.
- a culture of work or family: employees who work for organizations with this culture feel they have to choose between their family and career advancement, and that family responsibilities and taking family leave will limit their career advancement.

On the other hand, employees who worked in an organization with a supportive culture (i.e. the culture promoted an environment that supported balance) reported significantly lower levels of work interferes with family.

Women respond to culture slightly differently than men

Data analysis showed that the link between organizational culture and this form of work-life conflict depends to some extent on the gender of the employee (i.e. men and women find different dimensions of an organization's culture to be particularly problematic). Specifically:

- working for an organization with a culture of hours presents more of a problem with respect to work interferes with family for men than for women.
- working for an organization with a culture of work or family presents more of a problem with respect to work interferes with family for women than men.
- women who feel that they are able to refuse overtime work are significantly less likely to report high levels of work interferes with family than women who do not feel that they can say no to overtime. Ability to say no to overtime is not predictive of work interferes with family for men.

Demands at work are a key determinant of work interferes with family

Unlike role overload, this form of work-life conflict is not just a function of workload. Rather, the work demands that predict work interferes with family all physically remove the employee from the family domain (i.e. job-related travel) and/or take time that is typically reserved for the family (unpaid overtime, supplemental work at home). Key predictors of work interferes with family for both genders include the number of hours spent in unpaid overtime per month, the number of weekend nights spent away from home on business per month, the number of hours per week spent in work, the number of hours per week spent in supplemental work at home, and the number of week nights spent away from home on business per month.

Canadians with more non-work responsibilities have higher work interferes with family

Analysis of the 2001 data reveals that employed Canadians with more non-work responsibilities experience higher work interferes with family. Specifically, employees in life cycle stages that entail dependent care responsibilities report the highest levels of work interferes with family; employees with no dependent care responsibilities report very low levels of this form of interference. It should be noted, however, that family demands are not as strong a risk factor for this form of work-life conflict as culture and work demands.

Life circumstances impact work interferes with family

If we have information on where people live, their family situation, where they work (i.e. their sector of employment) and their socio-demographic circumstances, we will have some understanding of the amount of work interferes with family they will experience. This would indicate that an employee's life circumstances (i.e. their work and life situation) have more of an influence on the 'juggling' aspect of work-life conflict than on the demand (overload) side of this phenomenon.

Men and women have the same experience with respect to work interferes with family

Work interferes with family is more a function of where one works, work and non-work demands and work schedules, than gender. Employees who spend more time in job-related travel (i.e. spend more week nights and weekend nights away from home), perform supplemental work at home, work unpaid overtime and work longer hours per week are more likely to report high levels of work interferes with family, regardless of their gender.

Role overload and work interferes with family are similar

The relationship between work interferes with family, and many of the demographic variables considered in this analysis, is very similar to that observed with respect to role overload. This would suggest that role overload and work interferes with family have the same underlying causative factors. It should be noted, however, that organizational culture and work demands are better predictors of work interferes with family than role overload.

Who is at risk with respect to work to family interference?

Who is at the highest risk with respect to work interferes with family? The data indicate that employees with heavier work and/or family demands and lower levels of control (i.e. inflexible work arrangements) such as managers and professionals, employees with dependent care responsibilities and those working in health care and education are at highest risk.



What are the consequences of high levels of work interferes with family?

Over one in four (28%) of the respondents to the 2001 survey reported high levels of work interferes with family. What impact do these high levels of role interference have on employers, employees, families and Canadian society? Answers to these questions are summarized below.

What is the impact of high levels of work interferes with family on Canadian organizations?

High levels of work interferes with family create a major problem for many Canadian companies. Consider the following data. Compared to their counterparts with low levels of work interferes with family, employees with high work interferes with family are:

- 6.0 times more likely to report high levels of job stress,
- 2.8 times more likely to report high intent to turnover,
- 1.9 times more likely to have high absenteeism due to physical, mental or emotional fatigue,
- 1.3 times more likely to have high levels of absenteeism from work, all factors considered, and to miss three or more days of work in the past six months due to ill health,
- one-third as likely to report high levels of job satisfaction, and
- half as likely to have a positive view of their employer.

In addition, employees who report low levels of work interferes with family are 1.4 times more likely than those with high work interferes with family to be highly committed to their employer.

Work interferes with family affects an organization's ability to recruit and retain employees

The impact of work interferes with family on the organization is very similar to that observed with respect to role overload. This is not surprising given the high correlation between these two constructs. It should be noted, however, that the respondents with high levels of work interferes with family reported the lowest levels of commitment (only 44% with high commitment), the lowest levels of job satisfaction (only 24% were highly satisfied with their jobs), the highest levels of job stress (66% reported high job stress), and the highest intent to turnover (44% are thinking of leaving weekly or more, with 24% of them thinking of leaving several times a week or daily!) of any of the respondents in the study.

Organizational commitment, intent to turn over (change jobs), and view of the employer have all been found to be strongly associated with recruitment and retention issues.

These data imply that work interferes with family affects how people feel about their employer. Taken as a whole these findings suggest that employees who perceive that they have to put work ahead of family (e.g. feel that they have to make a choice between career advancement and family, or between job security and family) do not feel the same way about their employer as employees who do not perceive that such a choice is necessary. The employees who feel they have to choose between work and family are less committed to the organization and more likely to be thinking of leaving their organization.

Work interferes with family negatively impacts job satisfaction

As noted previously, employees with high levels of work interferes with family report the lowest levels of job satisfaction in this study. Why are those with high work interferes with family less likely to be satisfied with their jobs? The data indicate that compared to their counterparts with low levels of work interferes with family, employees with high work interferes with family are approximately:

- three times more likely to be dissatisfied with their workloads,
- 2.7 times more likely to be dissatisfied with the number of hours they work,
- 1.9 times more likely to be dissatisfied with their work schedule, and
- 1.6 times more likely to be dissatisfied with their ability to meet their career goals and their opportunities for career development.

In other words, high work demands, onerous work expectations and an inability to focus on career development activities reduce the level of job satisfaction for employees with high levels of work interferes with family.

The link between work interferes with family and job stress is very strong

The link between job stress and work interferes with family is very strong, and as such, worthy of note. Compared to their counterparts with low levels of work interferes with family, employees with high work interferes with family are six times more likely to report high levels of job stress. While

the cross-sectional nature of the data makes it impossible to determine why the association is so strong, two explanations are plausible. First, it may be that employees who work in high stress jobs are more likely to take their work home with them mentally. Alternatively, it may be that high stress jobs require the employee to work a lot of extra hours. The negative outcomes associated with high work interferes with family in this case could, therefore, be partly attributed to its association with high role overload.

The link between interference and intent to quit is also very strong

Compared to their counterparts with low levels of work interference with family, employees with high work interferes with family are 2.8 times more likely to report high intent to turnover. Why are those with high work interferes with family more likely to be thinking of leaving the organization? The data indicate that, compared to those with low work interferes with family, employees with high work interferes with family are:

- 6.7 times more likely to say they would leave because they wanted more time for their family and/or themselves,
- 6.6 times more likely to say they would leave because their work expectations were unrealistic,
- 4.1 times more likely to say they would leave because their work environment is non-supportive,
- 3.3 times more likely to say they would leave because their values are not the same as their organization,
- 2.8 times more likely to say they would leave because their work environment is frustrating,
- 2.6 times more likely to say they would leave because they perceive that they are not recognized for their efforts, and
- 2.4 times more likely to say they would leave because of personality conflicts at work.

Cost of absenteeism, due to high work interferes with family, is \$1 billion per year

While work interferes with family is also associated with total absenteeism and absence due to mental or emotional fatigue, the association is not as strong as that observed with respect to role overload. Nevertheless, the data reviewed in this report indicates that employers could reduce absenteeism in their organizations by 6.3% if they eliminated high levels of work interferes with family – a savings of approximately \$1 billion

per year in direct costs alone (savings of \$1.5 to \$2 billion if one also includes the indirect costs of absenteeism due to this form of work-life conflict).

What is the impact of high levels of work interferes with family on Canadian employees?

The data reviewed in this study can serve as a warning to employees that the strategy of 'trying to do it all' and 'meeting heavy demands at work at the expense of one's personal life' is associated with impaired mental and physical health. Compared to their counterparts with low work interferes with family, employees with high work interferes with family were:

- 5.6 times more likely to report high levels of burnout,
- 2.4 times more likely to report high levels of depressed mood,
- 2.4 times more likely to say their health is fair/poor,
- 2.3 times as likely to report that they were in poor physical health,
- 2.2 times as likely to report high levels of perceived stress, and
- slightly less than half as likely to report high levels of life satisfaction.

In other words, work interferes with family is associated with higher levels of perceived stress, burnout, and depressed mood and lower levels of life satisfaction and perceived physical health. The extent to which this form of work-life conflict poses a mental health risk for employed Canadians can be appreciated when one considers the following: 62% of the respondents with high work interferes with family reported high levels of burnout while just over three quarters (77%) reported high levels of perceived stress.

What is the impact of high levels of work interferes with family on Canadian families?

Work interferes with family is negatively associated with all of the family outcomes examined in this study. Compared to their counterparts with high work interferes with family, those with low levels of this form of work-life conflict are:

- three times as likely to frequently engage in activities associated with high levels of family integration.
- 2.2 times as likely to live in families with high levels of adaptation (i.e. are able to adapt to the stresses in their lives),



- 1.5 times as likely to be satisfied with their family life, and
- 1.5 times as likely to be satisfied with their parental abilities,

These findings indicate that employees who put work ahead of family can expect to experience serious repercussions on the family front. Such employees are less satisfied with their families and their abilities as a parent, less pleased with their family's well-being, and less likely to live in a stable family unit. It is interesting to note that the relationship between family integration and work interferes with family is particularly strong (only 12% of employees with high levels of work interferes with family can find/make the time to engage in meaningful activities with their families).

What is the impact of high levels of work interferes with family on Canadian society?

To answer this question we looked at the impact of work interferes with family on the use of Canada's health care system and the decision to have children.

Employees whose work interferes with their family make greater use of Canada's health care system

Approximately one in three of the employees in this sample have high levels of work interferes with family. These individuals make more use of Canada's health care system than their counterparts who do not experience such interference. The magnitude of the relationship between work interferes with family and the use of Canada's health care system can be determined by examining the following relative risk data. Compared to their counterparts with low levels of work interferes with family, employees with high levels of work interferes with family were:

- 1.7 times more likely to have sought care from a mental health professional,
- 1.7 times more likely to have received care on an outpatient basis three or more times,
- 1.6 times more likely to have seen a physician three or more times,
- 1.5 times more likely to have visited a hospital emergency room,
- 1.4 times more likely to have had to spend at least one night in the hospital, and
- 1.3 times more likely to have sought care from another health professional four or more times.

These data imply that demands on the health care system could be reduced if employers implemented policies which have been found to make it easier for employed Canadians to combine work and non-work roles. Suggestions here include greater use of flexible work arrangements such as flextime and compressed work weeks, and more judicious use of job-related travel.

Cost of physician visits due to high work interferes with family was approximately \$650 million per year

Analysis done in Report Three determined that the number of physician visits made by Canadians per year could be reduced by 8.5% if work interferes with family was eliminated – a savings of approximately \$650 million per year.

Costs associated with inpatient hospital care due to high work interferes with family were almost \$2 billion per year

Employees reporting high work interferes with family are substantially more likely to require inpatient hospital care than those with lower levels of interference. We estimated that in 2001 these excess visits cost Canadian taxpayers almost \$2 billion per year. Other calculations indicated that the costs associated with inpatient hospital care could be reduced by approximately 9% if employees were more able to balance competing work and life demands and did not meet work demands at the expense of commitments to family and non-work roles.

Emergency department visits could be reduced by 12% if interference from work to family was reduced

Employees with high work interferes with family are 1.5 times more likely seek care at an emergency department than are their counterparts with lower levels of interference. The cost of these extra visits was estimated to be approximately \$144 million per year.

Employees who consistently let work interferes with family spend more on prescription drugs

Employees with high work-interferes with family were 1.3 times more likely than those with lower levels of interference to spend \$150 or more on prescription medication in a six-month period. In 2001 they spent approximately \$188 per year (\$94 in a six-month period) on medication for their own use, \$34 per year more than their counterparts with low interference. We have noted previously that employees who put work ahead of family pay a price for this behaviour in terms of increased stress, depressed mood and lower life

satisfaction. It appears from these data that the employer also pays a price to their bottom line through increased benefit costs.

Employees with higher levels of work interferes with family cope by limiting family size

The relationship between work interferes with family and decision-making around having children reinforces our contention that some of the decline in Canada's birth rate may be attributed to increases in work-life conflict. Employees with higher levels of work interferes with family are more likely to agree that they have had fewer children because of work demands, and to agree that they have delayed having children or decided not to have children because of career demands and work interferes with family.

These findings point to the fact that employees having problems reconciling work and family demands are more likely than those more able to balance competing expectations to decide that they cannot cope with the additional responsibilities that come with additional children. As such they reinforce our contention that one way for Canadian policy-makers to address declining fertility is by looking at how they can reduce work interferes with family.

What can we do to reduce work interferes with family?

What can employers, employees and their families do to help reduce the percent of the population at risk of high work interferes with family? Answers to these questions are summarized below. Things that can be done by employees are addressed first. This is followed by strategies that can be employed by employers and their families.

Perceived flexibility the key to reducing work interferes with family

This research has identified a very strong association between higher levels of perceived flexibility and lower levels of work interferes with family. The strength of this relationship can be illustrated by the fact that higher levels of six of 10 forms of flexibility in this analysis were associated with lower levels of this type of work-life conflict for employees, regardless of their gender, their job type or their dependent care status. What forms of flexibility should employers implement if they wish to help employees cope with work interferes with family? They should make it easier for employees to:

- arrange their work schedule to meet personal or family commitments,

- get home from work in time to have meals with their family,
- interrupt their work day to deal with personal or family matters and then return to work,
- take paid time off work to attend a course or a conference,
- take a paid day off to care for a sick child, and
- take a paid day off to care for an elderly dependent.

All of these forms of flexibility give employees greater control over the work-family situation by helping them deal with family or personal issues (both scheduled and unanticipated) during work hours. In other words, they help employees meet personal commitments during what are traditionally considered to be 'work hours.' Given the high costs of this form of work-life conflict, it would appear that allowing employees greater freedom to deal with personal issues during work hours makes good business sense.

The importance of increasing perceived flexibility within the organization as a strategy to reduce work interferes with family is further illustrated by the fact that three of the remaining four items in the perceived flexibility measure were all moderately associated with work interferes with family. These data indicate that organizations that wish to reduce work interferes with family should consider making it easier for employees to: vary their hours of work, take their holidays when they want, and be home when their children get home from school.

Who you work for and how they behave is key to coping with work interferes with family

The findings from this study are unequivocal - work interferes with family depends more on who you report to within the organization and how they behave, than the organization you work for. Employees who work for a non-supportive manager were significantly more likely to experience high levels of interference while those reporting to a supportive manager were more likely to report lower levels of interference. Even more striking is the fact that all sixteen of the behaviours typifying non-supportive and supportive management were either strongly or moderately associated with this form of work-life conflict. These data indicate that a focus on management behaviour in general, and on reducing non-supportive management in particular, should bring about substantial reductions in work interferes with family. Details are given below.



Employees who report to a non-supportive manager report higher work interferes with family

The importance of developing strategies to reduce non-supportive management behaviours within the organization can be illustrated by noting the very strong association between increased work interferes with family and working for a manager who has unrealistic expectations with respect to the work to be done, and who works long hours and expects employees to do the same.

The other four behaviours typifying non-supportive management are also moderately associated with work interferes with family. Specifically, interference increases concomitant with reporting to a manager who makes the employee feel guilty about time off work for personal or family reasons, focuses on hours of work and not on output, puts the employee down in front of others, and only talks to the employee when they make a mistake. Decreasing the extent to which these behaviours occur should be a high priority in organizations wishing to address this form of work-life conflict.

Having a supportive manager helps employees cope with work interferes with family

A focus on increasing the number of supportive managers within the organization should also help employees cope with work interferes with family. Specifically, organizations need to increase the extent to which their managers display the following behaviours:

- listen to employees' concerns.
- effectively plan the work to be done.
- be available to answer their employee's questions.
- ask for input before making decisions that affect employees' work.
- make expectations clear.
- give recognition for a job well done.
- support their employees' decisions.
- provide constructive feedback.
- share information with employees.

Shift work is associated with higher work interferes with family

Flexible work arrangements, on their own, have little impact on work interferes with family. The following lends credibility to this conclusion. First, the association between working

flextime, a compressed work week, and a regular 9 to 5 workday, and work interferes with family, was not significant. Second, the associations that do exist are only weak and do not yield large changes in role interference. That being said, employers who do wish to reduce work interferes with family should be aware of the following:

- part-time work helps employees with dependent care responsibilities cope with work interferes with family.
- shift work puts people at risk for work interferes with family.
- both guerilla telework and telework arrangements are moderately associated with increased work interferes with family.

Family-friendly benefits do little to help employees cope with work interferes with family

Supportive benefits, on their own, have little impact on work interferes with family. This conclusion is supported by the fact that the association between the use of the following benefits and work interferences was not significant: on-site day care, use of child care referral, use of elder care referral services, use of flexible work arrangements, use of EAP, emergency days off, unpaid LOA, use of paid personal days off work, use of time off in lieu of overtime, use of short-term personal leave, telework, supportive relocation policies, and part-time work/job-sharing.

Many of the strategies individuals use to cope with work interferes with family do little to help

The findings with respect to the effectiveness of various individual coping strategies to ease work interferes with family are virtually the same as was noted for role overload. Again, we conclude that the majority of the individual coping strategies examined in this body of research do little to help employees cope with work interferes with family. There was no association between work interferes with family and the use of the majority of the individual coping strategies examined. Neither social support (talked with family or friends, talked with colleagues at work, sought help from family or friends, sought help from colleagues at work) nor active coping strategies (i.e. prioritize, delegate, schedule, plan and organize) helped individuals deal with work interferes with family. Nor did doing the following lead to a decrease in this type of conflict: trying to find another activity to take one's mind off things, having an alcoholic drink, or off-shifting work with a partner. Furthermore, there

is no relationship between work interferes with family and attempts to cope by just trying to forget about things and using prescription medicine

So what does appear to make a difference? Working harder and reducing the quality of things one does, which are the same strategies that were significantly linked to role overload. Again, we note that the relationship between the use of each of these strategies and work interferes with family is very strong and positive, which reinforces our idea that these strategies do not help employees cope with work-life conflict, and instead may exacerbate the situation.

Employees with higher work interferes with family cope by working harder

The relationship between working harder and work interferes with family is very strong. Unlike the situation with respect to role overload, however, the effectiveness of this strategy depends on the gender, job type and dependent care status of the individual. The data from this study support the following conclusions with respect to the relationship between working harder and work interferes with family:

- the use of this coping strategy is associated with increased work interferes with family for men and women in managerial and professional positions and men with dependent care responsibilities. These findings suggest that these employees cope by devoting more effort to their work role, thereby increasing their feelings of interference on the family front.
- the use of this coping strategy does provide for some degree of relief from work interferes with family for those in other positions within the organization - especially men. It may be that by working harder these individuals are more able to focus their efforts on meeting demands outside of work, thereby reducing the extent to which work interferes with family.

Employees with higher work interferes with family cope by reducing the quality of their work

The relationship between the use of this strategy and work interferes with family varies with dependent care status. Employees with dependent care responsibilities experience a greater drop in work interferes with family than do their counterparts without such responsibilities, when they reduce the quality of things that they do. These findings are consistent with our contention that individuals with child and/or elder care responsibilities cope with work interferes with family by lowering their standards at home. These results

also support our view that organizations that make it difficult for employees to reconcile work and non-work demands, by expecting employees to give priority to work at the expense of their lives, will not realize significant productivity gains.

Daily use of prescription drugs helps employees cope with work interferes with family

Similar to what was observed with respect to role overload, there is a moderate relationship between the use of prescription medicine to cope with stress and work interferes with family. Furthermore, the data verify the relationship between prescription drug use and work-life conflict observed with role overload: prescription medicine helps employees cope with conflict if used on a daily basis. Weekly use, however, is associated with higher levels of work interferes with family.

Employees who cope by sacrificing their personal needs report higher levels of work interferes with family

Individuals who cope with work interferes with family by sacrificing their personal needs (i.e. leave things undone around the house, cutting back on sleep, cutting down on outside activities and buying goods and services) do not experience lower levels of interference. The relationship between the use of two of these strategies (cutting back on sleep and buying goods and services) and interference is very straightforward: the greater the use, the greater the interference. The relationship between the use of the other two strategies and interference is more complex. Details are given below.

Occasionally leaving things undone around the house helps women cope with work interferes with family

Leaving things undone around the house has a strong, positive association with work interferes with family for men, regardless of their job type. For women, on the other hand, moderate use (i.e. once a week) of this strategy is associated with an increased ability to cope with work interferes with family. Women who leave things undone around the house on a daily basis, however, report significantly higher levels of interference. Women in managerial and professional positions, in particular, benefit from using this strategy moderately.



Employees who from time to time cut down on outside activities are more able to cope with work interferes with family

A similar relationship can be observed on work interferes with family with the use of cutting down on outside activities as a coping strategy. Moderate use of this strategy is associated with lower levels of interference, while daily use of the strategy is associated with greater interference regardless of gender, job type or dependent care status. Men and women in managerial and professional positions benefit the most from the moderate use of this strategy, in terms of a decline in work interferes with family. Male managers and professionals experience the greatest increase in interference when this strategy is used daily. The fact that no such increase in interference can be observed for female managers and professionals suggests that this strategy is effective at all levels of use for women in this group.

Employees who put family first are more able to cope with work interferes with family

Employees who wish to reduce the amount of interference they experience between work and family need to make a conscious effort to leave work problems at work, and modify their work schedules. The results imply that employees who make an effort to separate work time from non-work time, by leaving work problems at work, will realize significant declines in work interferes with family.

Managers and professionals who put family first are more able to cope with work interferes with family

Similarly, modifying work schedules was only significantly associated with work interferes with family in the analysis that took job type into consideration. Male and female managers and professionals benefit the most when they modify their work schedule. Interestingly, the results suggest that modifying one's work schedule once or twice a week is enough to help employees in this group cope with work interferes with family. Additional modification (i.e. on a daily basis) provides no additional reduction in interference.

Non-professionals who put family first are less able to cope with work interferes with family

The relationship between work interferes with family and modification of work schedule is quite different for women in other positions within the organization. Similar to what was observed in the other groups, these experience a decline in interference when they move from never modifying their schedules to weekly modification. Unfortunately, this group

experiences a significant increase of interference when they use this strategy on a daily basis. While we cannot say why modification of one's work schedule increases interference for this group of women when used frequently, the findings with respect to work schedules does shed some light. It will be recalled that women in other positions are more likely to work a 9 to 5 schedule when the hours of work are fixed and therefore predictable. It may be that women in this group, who cannot afford more flexible child and elder care support services, may find working flexible hours more problematic with respect to getting things done at home.

Employees with higher levels of interference are more likely to try and cope by purchasing supports from outside the family

There is a positive relationship between work interferes with family and purchasing good and services from outside the family. The difference in interference between someone who never purchases outside support and one who does so daily is notable, suggesting that while money can buy happiness, it may not be able to buy balance.



CHAPTER FIVE

Family Interferes with Work: A Primer

This chapter provides a primer for interested readers on the third of the four forms of work-life conflict examined in the *2001 Balancing Work, Family and Lifestyle National Study* – family interferes with work. The chapter begins by defining this construct and quantifying its prevalence in Canada at this time. The chapter then identifies the demographic and organizational factors that place employees at risk with respect to family interferes with work, articulates the consequences of high levels of this form of interference on employers, employees, families and Canadian society and looks at how this form of work-life conflict can best be reduced.

Definition

This form of work-life conflict is similar to work interferes with family, as both occur because employees cannot be physically and/or emotionally in two different places doing two different things at exactly the same time. This type of conflict reflects a different set of priorities, because employees who experience this form of interference meet family demands at the expense of work demands (i.e. do not stay late, do not take work home to do in the evening, refuse job-related travel, forgo a promotion, etc) and not vice versa.

Prevalence

Only one in 10 Canadians allows family demands to interfere with work

The 2001 survey data indicate that very few Canadians experience this form of work-life conflict. Only 10% of the sample reported that their family demands and responsibilities interfered with their ability to meet demands at work (i.e. high levels of interference). The majority (58%) of the working Canadians in our sample, in fact, reported that their family demands did not interfere with their work at all (i.e. low levels of interference). The rest of the respondents (32% of the sample) reported moderate levels of interference.

It is interesting to note that family interferes with work has a very different distribution than was observed with role overload and work interferes with family. While role overload is positively skewed and work interferes with family has a

normal distribution, family interferes with work is negatively skewed. Three times as many Canadians give priority to work at the expense of their family as do the reverse.

Family interferes with work has increased over the decade

In 1991, only 5% of the working Canadians who responded to our survey reported high levels of family interferes with work. In 2001, the percentage of the sample had doubled to 10%. In other words, a greater percentage of working Canadians are putting family ahead of work today than was the case a decade ago. Analysis of the data suggests that much of this increase can be attributed to an increased need for employees to supply care to elderly dependents. The aging of the workforce means that the proportion of Canadians facing this form of work-life conflict is likely to increase dramatically over the next decade. The costs associated with this form of imbalance are also likely to increase considerably over time.

Who is at risk with respect to family interferes with work?

Which groups are at risk of experiencing high levels of family interferes with work? The following conclusions with respect to the prediction of this form of interference can be drawn from our research:

Family interferes with work has a different cause than overload and work interferes with family

Sector of employment, community, socio-economic circumstances, work demands and work characteristics were not substantive predictors of family interferes with work for either gender. These findings, combined with the fact that we were not able to explain as much of the variation in family interferes with work as we could explain for work interferes with family and role overload, indicate that this form of work-life conflict is very different than work to family interference.

The lack of a substantive relationship between family interferes with work and community of residence, sector of employment, characteristics of work and socio-economic circumstances indicates that this form of work-life conflict has little to do with circumstances at work or within the community for either gender.

Who is at risk with respect to family interferes with work?

The greater the demands the employee faces outside of work, the greater the likelihood that they will report that their family responsibilities interfere with their ability to meet

obligations at work. Key predictors of family interferes with work include hours per week spent in providing child care and eldercare and having responsibility for child care. Employees with child care and/or elder care responsibilities are at the highest risk of experiencing this form of work-life conflict. Even in this higher risk group, however, the prevalence of this form of work-life conflict is low (i.e. only 13% of the women and 11% of the men with dependent care responsibilities reported high family interferes with work). These findings may be useful in dispelling the stereotype that female employees with children or elder care responsibilities give their work responsibilities a lower priority.

While time in home chores, education and volunteer work are not significant predictors of family interferes with work for either gender, this form of work-life conflict is negatively associated with hours per week spent in leisure activities (i.e. the higher the conflict, the less time in leisure). This suggests that these employees may be trying to cope with this form of interference by devoting time they would normally spend on themselves to their work and/or family roles.

Demands at home predispose an employee to family interferes with work

This form of work-life conflict is linked to what an employee has to do at home (i.e. non-work demands) and how easy it is to fulfil these responsibilities given the expectations imposed at the level of the organization (i.e. organizational culture). It is not associated with the demands an employee faces at work (i.e. work circumstances, sector of employment). Nor is it associated with where one lives.

Organizational culture is an important predictor of family interferes with work

Organizational culture is an important predictor of family interferes with work for both men and women. Specifically:

1. Employees who work in an organization that promotes a culture of hours (i.e. employees perceive that their career advancement will be limited if they do not work long hours) will report higher family interferes with work.
2. Employees who work in an organization that promotes a culture of work or family (i.e. one in which employees feel that they have to choose between their family and career advancement) will report higher family interferes with work.

These findings support the following conclusion: family interferes with work occurs when the types of behaviour that the work culture rewards with respect to career advancement

(i.e. long hours, putting work first) are at odds with the types of behaviours one would associate with being a suitable parent/elder caregiver (i.e. spending time in family activities, taking family leave, putting family first).

The cause of family interferes with work differs for men and men

Family interferes with work has different roots for men than women. For men, this type of work-life conflict has relatively little to do with their circumstances at home (i.e. what family roles they occupy). For women, family interferes with work is substantively associated with family circumstances (i.e. life-cycle stage, family type, age of children at home). This indicates that for women (but not men), this type of conflict is associated with occupation of certain family roles. Our findings identify the following groups of women are at higher levels of risk:

- those with elder care (though it should be noted that employees of both genders with elder care responsibilities are at higher risk for family interferes with work).
- women with younger children: family interferes with work is negatively associated with age of children at home, as women with younger children (i.e. under five) have significantly higher levels of this form of interference and women with teenage children have significantly lower levels.
- women who have child care responsibilities only have more problems with this form of interference than women with dual caregiving responsibilities (i.e. both child care and elder care); women with no dependent care responsibilities do not report substantive levels of this form of conflict. The fact that women with multiple care-giving demands (i.e. both child care and elder care) report lower levels of family interferes with work than women with only child- or elder- care supports Barnett's (1998) Multiple Role Hypothesis and suggests that multiple caregiver roles offer some form of protective function to women with respect to this form of work-life conflict.
- women who are in non-traditional families (i.e. they work, their partner stays home and looks after the children) report lower levels of this form of interference than other mothers.

These findings indicate that many working women in Canada experience family interferes with work because they still have responsibility for the traditional family roles of mother (especially of younger children) and caregiver for elders.



When these role expectations are reduced (e.g. children are older and/or the spouse has assumed the role of caregiver), this form of interference is reduced, suggesting that this form of conflict is linked to traditional gender role expectations with respect to who should care for children and the elderly

These results also imply that if we have information on what roles employed women occupy, we will have some indication of the extent to which they will experience family interferences with work. No such prediction can be made for men.

What are the consequences of high levels of family interferences with work?

Approximately one in 10 of the respondents to the 2001 survey reported high levels of family interferences with work. The percent of the Canadian workforce at risk with respect to this form of work-life conflict is expected to increase dramatically in the next decade with the aging of the workforce. What impact do these high levels of role interference have on employers, employees, families and Canadian society? Answers to these questions are summarized below.

What is the impact of high levels of family interferences with work on Canadian organizations?

Family interferences with work has minimal impact on the organizational attitudes examined in this study. While family interferences with work is negatively associated with organizational commitment, job satisfaction and one's view of one's organization, and positively associated with job stress and intent to seek other employment, the relationships are significantly less than were observed with role overload and work interferences with family (i.e. statistically significant, but not substantive).

This form of work-life conflict is, however, strongly associated with high levels of absenteeism (i.e. three or more days' absence in the past six months).

Employees with high levels of family interferences with work and caregiver strain are more likely to be absent from work

Compared to their counterparts with low levels of caregiver strain, employees with high levels of caregiver strain are:

- 6.5 times more likely to have missed three or more days of work in the past six months due to child care problems,
- 1.8 times more likely to have missed three or more days of work in the past six months due to physical, mental or emotional fatigue,

- 1.6 times more likely to have missed three or more days of work in the past six months (all causes combined), and
- 1.5 times more likely to have missed three or more days of work in the past six months due to ill health.

From the organization's perspective, the main consequence of high family interferences with work is higher absenteeism due to problems with child care. This finding is not surprising given that employees with high levels of this form of conflict put family first (i.e. place a higher priority on caring for children than attending work, or cannot attend work due to demands at home).

Particularly noteworthy is the fact that this is the only form of work-life conflict which is associated with absenteeism due to problems with child care.

There is a substantive cost of absenteeism due to high family interferences with work

The link between family interferences with work and absenteeism can be better appreciated by examining the costs of this form of work-life conflict to Canadian organizations. While only one in 10 of the respondents to this survey reported high levels of family interferences with work, the absenteeism associated with this form of work-life conflict was estimated to be just under \$0.5 billion a year in direct costs (approximately \$1 billion per year when indirect costs are also included in the total). These findings indicate that the organization can reduce costs associated with absenteeism by making it easier for employees with dependent care responsibilities to vary when and where they work (i.e. facilitate the ability to work from home).

What is the impact of high levels of family interferences with work on Canadian employees?

The strategy of putting family ahead of work does not appear to be as harmful to one's mental health as the alternatives: trying to do it all (i.e. role overload) or putting work ahead of family. Compared to their counterparts with low family interferences with work, employees with high family interferences with work were approximately:

- twice as likely to say their health is fair/poor,
- 1.6 times more likely to report high levels of perceived stress, burnout and depressed mood, and
- 1.6 times less likely to indicate that they were satisfied with their lives.

While the association between this form of work-life conflict and employee outcomes is not as strong as that observed with respect to role overload and work interferes with family, it is still cause for concern.

What is the impact of high levels of family interferes with work on Canadian families?

High levels of work interferes with family are negatively associated with three of the family outcomes examined in this study. Compared to their counterparts with high family interferes with work, those with low levels of this form of work-life conflict are:

- twice as likely to live in families with high levels of well-being (i.e. adaptation)
- 1.5 times as likely to be satisfied with their family life, and
- 1.5 times as likely to be satisfied with their parental abilities.

In other words, employees who put family ahead of work are less satisfied with both their families and their abilities as parents. They are also less likely to be happy with the level of their family's well-being. It is interesting to note that the respondents with high family interferes with work reported the lowest levels of family life satisfaction, parental satisfaction and family well-being in the study. It is hard to tell the direction of causality here. Is it because they are dissatisfied with these dimensions of their life that they have decided to put family first (i.e. trying to remedy the situation)? Or, has the fact that they have met family demands at the expense of their work (and possibly career progression) made them more dissatisfied, critical or resentful of circumstances at home that have made such choices/sacrifices necessary? Additional research is needed in this area to answer this question.

The fact that family interferes with work is not associated with family integration suggests that either people who put family ahead of work are doing so to keep their family units intact or the strategy of putting family first maintains family integrity.

What is the impact of high levels of family interferes with work on Canadian society?

To answer this question we looked at the impact of this form of interference on the use of Canada's health care system and the decision to have children.

Family interferes with work can be linked to poorer mental health

One in 10 of the employees in this sample have high levels of work interferes with family. While these individuals make more use of Canada's health care system than their counterparts who do not experience such interference, the magnitude of the relationship between this form of work-life conflict and the use of Canada's health care system is (with one exception) lower than can be observed with the other three forms of work-life conflict. Compared to their counterparts with low levels of family interferes with work, employees with high levels of family interferes with work were, in the six months prior to the study being done:

- 1.9 times more likely to have sought care from a mental health professional,
- 1.6 times more likely to have received care on an outpatient basis three or more times,
- 1.4 times more likely to have seen a physician three or more times,
- 1.3 times more likely to have visited a hospital emergency room, and
- 1.3 times more likely to have had to spend at least one night in the hospital.

One aspect of these data is worthy of note – the high association between family interferes with work and the use of mental health care services. That is, those with high levels of this form of interference are almost twice as likely to seek such care as those with low levels. What causes this association is hard to determine from these data, as the direction of causality is not clear. We can speculate that putting family first in a society that materially and socially recognizes the opposite behaviour (i.e. putting work first) is associated with higher levels of stress and depression and lower self-esteem. This explanation assumes that family interferes with work contributes to poorer mental health. Alternatively, it may be that family is more likely to rise in priority compared to work when there are problems at home, when demands associated with health care increase or when an individual is stressed or depressed (i.e. in poorer mental health). In this case, poorer mental health is assumed to lead to higher levels of family interferes with work rather than the reverse. Future research should seek to determine the direction of causality of this relationship as it affects how the issue could best be addressed.



Family interferes with work has less of a negative impact on health care costs

Both the relative risk and the absolute risk associated with high family interferes with work are lower than observed in the other forms of work-life conflict. In terms of absolute risk, only one in 10 of the respondents to this survey put family ahead of work (i.e. reported high levels of family interferes with work). Similarly the relative risk associated with high family interferes with work is lower than was observed with respect to role overload. Nevertheless, the increased number of physician visits associated with this form of work-life conflict is calculated to be just under a \$250 million a year. Similarly, the increased number of inpatient hospital days due to this form of interference is estimated to be another quarter of a billion dollars.

While the relative risk of visiting the hospital emergency department resulting from this form of work-life conflict is similar to that observed with role overload and work interferes with family, the costs associated with these visits is lower (approximately \$52 million) due largely to the fact that few Canadians allow family demands to take priority over work (i.e. prevalence is low).

These data would suggest that Canadian society will benefit (though employers may not) if more Canadians place a higher priority on family than work.

Interference from family to work not strongly associated with prescription drug use

Family interferes with work is not associated with prescription drug use. This finding is consistent with the fact that respondents with high family interferes with work do not make as great a use of medical care services as their counterparts with high role overload or caregiver strain.

The decision to delay or not have children reduces family interferes with work for women

The 2001 data shows that women who have made the decision not to have children because of their work report significantly lower levels of family interferes with work than their counterparts who have not made such a decision. This finding is not surprising since this group of women has fewer constraints to deal with at home. While the findings from this study validate the decision (it is easier to focus on your career if you do not have children) the use of this coping strategy is not good for Canada. Again, these data point to the need

for Canadian policy-makers and organizations to address the issue of work-life balance if they wish to increase fertility levels in this country.

What can we do to reduce family interferes with work?

What can employers, employees and their families do to help reduce the percent of the population at risk of high family interferes with work? Answers to these questions are summarized below. Things that can be done by employees are addressed first. This is followed by strategies that can be employed by employees and their families.

What can employers do to help employees cope with family interferes with work?

While organizations can do a lot to help their employees cope with role overload and work interferes with family, their options are much more limited when it comes to helping reduce family interferes with work. None of the organizational strategies examined in this study were strongly associated with this form of work-life conflict and interventions such as perceived flexibility and management support, which were effective at alleviating role overload and work interferes with family, had little (i.e. perceived flexibility) to no (i.e. supportive manager) impact on family interferes with work. That being said, we can provide some advice to organizations who wish to help employees cope with family interferes with work. These suggestions are summarized below.

Increase perceived flexibility

While the impact of perceived flexibility on family interferes with work is minimal and limited to employees with dependent care, the data reveal three strategies that are effective at upper management levels. Organizations who wish to help employees with dependent care cope with family interferes with work should make it easier for these employees to arrange their work schedule to meet personal and family commitments, vary their work hours, and take their holidays when they want. It is, however, important for organizations to recognize that these strategies are only effective at high levels (i.e. employee feels that they can rearrange their schedule and vary their hours) as employees with moderate flexibility in these areas realized no increased ability to cope with family interferes with work.

Non-supportive management increases family interferes with work

While working for a supportive manager does not help employees cope with family interferes with work, reporting to a non-supportive manager exacerbates this form of conflict. The following behaviours, in particular, are associated with increased family interferes with work: makes me feel guilty about time off work for personal or family reasons, and focuses on hours of work and not on output.

Working a regular work day reduces family interferes with work

Employees who work a fixed work day (i.e. start and stop times are the same every day) report substantially lower levels of family interferes with work while employees who work flextime report the highest levels of this form of conflict. It would appear that knowing one's exact hours of work helps an employee plan family activities so that they do not interfere with their work duties.

A number of benefits appear to help employees cope with family interferes with work

Seven of the family-friendly benefits considered in this study (child care referral, on-site day care, part-time/reduced work week, personal day off with pay, EAP, taking a family/emergency day off work, and short-term personal leave) were linked to the occurrence of family interferes with work for employees with dependent care. The relationship between two of these strategies, use of child care referral and part-time work, and family interferes with work is negative (i.e. interference decreases as use of these strategies increases) indicating that these two benefits do, in fact, help employees with child- and/or elder- care cope with family demands that interfere with work. In all other cases, however, the relationship between family interferes with work and use of benefits was positive. Since it is unlikely that the benefit itself would cause an increase in work-life conflict, these findings suggest that employees use these organizational benefits when they are experiencing greater interference. Unfortunately, cross-sectional data (collected at one point in time) does not allow us to determine the extent to which each of these benefits helps employees cope with family interferes with work. We can, however, say that virtually everyone in this sample who used these benefits indicated that the benefits had helped them cope to a moderate/great extent.

Effectiveness of some strategies depends on gender

There are several gender differences in the relations discussed above that give further guidance to organizations that wish to help their employees with dependent care cope with family interferes with work. Organizations can help women by giving them more flexibility to arrange their work schedules to meet personal and family commitments and by reducing the extent to which managers assess performance by looking at hours rather than output. They can help men, on the other hand, by giving them child care referral benefits; that is, the organization has a referral service to help employees find child care in their community.

What can individuals do to cope with family interferes with work?

The research has shown that, generally speaking, individual coping strategies are not effective at helping employed Canadians deal with family interferes for several reasons. The analysis of the 2001 data determined that the use of strategies such as seek social support, off-shift work with spouse, use alcohol and/or prescription drugs, find another activity to take one's mind off things or active coping (prioritize, and schedule, plan and organize) had no relationship with the occurrence of family interferes with work.

Effectiveness of other coping strategies depends on both gender and dependent care status

Analysis of the 2001 data leads to the identification of four coping strategies (reducing the quality of things one does, working harder, just trying to forget about things, delegating work to others) that were associated with family interferes with work when gender and dependent care status were taken into account. In all cases, the relationship between the use of the strategy and family interferes with work depended on both gender and dependent care status. The following observations on coping with family interferes with work can be made by looking at these relationships.

Reducing the quality of their work does not help men/women with dependent care responsibilities cope with family interferes with work

There is no relationship between the tendency to reduce the quality of things one does and family interferes with work for those without dependent care. On the other hand, there is a positive relationship between reducing the quality of things one does and family interferes with work for the parents/givers of elder care. These findings suggest that men and women with dependent care cope with stress at home by lowering



their standards at work (i.e. let family interfere with work). The implication of this is that employers who are interested in quality of work need to implement strategies to reduce family interferes with work and enhance work-life balance.

Working harder seems to help those without dependents cope with family interferes with work

Working harder seems to help men and women without dependent care responsibilities cope with family interferes with work. The same cannot be said for men and women with dependent care responsibilities, who report a strong positive relationship between use of this strategy and family interferes with work. It may be that those without child care and/or elder care are able to reduce this form of interference by increasing their efforts at home - a strategy that becomes less effective as demands outside of work increase.

Delegating work to others does not help women cope with family interferes with work

Delegating appears to be a more effective coping strategy for men than for women. There is no association between the frequency with which one delegates work to others and family interferes with work for women, regardless of dependent care status. For men, on the other hand, family interferes with work decreases as delegation increases. Men with dependent care experience slightly more benefits from the use of delegation, than do their counterparts without dependent care. Gender role theory suggests that these findings may be due to the fact that women have difficulty giving up responsibility for the family role (i.e. child care, elder care, home chores). While the tasks themselves might be delegated to others, the responsibility for the task remains with the women. Men have no such problems.

Just trying to forget about it can help those without dependents cope with family interferes with work

The results with respect to trying to forget about problems, and family interferes with work, is an interesting one. For those with dependent care responsibilities the findings are quite clear - interference increases concomitantly with the use of this strategy. For men and women without such care-giving responsibilities, higher use of this strategy is associated with a plateau effect of family interferes with work. The strategy appears to be particularly effective for women without dependents. These findings reveal that it is easier for those without care-giving responsibilities to successfully separate family from work and 'forget about' challenges outside of work.

Family coping strategies ineffective at reducing family interferes with work

Virtually none of the family coping strategies examined in this study were associated with family interferes with work. Only two strategies were substantively associated with family interferes with work: hire help to care for the children and get by on less sleep. In both cases, however, family interferes with work increased concomitant to the use of the strategy.



CHAPTER SIX

Caregiver Strain: A Primer

This Chapter provides a primer for interested readers on the fourth of the four forms of work-life conflict examined in the 2001 *Balancing Work, Family and Lifestyle National Study*—caregiver strain. The structure of this chapter is identical to chapters 3, 4 and 5. The first section offers a definition of this construct and quantifies its prevalence in Canada at this time. The chapter then goes on to identify the demographic and organizational factors that place employees at risk with respect to caregiver strain, articulate the consequences of high levels of this form of work-life conflict on employers, employees, families and Canadian society and look at how this form of work-life conflict can best be reduced.

Definition

Caregiver strain is defined as the perceptual aspect of feeling overwhelmed, overloaded or stressed by the pressures associated with the role of employed elder caregiver. Three types of strains associated with the care of an elderly dependent are recognized: physical strain, financial strain and the sense of being overwhelmed emotionally.

Prevalence

The findings with respect to the prevalence of caregiver strain are very similar to those observed with respect to family interferes with work. While the majority of the respondents to this survey (74%) rarely experience caregiver strain, 9% find elder care to be a strain (physically, financially and mentally) several times a week or daily, while 17% experience such feelings approximately once a week. In other words, approximately one in four working Canadians experience what can be considered to be high levels of caregiver strain.

A more detailed analysis of the data determined that respondents with high caregiver strain were more likely to say that elder care was overwhelming and a financial strain. It is difficult from these data to determine if these types of elder care issues lead to high caregiver strain or if people who put family first are more likely to find it a strain to continue to work (because they need the money) when they would prefer to stay at home and care for an elderly family member. Future research is needed to clarify this association.

Caregiver strain likely to increase over time

We cannot determine if the prevalence of caregiver strain has increased over time because this construct was not measured in 1991. The fact that both family interferes with work and the proportion of Canadians with elder care responsibilities have increased over the past decade would suggest that high caregiver strain has also become more common. We can also expect that this form of work-life conflict will increase dramatically over the next several decades as more employees become 'at risk' (the aging of the Canadian population means that more employees will take on elder care responsibilities).

Who is at risk with respect to caregiver strain?

A number of very strong conclusions with respect to the prediction of caregiver strain can be drawn from the 2001 data. Key conclusions are summarized below.

Caregiver strain is associated with life cycle stage

Data from the 2001 study reveal three key determinants of caregiver strain which are shared by male and female employees: non-work demands, life cycle stage and adult roles. All these factors point to the same underlying cause of caregiver strain—elder care.

This form of work-life conflict can be predicted with a great deal of certainty if we know an employee's life cycle stage. Employees who are older and in a life cycle stage that involves elder care are more likely to report high levels of caregiver strain, regardless of where they live, where they work, their income, job type, etc. This finding is not a surprise given that caregiver strain is defined as a strain from caring for an elderly dependent. Who can be expected to have the most problems with respect to the caregiver role? The data identify three groups of employees who can be considered to be at higher risk: those with elder care responsibilities, those in the sandwich group (i.e. multigenerational caregiving responsibilities) and single caregivers. In other words, older employees' life cycles are more susceptible to have this form of work-life conflict

Most employees will experience caregiver strain over time

Second, this form of work-life conflict has little to do with the other socio-economic or socio-demographic predictors examined in this analysis. From this we can conclude that factors such as place of residence, income and job type have little to do with the amount of caregiver strain an employee will experience. Rather, it would appear that it is a function of the passage of time—and that employees will face this

challenge when they reach a certain point in their lives when their parents require care, regardless of their other life circumstances.

The higher the demands at home, the greater the strain

Caregiver strain is positively associated with the time demands associated with looking after an elderly dependent (first) and having this form of responsibility (second). Family demands are a substantive predictor of caregiver strain. The greater the responsibility (i.e. only child, parent lives in home, siblings do not assume their share, lack of community support), the higher the level of this form of conflict. Non-work demands are a more powerful predictor of caregiver strain for men than for women.

Women report higher levels of caregiver strain than men

The data reviewed in this study are unequivocal – women are more likely to report high levels of caregiver strain than men regardless of job type, dependent care status or sector of employment. This gender difference can be largely explained by the fact that women are more likely than men to find elder care mentally 'overwhelming' and a physical strain. These findings are not surprising given the higher levels of role overload reported by the women in the sample and data showing that the women in the sample are more likely than the men (regardless of their job type or sector of employment) to have primary responsibility for elder care and spend more time per week in elder care.

Age of children at home provides a useful indicator of life cycle stage for women

Women with older children at home are more likely to report high caregiver strain. This finding can be explained by the fact that for women, biological limitations provide an upper limit on the age at which a woman can have children.

If you know the age of a female employee you can make an informed guess about her risk of experiencing caregiver strain and family interferes with work

The data indicate that knowing the age of female employees will give us valuable information with respect to the incidence of two forms of work-life conflict: family interferes with work and caregiver strain. The following picture for female employees in Canada emerges from our research. As working women age, the amount of care required by their children declines (as does family to work interference) as their children get older. At the same time, the amount of care required by their parents and in-laws increases with the age of the female worker (as does caregiver strain). These

data indicate that women experience lower levels of these two forms of work-life conflict when their children are adolescents and their parents are still young enough to be independent. These findings also indicate that employers and policy-makers need to consider both child care and elder care roles when looking at work-life conflict for women.

Caregiver strain is not associated with work demands or organizational culture

Caregiver strain has a very different cause than the other forms of work-life conflict examined in this study, in that it is the only form of work-life conflict that has little to no link with work. The data indicate no association between the sectors of employment, community, socio-economic circumstances, work demands and work characteristics, and caregiver strain for either gender. Also of interest is the fact that caregiver strain is the only form of work-life conflict examined in this study that was not substantively associated with organizational culture. These results support our earlier conclusion that this form of work-life conflict is largely a result of an employee's progress through the life cycle stage (i.e. it has little to do with work culture or demands).

Women with higher levels of caregiver strain shift work to home

Work demands are not an important predictor of caregiver strain for men. Work demands are, however, significantly associated with this form of work-life conflict for women. Analysis of the 2001 data shows that women with higher levels of caregiver strain spend fewer hours at work per week and more hours performing supplemental work at home. These data suggest that women with high levels of this form of work-life conflict try to fit their work demands around their caregiving obligations by leaving the office early (fewer hours in work per week) and bringing work home to complete (higher supplemental work at home or SWAH).

What are the consequences of high levels of caregiver strain?

Over one in four of the respondents to the 2001 survey reported high levels of caregiver strain. What impact do these high levels of strain have on employers, employees, families and Canadian society? Answers to these questions are summarized below.



Caregiver strain has a minimal impact on the organizational attitudes examined in this study

Caregiver strain does not have the same type of association with work outcomes, as was observed with role overload and work interferes with family. The association between caregiver strain and organizational commitment, job stress, job satisfaction, intent to look for a new job and view of the organization as a place to work, while statistically significant, is not substantive.

Employees with high levels of caregiver strain are more likely to be absent from work

From the organization's perspective, the main consequence of high caregiver strain is higher absenteeism due to elder care problems and physical, mental and emotional fatigue. Compared to their counterparts with low levels of caregiver strain, employees with high levels of caregiver strain are:

- 13 times more likely to have missed three or more days of work in the past six months due to elder care problems,
- 1.8 times more likely to have missed three or more days of work in the past six months due to physical, mental or emotional fatigue,
- 1.4 times more likely to have missed three or more days of work in the past six months (all causes combined), and
- 1.4 times more likely to have missed three or more days of work in the past six months due to ill health.

Employees with high caregiver strain were more likely to take time off to deal with elder care problems and because they were mentally, emotionally or physically fatigued. Particularly noteworthy is the only dimension of work-life conflict that is associated with absenteeism due to elder care problems. The strong link between caregiver strain and absenteeism is similar to what was observed with respect to family interferes with work. The data show, however, that the root causes of the absenteeism does differ between these two forms of work-life conflict, as those with high family interferes with work are more likely to miss work due to issues with respect to child care, while those with higher levels of caregiver strain are more likely to miss work due to elder care issues.

Cost of absenteeism due to high caregiver strain just over \$1 billion per year

The data collected in the 2001 survey provided us with the opportunity to estimate the potential financial cost of work-life conflict to Canadian organizations. Our calculations

(see Report Two) indicate that, in 2001 the direct costs of absenteeism due to high levels of caregiver strain was just over \$1 billion per year. Indirect costs were estimated at another \$1 to \$2 billion). Our calculations also determined that employers could reduce absenteeism in their organization by 8.6% if they could eliminate high levels of caregiver strain.

What is the impact of high levels of caregiver strain on Canadian employees?

The impact of caregiver strain on Canadian employees is virtually the same as what was observed with family interferes with work. Employees with high caregiver strain were 1.5 times more likely than those with low caregiver strain to report high levels of perceived stress and burnout, almost twice as likely to report high levels of depressed mood, 1.8 times less likely to indicate that they are satisfied with their lives, and 1.6 times more likely to perceive that their physical health was poor/fair.

Employees with high caregiver strain most likely to report high levels of stress and depressed mood

Caregiving responsibilities place employed Canadians at a higher risk with respect to physical and mental health problems. Respondents in this study with high caregiver strain reported the highest levels of perceived stress (80% with high caregiver strain reported high stress) and depressed mood (60% with high caregiver strain reported high depressed mood) of any group in the sample. They were also more likely to suffer from impaired physical health (28% with high caregiver strain reported their health as fair/poor). It would appear that strains of caring for elderly dependents, while employed, are exceeding Canadians' ability to cope.

What is the impact of high levels of caregiver strain on Canadian employees?

High caregiver strain impacts family life satisfaction, positive parenting and family well-being. Compared to their counterparts with high caregiver strain, those with low caregiver strain were:

- 1.3 times more likely to report high levels of family well-being, and
- 1.3 times more likely to be satisfied with their family life

Respondents with high caregiver strain were also the least likely to engage in behaviours associated with positive parenting. These phenomena can be explained by the fact that

about one in three of the respondents in the high caregiver strain group are in the 'sandwich group'. It would appear that in these families the time and energy devoted to elder care activities is interfering with the time available for children.

What is the impact of high levels of caregiver strain on Canadian society?

To answer this question we looked at the impact of this form of interference on the use of Canada's health care system and the decision to have children.

Caregiver strain can be linked to poorer physical health

The data from this study support the idea that employed Canadians with higher levels of caregiver strain are in poorer physical health. Employees with high levels of caregiver strain make the greatest use of physician services and are the most likely to have spent time in hospital on both an inpatient and an outpatient basis. They also make the highest use of the emergency room and spent the greatest amount on prescription medication. Compared to their counterparts with low levels of caregiver strain, employees with high levels of caregiver strain are:

- 1.8 times more likely to have received care on an outpatient basis,
- 1.7 times more likely to say their health is fair/poor,
- 1.6 times more likely to have made eight or more visits per year to a health care professional,
- 1.6 times more likely to have spent \$300 in the last year for prescription medicine for their personal use,
- 1.5 times more likely to have sought care from a mental health professional,
- 1.5 times more likely to have required inpatient hospital care,
- 1.5 times more likely to have visited a hospital emergency room,
- 1.4 times more likely to have made six or more visits per year to a physician.

It would appear from these data that caregiver strain is associated with an increased incidence of illness that requires treatment and prescription drugs.

The health care costs associated with high caregiver strain are substantial

Data on caregiver strain provide further support for our conclusion that work-life conflict is associated with increased health care demands and costs. For example, we calculated the direct costs of inpatient hospital stays due to high caregiver strain to be approximately \$4 billion per year, of physician visits due to high caregiver strain to be approximately \$1 billion per year, and of visits to the hospital emergency department due to high caregiver strain to be approximately \$100 million per year. These costs can be expected to increase in the future as the proportion of the workforce with elder care responsibilities increases.

Support for elder care should reduce the demands on Canada's health care system

The 2001 data support the idea that demands on Canada's health care system can be reduced dramatically by providing more supports for employed Canadians who have to deal with elder care issues. Our calculations indicate that physician visits could be reduced by 8%, inpatient hospital stays lowered by 18% and use of Canada's emergency rooms cut by 14% if high levels of this form of work-life conflict could be eliminated.

It would appear that the need to provide elder care is overwhelming employees' ability to cope with both work and life demands. If nothing is done to alleviate the demands placed on these workers, ill health due to this form of work-life conflict is likely to increase dramatically in the next decade as more baby boomers assume responsibility for the care of their parents. These findings indicate that if business does not take strategic action with respect to this issue soon, the government should step in and take action to help employees deal with elder care issues. The country cannot afford to pay the health care costs incurred by organizational inaction in this area.

Employees with high levels of caregiver strain spend substantially more on prescription medicine

In 2001, the average employee with high caregiver strain spent approximately \$118 in a six-month period or \$236 per year on prescription medicine, as compared to \$86 in the six months prior to the study being done, or \$172 per year, for those with low caregiver strain. The higher drug expenditures reported by those suffering from this form of work-life conflict are not surprising, given the fact that they are more likely than respondents with other forms of work-life conflict to have sought care in a hospital setting



(either as an inpatient, in the emergency department, or as an outpatient) in the six months prior to the study being done. It would appear that caregiver strain is associated with an increased incidence of illness that requires medical treatment and prescription drugs.

The decision to delay or not have children reduces caregiver strain for women

Women with high levels of caregiver strain were substantively more likely than their counterparts with lower levels of strain to decide to delay or not to have children. This implies that the solution to increasing Canada's birth rate is to help employees deal with caregiver strain, perhaps by providing elder care support mechanisms within the community.

What can we do to reduce caregiver strain?

What can employers, employees and their families do to help reduce the percentage of the population at risk of high caregiver strain? Answers to these questions are summarized below. Things that can be done by employees are addressed first. This is followed by strategies that can be used by employees and their families.

What can employers do to help employees cope with caregiver strain?

The data from this study suggest that there is very little that the employer can do to help employees deal with caregiver strain. That being said, this body of research does allow us to provide concrete advice to employers who are concerned with this issue. Key conclusions are summarized below.

Elder care referral key to coping with caregiver strain

There is only one high-impact strategy available to organizations that wish to reduce the levels of caregiver strain in their workforce: provide elder care referral services. The relationship between the use of this benefit and caregiver strain is very strong. The fact that the association is positive indicates that employees with higher strain are more likely to seek such assistance than those who have less caregiver strain. Again, while we cannot tell from this study the extent to which such a benefit helps employees cope with the demands associated with elder care, the data does tell us that employees themselves perceive that this benefit helps them cope.

Short-term personal leave helps employees cope with caregiver strain

The use of two other benefits, short-term personal leave, and family/personal days off work, were moderately associated with caregiver strain. The negative relationship between caregiver strain and short-term personal leave indicates that this benefit does help employees cope with the strains associated with the care of an elderly dependent. The positive relationship between personal days off work and caregiver strain, on the other hand, indicates that employees need to take time off work when caregiver strain gets high. This benefit makes it easier for employees to use this strategy.

Flextime arrangements associated with lower levels of caregiver strain

Employees who use flextime arrangements report substantially lower levels of caregiver strain. Employees who work a fixed schedule, on the other hand, report the highest levels of this form of work-life conflict. Unfortunately, when considered in the light of the findings obtained earlier with role interference, it appears that organizational actions that minimize caregiver strain will maximize family interference with work.

Increasing perceived flexibility does provide some ability to cope with caregiver strain

By increasing perceived flexibility, organizations can give employees with dependent care responsibilities some small degree of protection against caregiver strain. Specifically, the ability to be home in time for dinner with the family, vary one's work hours, interrupt one's work day and return to work later, and arrange one's work day to meet family or personal needs, all seem to help employees cope with caregiver strain.

Employees who report to a non-supportive manager find it more difficult to cope with caregiver strain

One way employers can help their employees with dependent care responsibilities cope with caregiver strain is to reduce the number of non-supportive managers in their organizations. The following management behaviours were all found to be associated with higher levels of this form of work-life conflict: making employees feel guilty about time off for personal/family reasons, focusing on hours or work and not on output, and having unrealistic expectations around workloads. Again, it should be emphasized that the association between this form of work-life conflict and non-supportive management is only moderate in magnitude.

How can individuals cope with caregiver strain?

The relationships between the use of the various personal coping strategies and caregiver strain are very similar to those observed for family interferes with work. In both cases, individual coping strategies did little to help employed Canadians deal with the form of work-life conflict.

Analysis of the 2001 data lead to the identification of four coping strategies (reducing the quality of things one does, working harder, just trying to forget about things, use of prescription medicine) that were associated with caregiver strain when gender and dependent care status were taken into account. All but one of these strategies (use of prescription drugs) was also associated with family interferes with work.

With one exception (use of prescription medicine) the relationship between the use of the strategy and caregiver strain is straightforward – the greater the strain, the higher the use of the strategy.

Daily use of prescription drugs helps employees cope with caregiver strain

There is a moderate relationship between the use of prescription medicine to cope with stress and caregiver strain. The relationship between prescription drug use and caregiver strain is similar to that observed with both role overload and work interferes with family: prescription medicine helps employees cope with strain if used on a daily basis, but not if used occasionally. These findings suggest that employees resort to prescription drugs as a last resort (i.e. when their stress levels are higher).

Family coping strategies ineffective at reducing caregiver strain

The findings with respect to the ability of the various family coping strategies explored in this study to help employees cope with caregiver strain are, with one exception (employees hire help to care for elderly dependents rather than their children), virtually identical to those observed for family interferes with work. In both cases, only two strategies were substantively associated with caregiver strain: hire help to care for dependents and get by on less sleep.

While the relationship between caregiver strain and get by on less sleep is relatively straightforward (use of the strategy increases as strain increases) the relationship between hiring help to care for elderly dependents and caregiver strain is more complex and varies depending on both the gender and

the job type of the individual. For the men in the sample, the greater the strain, the greater the tendency to procure assistance from outside the family. For women, on the other hand, moderate use of this coping strategy is associated with an increased ability to cope with caregiver strain. Daily use of hired help to care for elderly dependents, on the other hand, is associated with higher levels of caregiver strain. This suggests that when caregiver strain is acute, outside support does little to alleviate the strain.



CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusions and Recommendations

So what does the elephant look like?

The conclusions one reaches with respect to the prevalence of work-life conflict in Canada depend on what measure of work-life conflict is used and the characteristics of the group being studied. Looking at the data optimistically (i.e. taking prevalence of work interferes with family and caregiver strain as our measures of work-life conflict) we estimate that one in four Canadians working at larger organizations experiences high levels of conflict between work and family. This is the best-case scenario. The worst-case scenario (i.e. estimates calculated using role overload data) is that almost 60% of Canadians who are employed outside the home cannot balance their work and family demands.

So why should we care?

The findings from this body of research leave little doubt that reducing work-life conflict, regardless of the form it takes, will benefit all Canadians. High work-life conflict was found to be associated with a number of indicators of physical and mental health problems at the employee level. Employees who are stressed, depressed and burnt out are not as productive as those in good mental health. Stress, depression and burnout are also linked to increased absenteeism, greater use of prescription medicine and EAP, and lower levels of creativity, innovation and risk-taking. These factors, in turn, can all be expected to negatively impact an organization's bottom line and Canada's ability to be globally competitive. We have also ascertained that high work-life conflict has a negative impact on the organization's bottom line, impairs an employee's health (both physically and mentally), reduces participation in and enjoyment of family roles, negatively impacts employees' abilities to enjoy and nurture their families, is associated with reduced fertility, and significantly increases health care costs.

If things remain as they are, the proportion of the Canadian workforce at risk with respect to work-life conflict can be expected to increase due to a number of well-documented

demographic and structural changes in the family⁴ and in the nature of work⁵ (Hammer et al., 2002; Barnett, 1998, Frone, 2002). It is hoped that the findings from this report will help policy-makers and employers put into place strategies, policies and interventions that stem the work-life conflict tide. This report should also prove useful to Canadians who wish to make lifestyle changes to restore balance to their lives.

Future success in an increasingly competitive business environment will depend on making the most of one's employees. While Canadian organizations have long held that 'people are our most important resource,' the policies and practices currently in place in many organizations do not reflect this view. Canadian employers, faced with an impending labour force shortage, are searching for ways to stay 'lean and mean' but effective. Dealing with the issue of work-life balance offers one strategy employees can use to increase their ability to recruit and retain employees in a 'sellers market' for labour.

Who is at risk?

Examination of the data leads to some key conclusions with respect to the prediction of the various forms of work-life conflict:

- no set of factors could be identified that substantively predicted all four forms of work-life conflict;
- organizational culture is a substantive predictor of role overload, work to family interference and family to work interference;
- employees who work in an organization with a culture of hours and a culture of work or family report higher role overload, work to family interference and family to work interference;
- employees who work for an organization with a culture supportive of work-life balance report lower levels of role overload, work to family interference and family to work interference;
- role overload and work to family interference are strongly predicted by work-related factors while family to work interference and caregiver strain are predicted by family factors;

⁴ Changes noted in the literature include the greater number of female employees, increased divorce rates, increased life expectancy, a higher portion of dual income and single parent families, an increased number of families with simultaneous child care and elder care demands, a redistribution of traditional gender role responsibilities and an increase in the interdependency between work and family.

⁵ Changes reported in the literature include globalization, sophisticated office technology, the need to deal with constant change, the movement towards a contingent workforce, and growth in atypical forms of work.

- work to family interference was the only dimension of work-life conflict predicted by sector of employment, income, job type, work arrangement, union membership and place of residence in Canada;
- employees with higher work expectations and whose jobs require that they extend their work hours into times typically reserved for the family are more likely to report high work to family interference;
- caregiver strain is strongly associated with the provision of elder care.

Details on each of these conclusions are given below.

What can we do about it?

The following key conclusions can be drawn to reduce the various forms of work-life conflict considered in this study:

- There is 'no one size fits all solution' to the issue of work-life conflict. This body of research shows quite clearly that differing policies, practices and strategies will be needed to reduce each of the four components of work-life conflict. The workforce is not homogeneous. Gender, dependent care status, and job type are significant moderators of the relationship between many of the coping strategies examined in this study and work-life conflict. Policy planning should take these differences into account.
- The study identified several strategies at the organizational level (supportive management and perceived flexibility) and individual level (have fewer children, do not have children, get enough sleep) that are associated with an increased ability to cope with all four forms of work-life conflict.
- Employees who experience high levels of work-life conflict are, regardless of the form of conflict, less likely to have children. This finding has very important social implications as it links issues such as labour force shortages and pension plan collapse to work-life conflict. Our research suggests that one way to increase Canada's birth rate would be to implement policies and programs to help Canadians cope with work-life conflict in general and role overload and work interferes with family in particular. Suggestions on how this can be done are given below.
- Organizations can do a lot to help employees cope with work-life conflict in general and role overload and work interferes with family in particular. Virtually all of the effective coping strategies identified in this study originated in the organizational domain. With a few exceptions (such as reducing family size and not having children) the ability of personal and family coping strategies to reduce work-life conflict pales in comparison to the effectiveness of actions that can be taken by the organization.
- The same organizational interventions and personal coping strategies that reduce role overload also reduce work interferes with family - but more effectively.
- Perceived flexibility helps employees cope with work-life conflict. Flexible work arrangements do not.
- Work-life conflict depends more on who you report to within the organization than the organization you work for. Family-friendly benefits and alternative work arrangements, on their own, have little to no impact on an employee's work-life conflict. The behaviour of the employee's immediate manager (i.e. extent to which they engage in supportive and non-supportive behaviours), on the other hand, are key predictors of work-life conflict in general, and role overload and work interferes with family in particular. Who you work for is also a key predictor of how much flexibility an employee perceives they have with respect to hours of work and work schedules.
- Work-life policies and programs are necessary but not sufficient in that they will not be implemented or used if an employee's manager is non-supportive of work-life issues.
- While employers often point with pride to the many 'programs' available in their organizations to help employees meet family obligations, these programs or options do not diminish the fact that most people simply have more work to do than can be accomplished by one person in a standard work week. This study indicates that many of the ways employees attempt to cope with workload issues (i.e. decide to reduce their family size or not have children, work harder, cut back on their sleep, take prescription medicine or have a drink, reduce the quality of the work, cut back on outside activities) benefit neither employees, nor their families, employers or Canadian society in general. These findings are consistent with those noted in previous reports, and reinforce our contention that employers and governments need to recognize that the issue of work-life conflict cannot be addressed without addressing the issue of workloads.
- The majority of Canadians do not cope effectively with work-life conflict. Most Canadians attempt to cope by sacrificing their personal lives, cutting back on their social lives, foregoing having children, working harder, and getting less sleep - strategies that this research shows are associated with increased rather than



decreased conflict between work and home. Relatively few Canadians cope by putting family first (i.e. modify work schedule, leave work problems at work), seeking social support and using active coping strategies such as prioritizing, delegating and planning.

- Many of the individual and family coping strategies that the research literature links to an increased ability to deal with stress, do not appear to be effective means of coping with work-life conflict. This would point to a need to consider a much broader set of coping responses that are typically studied.
- Caregiver strain has a different source than the other three types of work-life conflict. Coping strategies and organizational interventions that help employees cope with role overload and work interferes with family, in particular, have little to no impact on caregiver strain. Our research shows that policies and community supports (i.e. elder care referral, purchasing help from outside the family) are fundamental to an employee's ability to deal with caregiver strain. This indicates that governments have a great role to play with respect to helping Canadians deal with caregiver strain.

Moving Forward: Key Recommendations Arising from the *Balancing Work, Family and Lifestyle National Study*

The data reviewed in this report leave little doubt that there is no 'one size fits all solution' to the issue of work-life conflict and that different policies, practices and strategies will be needed to reduce each of the four components of strain examined in this analysis. That being said, this research has identified a number of concrete strategies and approaches that key stakeholders can use to reduce the different types of work-life conflict. The recommendation section is divided into four parts, each of which is devoted to one of the key stakeholders in the work-life arena: employers, employees, governments and unions.

What Can Employers Do To Reduce Work-life conflict?

To reduce work-life conflict and to improve their bottom line, employers need to focus their efforts on the following sets of initiatives:

- make work demands and work expectations more realistic,
- increase employees' sense of control,
- provide flexibility around work hours of work,
- focus on creating a more supportive work culture, and

- increase the number of supportive managers in the organization/decrease the number of non-supportive managers.

We caution the reader that most of the recommendations offered below will not have the desired impact if they organization does not address the issue of management support/organizational culture. Why do we say this? First, the data show that managers are, through their behaviours, the transmitters of culture within their organization and the ones who make employees believe that they are able to exert some degree of control over their work schedule. Managers are also implicated in our discussions concerning workload, through their ability to plan the work to be done, give clear directions and constructive feedback, and their belief in the 'culture of hours'.

Decreasing demands, changing the culture to one that supports employees, and increasing perceptions of flexibility and supportive management help all employees cope with these forms of work-life conflict, so progress in these areas should produce the maximum return on investment. Employers that implement some or all of the recommendations noted below should realize significant reductions in employee role overload and work interferes with family, moderate reductions in family interferes with work and some increased ability for employees to cope with caregiver strain. Details on ways forward are given below.

Employers need to make work demands and work expectations more realistic

To reduce role overload, work to family interference and family to work interference, employers need to focus their efforts on making work demands and work expectations realistic. Work demands, rather than demands outside work, are the key predictors of role overload and work to family interference, the two most common forms of work-life conflict in Canada at this time (58% of the employees in this sample report high levels of role overload, while 28% report high work to family interference). While employers often point with pride to the many programs available in their organization to help employees meet family obligations, these options do not diminish the fact that most people simply have more work to do than can be accomplished by one person in a standard work week. Employers and governments need to recognize that the issue of work-life conflict cannot be addressed without addressing the issue of workloads. While a full discussion of workload issues can be found in Report One in this series, it is worthwhile to note the following:

"Comparisons done using the 1991 and 2001 samples suggest that time in work has increased over the decade. Whereas one in ten respondents in 1991 worked 50 or more hours per week, one in four does so now; during this same time period the proportion of employees working between 35 and 39 hours per week declined from 48% of the sample to 27%. This increase in time in work was observed for all job groups and all sectors." (Higgins and Duxbury, 2002, p. 17)

Further work is needed to determine why work demands have increased over the decade. Competing explanations drawn from the data which are discussed in chapter three of this report include 'organizational anorexia', corporate culture, increased use of technology, global competition, constant change, and the fact that employees are worried about the consequences of 'not being seen to be a contributor.' As one survey participant said:

"Changing expectations have driven us to a fast-paced and hectic lifestyle. We have less people to do the same jobs, but jobs have also changed due to technology. We are constantly revving the engine and if not enough oil gets on the pistons, the engine blows up. Business and industry and government need to recognize this and find ways to assist."

As one respondent noted at the end of the survey:

Employers need to identify ways of reducing employee workloads. Special attention needs to be given to reducing the workloads of managers and professionals in all sectors. Accordingly, we offer the following set of recommendations which we believe are critical with respect to this issue:

1. Employers need to examine workloads within their organizations. If they find that certain employees within their organization are consistently spending long hours at work (i.e. 50 + hours per week), they need to determine why this is occurring (e.g. ambitious, work expectations are unbalanced and unrealistic, poor planning, too many priorities, do not have the tools and/or training to do the job efficiently, poor management, culture focused on hours not output, lack of administrative support). Once they have determined the causal factors, they need to determine how these can be addressed to make workloads more reasonable.
2. Unrealistic work demands are not sustainable over time and cost the organization in ways that are often not recognized or tracked. We recommend that the employer start recording the costs of understaffing and over-work (i.e. greater absenteeism, higher prescription drug costs, greater EAP use, increased turnover, hiring costs), so that they can make informed decisions with respect to this issue.
3. Employers need to identify ways to reduce the amount of time employees spend in job-related travel (i.e. increase their use of virtual teams, teleconferencing technology, etc.). In particular they need to reduce their expectations that employees will travel on their personal time and spend weekends away from home to reduce the organization's travel costs.
4. Employers need to track the amount of time employees spend working paid and unpaid overtime and capturing the number of hours it actually takes to get various jobs done. They should also collect data which reflect the total costs of delivering high-quality work in various areas on time (i.e. paid and unpaid overtime, subsequent turnover, EAP and prescription drug use, absenteeism). Such data should be longitudinal in nature, as many of the consequences of poor people management do not appear until six to 12 months after the event. This type of data should improve planning and priority setting, as well as allow senior executives to make better strategic, long-term decisions.
5. Many of Canada's largest employers appear to be 'anorexic' especially at the management and professional levels (i.e. they do not have enough people to do the job in a reasonable amount of time). Accordingly, we recommend that employers analyse workloads and hire more people in those areas when the organization is overly reliant on unpaid overtime.
6. Employers need to develop protocols around the use of office technologies such as e-mail, laptops and cell phones. They should set limits on the use of technology to support after-hours work and make expectations regarding response times and availability explicit and realistic. The following comments from survey participant speaks to this:

"The amount of work has increased dramatically in the last decade - particularly with the increase in technology. Today we can have someone in our office, an incoming phone call, voice mails and e-mails all of which we are expected to respond to at the same time. Technology has added the expectation of immediate response and solution to the workplace."



"Electronic tools have increased the expectations of availability – anytime anywhere, immediate answers expected. After hours, – during business travel – Sunday and Friday nights – you are now expected to use this time to return voice mail and e-mails."

Employers need to give employees more control over their work

Employers can also help employees deal with heavy work demands by introducing initiatives which increase an employee's sense of control. The research in this area (see work by Karasek, 1979) is quite clear—employees can cope with greater demands if they have a greater sense of control. The literature suggests a number of mechanisms that should be investigated, including increased autonomy and empowerment at the individual employee level, the increased use of self-directed work teams, increased employee participation in decision-making, increased communication and information-sharing, time management training, training on how to plan and prioritize, etc. We offer the following recommendations in this area:

7. Employers should provide appropriate support for their employees who work rotating shifts. What is an appropriate support should be determined by consulting with these employees. Policies that have been found to be effective in this regard include limiting split shifts, advanced notice of shift changes, and permitting shift trades (i.e. allowing employees to change shift times with one another).
8. To accommodate the diversity in their workforce (in terms of gender, job type, life cycle stage and ethnicity) employers should implement 'cafeteria' benefits packages which allow employees to select, on a yearly basis, those benefits that are most appropriate to their personal situation.
9. Employers should give employees the right to refuse overtime work. Saying 'no' to overtime work should not be a career-limiting move. Some organizations may want to give management limited discretion to override the employee's right to refuse overtime (i.e. emergency situation, operational requirements) but this should be the exception and not the rule.
10. Employers should extend their employee assistance program to cover the families of their employees (e.g. offer an employee family assistance program instead). EAP should also include child and elder care referral services

11. Employers need to make it easier for employees to transfer from full-time to part-time work and vice versa. They should introduce pro-rated benefits for part-time work, guarantee a return to full-time status for those who elect to work part-time, and allow an employee's seniority ranking and service to be maintained.

The rise in the number of dual-income families, coupled with high levels of role overload and work interferes with family, together with the appeal of part-time work, job sharing and reduced work-week arrangements, suggest that organizations should redesign the part-time job to ensure that people who engage in part-time work for a limited period of time do not suffer economic or career penalties. Introduction of part-time work, if made legitimate and detached from the traditional definition of part-time jobs as jobs requiring low skills and low potential for upward mobility, could make it easier for men and women with dependent care responsibilities to handle work and family requirements more effectively.

Employers should increase flexibility with respect to work time and work location

Despite all the talk about being 'family-friendly', many of Canada's largest employers have not yet implemented flexible work arrangements and only a minority of the employees in the 2001 sample report high perceptions of flexibility in terms of work time and work location. Accordingly, we recommend the following:

12. Employers need to provide employees with a greater sense of control over their hours of work and their work schedules. Specifically, to help employees cope with work-life conflict organizations need to make it possible for them to:
 - arrange their work schedule to meet personal/family commitments,
 - interrupt their work day for personal/family reasons and return to work,
 - take their holidays when they want to,
 - be home in time to have meals with their family, and
 - vary their hours of work.

The criteria, under which flexibility in each of these areas can be used, should be mutually agreed upon and transparent. There should also be mutual accountability around their use (i.e. employees need to meet job demands, but organizations should be flexible with respect to how work is arranged).

The process for changing hours of work, location of work, and vacation time should be flexible whenever possible. The increased use of flexible work arrangements would have the added benefit of reducing the amount of time spent commuting to and from work—an important predictor of role overload for women.

13. Employers should give employees paid time off work to attend relevant training sessions, courses and conferences. Employees should not have to choose between their family and career advancement.

The strong association between an inability to participate in career development opportunities outside of work hours, and both role overload and work interferes with family, indicate that employees with dependent care responsibility who try to maintain their professional credentials or increase their learning on their own time pay a price – increased work-life conflict. Of course, those who do not engage in learning activities pay a different price – a lack of career mobility and reduced economic benefits and job insecurity. These findings give organizations another incentive to deal with the issue of role overload: an increased ability to recruit and retain talent.

14. Employers need to give employees the opportunity to take a fixed number of paid days off work per year (we suggest five) to care for sick children or elderly dependents. This leave should be available on short notice and the employee should not be required to provide a reason for his or her absence. Such stipulations would give employees the flexibility to deal with personal/family matters with a large degree of confidentiality.

This study determined that greater flexibility in both these areas was associated with an increased ability to cope with role overload and both types of role interference. Implementation of these benefits should also produce additional advantages for employers outside the work-life arena as they concretely demonstrate to employees that their employer trusts them, is listening to them, and recognizes their demands outside of work. Our data also indicate that such policies are positively associated with increased levels of commitment and engagement.

Employers need to examine their organizational culture

To reduce role overload, work to family interference and family to work interference, employers must deal with their organization's culture. Work-life policies are a necessary first step to addressing work-life conflict. Unfortunately, our

research shows that policies on their own will have little impact as they will not be implemented or used in a culture that is non-supportive of work-life issues. The findings from this study identified three different organizational cultures that are associated with increased work-life conflict: a culture of hours (employees who do not work long hours and who say 'no' to more work will have limited opportunities to advance in their career), a culture of work or family (family leave and family responsibilities limit career advancement) and a non-supportive culture (work environment is non-supportive of balance). The importance of addressing the issue of organizational culture cannot be overemphasized. Culture was the single strongest predictor of role overload, work to family interference and family to work interference for both men and women in our study. A policy approach on its own will not fix what is wrong in many organizations. To address the issue of work-life conflict, employers need to create supportive work cultures. This means changing reward structures, and accountability and measurement systems. Again, the need for such a focus can be seen in the following comment by a study participant:

"I think that we won't have achieved the objective until it becomes socially unacceptable to write e-mails on evenings/weekends, brag about long hours and schedule meetings outside 'core' hours. Although there is much talk about balance, long hours are still rewarded and equated to dedication to the job. Senior managers who talk the most about the need for balance are the worst offenders."

While the recommendations that precede this one will all act to make the work environment more supportive, we would recommend the following specific steps be taken by organizations that wish to focus their efforts on cultural change:

15. Organizations need to introduce new performance measures that focus on objectives, results and output rather than time at work (i.e. move away from a focus on hours to a focus on output).
16. Employers need to change their accountability frameworks and reward structures. They need to stop rewarding long hours and unpaid overtime work and instead focus on rewarding accurate work plans and sound human resource management.



It is very difficult (if not impossible) to increase perceived flexibility in organizations where the focus is on hours rather than output, and presence rather than performance. To do this, employees need to reward output, not the number of hours worked, and reward what is done, not where it is done. They also need to reward people who have successfully combined work and non-work domains and not promote those who work long hours and expect others to do the same. The following comments from survey participants speak to this issue:

"I believe that existing work/balance policies are adequate, but can be improved upon. I also think that management wants to address problems but is trapped in a culture that measures performance and individual contribution by the old standard of time and ability, rather than by quality."

"Although my employer has invested a lot of effort in studying the issue of work/family balance and in promoting it, the 'work culture' speaks to a different situation. Until the management cadre start to 'walk the talk', the current situation and its implied expectations will continue (employees are considered 'serious' and 'good managers' based upon the number of hours they are at the office). Meetings with senior management are often scheduled after the end of a typical day. There is still a tendency to look down on those employees who choose to respect the normal (paid) work day, and leave to take care of family/home responsibilities."

A number of other recommendations arising from this study, which speak to the issue of culture and supportive work environments, are summarized below:

17. Employers need to work with employees to identify the types of support they would like (i.e. diagnose the situation) and which types could be accommodated within the organization. Not all supportive policies are feasible and practical in every context.
18. Employers need to develop and implement appropriate supportive policies. The development phase should include an analysis of the potential problems associated with the implementation of each policy and suggestions on how these problems could be addressed.
19. Employers need to communicate to employees the various policies that are available, indicate how these

policies can be accessed, and inform whether there are any restrictions to their use. Repeat these communications on a regular basis (e.g. every couple of months). Publish these data on the company's Intranet site.

20. Employers need to encourage employees to use the policies by having senior management model appropriate behaviours, conduct information sessions on the policies and how they can be used (e.g. through lunch-and-learn sessions), and communicate how these policies are being used successfully in this organization and in others etc. Employees must be made to feel that their career will not be jeopardized if they take advantage of supportive policies.
21. Employers need to measure the use of the different supportive policies and reward those sections of the organization that demonstrate best practices in these areas. They also need to investigate those areas where use is low.

Finally, because culture change is considered to be transformational in nature, we recommend that:

22. Organizations need to offer training to senior managers on the critical success factors necessary for transformational change, provide training to managers on how to manage a change of this nature, and ensure that several people on the organization's senior leadership team have the necessary competencies to lead and manage this type of change.

Increase the number of supportive managers within the organization

The findings from this study support the idea that who one reports to within an organization has more of an impact on their ability to balance work and family than either the policies within place in the organization or the organization itself. Accordingly we recommend the following:

23. Employers need to increase the number of supportive managers within their organizations, while simultaneously reducing the number of managers who are seen to be non-supportive. Specifically they need to increase the number of managers within their organization who consistently display the following behaviours:
 - make work expectations clear.
 - listen to their employees.
 - are effective at planning the work to be done.

- give employees recognition when they do their job well.
- make themselves available to answer their employee's questions.
- ask for employee's input before making decisions that affect their work.

While decreasing the number of managers who:

- have unrealistic expectations with respect to the amount of work that can be done in a given amount of time.
- expect their employees to put in long hours, just because they do.
- make employees feel guilty if they need to take time off work because of personal or family issues.

While all employees who work for a supportive manager are substantially more able to cope with role overload, work interferes with family, and family interferes with work, men and women in other positions in the organization benefit the most from such managers. Similarly, while all employees who work for a non-supportive manager are significantly less able to cope with role overload, work interferes with family, family interferes with work and caregiver strain, this type of manager is particularly problematic for employees with dependent care responsibilities, female managers and professionals, and for men and women who work in other positions within the organization.

How should organizations proceed with respect to this issue? Specifically, we would recommend that:

24. Organizations commit resources to improving 'people management' practices within their organization. They can increase the number of supportive managers within the organization by giving managers at all levels:
 - *the skills* they need to manage the 'people' part of their job (i.e. communication skills, conflict resolution, time management, project planning, how to give and receive feedback),
 - *the tools* they need to manage people (i.e. appropriate policies, the business case for support, training on how to implement alternative work arrangements, web sites and other resources on how to handle different human resource problems, referral services to help employees deal with specific problems such as child care and elder care),

- *the time* they need to manage this part of their job (people management has to be seen as a fundamental part of a manager's role, not just an 'add on' that can be done in one's spare time - an overworked manager finds it difficult, if not impossible, to be a supportive manager),
- *incentives* to focus on the 'people part' of their jobs (i.e. measurement and accountability, 360 feedback (allowing employees to evaluate their manager's performance), rewards focused on recognition of good people skills, 'people' performance should be part of promotion decisions, hiring decisions, etc., public recognition of supportive supervisors, and measurement of management support and non-support should be tied into the manager's performance appraisal system).

Other recommendations to employers:

Additional recommendations to employers arising from this body of research include the following:

25. Employers need to analyze their benefit costs and understand who is using which facet of their benefit plan: EAP, short- and long-term disability claims (incidence and duration), workers' compensation benefits, absenteeism, prescription drugs. Such assessment would allow the organization to put a dollar figure on the costs associated with workplace health and work-life conflict and help interested parties make a compelling case for change. As CCIH (2002) notes:

"Such a case is necessary before organizations will make the financial/cultural commitment to put together the changes necessary to move their organization towards healthier workplace practices and policies."

26. Human resource and occupational health and safety groups should work together to address issues associated with work-life conflict. Both groups have a key role to play in this area and have much to gain by working together (i.e. can broaden their constituencies and gain a better understanding of the big picture). A silo approach to change in this area is likely to fail.
27. Employers should move away from their current reactive approach to workplace health (i.e. EAP, unpaid time off work) and instead implement benefits and practices that deal proactively with work-life conflict and its downstream impacts (i.e. child care and elder



care referral services, cafeteria benefits plans, flexible work arrangements, screening programs for disease or depression, education sessions).

28. Employees should strategically link workplace health and work-life initiatives to broader organizational goals such as recruitment, retention and succession planning. This strategy would help those who champion such initiatives make the business case for change.
29. Employers should quantify the impact of their work-life and workplace health programs on key outcomes and critical success factors. Again, these data would help those who champion such initiatives establish their impact on the 'bottom line.'
30. Organizations should place accountability for the implementation and success of work-life and workplace health initiatives with senior management, and not on HR. Senior management has a critical role to play in creating a healthy work environment, because they make most of the decisions with respect to how, when and where and under what conditions work gets done. Their success or failure in these areas should be reflected in how they are compensated.

The data collected in this study support a number of more specific suggestions on the reduction of the different types of work-life conflict considered in this study. These additional recommendations are summarized below.

What else can employers do to reduce role overload?

31. Employees who wish to help employees (especially those with dependent care responsibilities) cope with role overload should implement a telework program within their organization.

Organizations and employees should, however, recognize that this reduction in role overload comes at a cost - increased work interferes with family.

What else can employers do to reduce work interferes with family?

As noted earlier, employers concerned with work interferes with family should provide appropriate support for their employees who work rotating shifts. They should also:

32. Provide all employees in their organization who are being moved to a new location with services to support their re-location.

What else can employers do to reduce caregiver strain?

33. Employers who wish to help employees cope with caregiver strain should implement flextime work arrangements in their organization.

Organizations and employees should, however, recognize that this reduction in caregiver strain comes at a cost - increased family interferes with work. Employees who are worried about their family interfering with their work are better off working a fixed, nine-to-five work schedule.

What Can Employees Do To Reduce Work-life Conflict?

While the options in this regard are more limited than what employers can do (in our opinion many families are using all available options with respect to coping), we offer the following recommendations to individual employees with respect to what does and does not help:

What not to do - work harder, reduce standards at home, cut back on sleep

1. Employees should not attempt to cope with work-life conflict by:
 - 'just working harder and trying to do it all'
 - reducing the quality of things that they do, especially at home
 - cutting back on their sleep

These three coping strategies, which are used by the majority of employed Canadians in this study, are associated with increased levels of all four forms of work-life conflict examined in this study. These strategies are particularly problematic for men and women in managerial and professional positions, where the reward for doing a good job and exceeding work expectations is often more work!

Employees have to recognize that 'No one can balance your life but you'

While we offered a number of suggestions on how employers can increase employees' sense of control, the findings from this study indicate that many of the solutions to this issue ultimately come back to how individual employees behave. We recommend that:

2. Employees need to say 'no' to overtime hours if work expectations are unreasonable.
3. Employees need to limit the amount of work they take home to complete in the evenings. Employees who do bring work home should make every effort to separate time in work from family time (i.e. do work after the children go to bed, have a home office).
4. Employees need to turn their PDAs and Blackberry devices off when engaged in family activities and/or when their children are awake. They should also resist checking their e-mail during these time periods.
5. Employees need to limit the amount of time they spend in job-related travel.

Seek help from your family physician

Our study indicated that 'toughing it out' and 'trying and do it all' often exacerbates rather than alleviates work-life challenges. The data shows that employees who have experienced high levels of all four forms of work-life conflict for a sustained period of time would benefit from a visit to their doctor and prescription of appropriate medication. Accordingly we recommended the following:

6. Employees who are experiencing challenges balancing work and family roles consult their family physician.

Such a strategy, while effective, does however come at a cost: increased demand on Canada's health care system, increased spending on prescription medication, and the potential of negative side effects from continual use of such medication. In other words, we make this recommendation knowing that this is a 'band-aid solution' which will do little to alleviate work-life conflict over the long run. As such we recommend that it be employed in conjunction with a number of the other strategies included in this report.

Just 'trying to forget about it' does not solve anything

7. Employees need to educate themselves on how to deal effectively with work-life conflict. Things such as financial planning courses and nurturing an awareness of which community resources are available for those with child care and elder care responsibilities are likely to help employees increase the amount of control they have over these issues.

A number of respondents indicated that they coped with work-life conflict by 'just trying to forget about it.' Unfortunately, we determined that the use of this strategy is associated with increases in role overload, family to work interference and caregiver strain for employees in general and men and women with dependent care responsibilities in particular. Family problems and challenges at home do not go away just because we ignore them, and employees have to personally take the appropriate actions needed to reduce work-life conflict. A number of these actions are summarized in the recommendations given below.

Employees should use active coping strategies such as delegation and prioritization

This study determined that the use of active coping strategies were effective at alleviating role overload and family interferes with work for some of the groups in the study. For this reason we recommend that:

8. Employees with dependent care responsibilities prioritize and delegate work to others.

It should be noted that these strategies are most effective when family roles are given priority.

Family members should not try and cope by sacrificing their personal needs

9. Employees need to maintain a healthy social life.
10. Employees need to maintain personal standards at home.

A substantive number of the employees in this study attempted to cope with work-life conflict by leaving things undone around the house and cutting down on outside activities. On a positive note, moderate (i.e. weekly) use of these strategies was associated with a reduction in role overload and work interferes with family for employees with dependent care responsibilities and women in managerial and professional positions. On a negative note, both of these strategies were associated with increased levels of role overload and work interferes with family when used several times a week or more. Employees, therefore, need to use both these strategies in moderation.

Employees should make a concerted effort to leave work problems at work

This study identified two strategies that were very effective at reducing role overload and work interferes with family. Both strategies involve the employee setting boundaries



between their work and family life and making a concerted effort to reduce the extent to which work intrudes on family. The following recommendations are key to the reduction of overload and the extent to which work intrudes on family:

11. Employees need to make a concerted effort to leave work problems at work – both physically and mentally.
12. Employees should modify their work schedule as necessary (i.e. reduce the number of hours they spend in work, work different hours than they do) to manage role demands at home.

These recommendations are consistent with our contention that the employee has to 'make balance happen'.

There is, however, one caveat with respect to our recommendation on modifying work schedules. The data show that for the non-professionals in our sample, modification of one's work schedule once or twice a week is ideal with respect to balancing work and family. Daily use of this strategy, on the other hand, is associated with a sharp increase in work interferes with family.

Money does help but only when used in moderation

Many of the employees in our sample bought supports from outside the family in an attempt to increase their work-life balance. Unfortunately, our results indicate that employees who cope by buying goods and services report higher levels of role overload and work interferes with family than those who are able to get such support within the family. The data is much more positive with respect to the relationship between hiring help to care for children and role overload. This strategy is very effective when used once or twice a week. Overload and family interferes with work is, however, substantially higher when reliance on paid child care is high. Similarly, hiring help to care for elderly dependents is associated with lower levels of caregiver strain for women when used moderately often. Caregiver strain is, however, substantially higher when reliance on paid elder care is high.

Accordingly we recommend the following:

13. Employees should occasionally hire someone to help care for children and/or elderly dependents.

Employees should cover family responsibilities for each other

14. Employees with dependent care should cover family responsibilities for each other at home.

Men and women both benefit if they have a spouse who will cover for them at home. Higher use of this strategy is associated with lower levels of role overload for both genders. This suggests that employees can cope with extra demands at work, if they have a partner to pick up the slack and if they are willing to help out when the situation is reversed.

Other recommendations to employees from this study, which deserve mentioning, include:

15. Employees need to take advantage of the supportive policies and flexible work arrangements available within their organizations.
16. Employees need to raise work-life balance issues in their discussions within the workplace and within the community.
17. Employees with caregiving responsibilities should self-identify so that their employer can try to respond. This is particularly true with respect to issues surrounding elder care, when the employer does not know that the employee is facing challenges outside work. It is difficult for an employer to assist if he or she does not know there is a problem.
18. Employees and managers alike need to model the type of behaviour that is associated with organizational support of work-life balance, as actions speak louder than words in this arena (i.e. do not call meetings late in the day or early in the morning, do not expect employees to travel on personal time to save money for the organization).

What Can Governments Do To Reduce Work-life Conflict?

Governments at all levels have a critical role to play with respect to this issue. Recommendations to governments arising from this body of research can be grouped into six broad areas: legislative change, child care and elder care; financial incentives for change; health promotion activities; structural changes at the governmental level, and support of relevant research and data collection.

Labour standards and legislative requirements

There is a need for consistency with respect to labour standards and legislative requirements pertaining to work-life conflict. For example, at the present time, labour standards legislation in most Canadian jurisdictions⁶ (exceptions include Manitoba, Ontario and Saskatchewan) does not provide employees with an explicit right to refuse overtime (thereby limiting their ability to control their workloads). Similarly, many jurisdictions do not allow employees the right to time off in lieu of overtime (at the present time, only Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Quebec and the Yukon have such a provision in their labour standards legislation). Such standards would provide a starting point for organizations in developing workplace policies and practices that address work-life conflict issues. We recommend that governments implement legislation:

1. Which stipulates that an employer's management rights do not include an implied right to require an employee to work overtime, except in an emergency
2. That gives employees the right to time off in lieu of overtime pay.
3. That entitles employees to up to five days of paid personal leave per year. This leave should be available on short notice and the employee should not be required to provide a reason for his or her absence. Such stipulations would give employees the flexibility to deal with personal/family matters with a large degree of confidentiality.
4. Includes specific language around long-term unpaid leave for the care of an elderly or disabled dependent (a disabled dependent can require full-time care for a longer period of time than can be granted under Canada's current compassionate care leave legislation).

Child care and elder care

Our findings from this research are clear: employees who are overloaded, experience interference between work and non-work roles and have high levels of caregiver strain, cope by having fewer children, delaying the start of their family, and deciding not to have any children. The fact that these strategies are associated with greater work-life balance for

employees in general and female managers and professionals in particular, indicate that governments need to take action so that men and women in Canada can have a meaningful career as well as a fulfilling family life. Research from Europe (Sweden in particular)⁷ has found that social policies designed to help working mothers (including universal child care) are associated with increased fertility rates. Accordingly, we recommend that governments consider the following actions:

1. Take the lead with respect to the issue of child care. In particular, they need to determine how to best help employed Canadians deal with child care issues (i.e. develop appropriate policies for parents of children of various ages, identify and implement relevant supports in the community, provide more high-quality day care). There is no 'one size fits all' solution to the issue of child care. Some women want to work, some women need to work, and some women want to stay home when their children are young. Government policy should be designed to offer choices to Canadians families - so that they can select the option that works best for their family.

The demands on family caregivers are likely to increase as Canada's population continues to age and the provision of services shifts from institutions to home and the community. Adequate and appropriate supports for caregivers are required to support them in their role. The data examined in this report identifies the short terms costs of caregiving (i.e. poorer health, increased physician visits and prescription drug use). Recent research by Fast et al. (2000), however, indicates that this may be 'the tip of the iceberg' - that there may also be long term public expenditure implications if informal caregivers are not supported (they estimated that it would cost between \$4.9 and \$6.3 billion to replace the voluntary of family members with paid caregivers). Accordingly, we recommend the following:

2. Governments need to take the lead with respect to the issue of elder care. In particular, they need to determine how to best help employed Canadians deal with elder care issues (i.e. develop appropriate policies, identify and implement relevant supports in the community).

⁶ The exact wording of this legislation and other legislation quoted in this section can be found in Rochon, C. (2000). Work and Family Provisions in Canadian Collective Agreements, HRDC Labour Program, Strategic Policy Division, Ottawa.

⁷ See Gardner, D. The Mother of all Issues, The Ottawa Citizen, pg. A17, June 14, 2006.



3. Governments and employers increase the range of supports for employed Canadians with elder care responsibilities. Specifically governments should consider the following types of support: making 'out of pocket' elder care expenses tax deductible; sponsoring flexible, professionally staffed in-home and community-based respite care; extension of the compassionate care leave benefit.⁸
4. Governments need to examine how they can reduce the 'financial penalties' associated with parenthood (i.e. determine how to concretely recognize that these employees have higher costs). Suggestions here include identifying ways to make it financially feasible for one partner to stay home during the time period when family demands are particularly great (i.e. when children are young, when a parent is dying), universal day care programs, increased respite care, and more high-quality homes for the aged.

Financial incentives

At this point in time, governments pay the lion's share of the costs associated with poor workplace health practices through their support of the country's health care system. To motivate employers to focus more attention on this issue, governments need to increase the tangible costs to employers of inaction in this area. They need to consider financial incentives to support employers that do their part to promote workplace health, and penalties for those who do not. We recommend that they consider the following activities:

5. Offer employers financial incentives to encourage investment in workplace health promotion. Included within this umbrella should be activities targeted to reduce role overload, role interference and caregiver strain. These incentives could take the form of a tax rebate, changes to income tax, or be provided through the Worker's Compensation Program.
6. Remove the financial disincentives for employers to expand their health care funding activities. This could be done by allowing employers to write off the cost of health promotion and work-life programs.
7. Publish report cards on organizations that link employment practices to health care systems costs. These report cards would allow tax payers to determine the extent to which they are subsidizing different organizational actions.

Governments need to create a public push for change in this area

Governments also have a critical role to play with respect to communicating the need for change in this area to the public at large, and brokering partnerships with key stakeholder groups who have an interest in addressing these issues. Such a strategy will create further incentives for change at the organizational level. To this end we recommend the following:

8. The costs (bottom line as well as opportunity costs) of ignoring workplace health and work-life issues should become the focus of government social marketing campaigns. These campaigns should be similar to those done for drinking and driving and cigarette smoking and should emphasize how organizations and Canadian society benefit from healthy workplace practices.
9. Canada should use a population health model to re-frame the business case for workplace health promotion. Instead of discussing the achievement of individual return on investment (ROI) goals, the focus should be broader social objectives linked to health, wellness, balance, fertility, and demands on Canada's health care system.
10. Governments need to investigate ways to increase Canadians' awareness of how social roles and responsibilities have changed over the past several decades, what changes still need to happen, and why (social marketing campaigns, education programs in schools, advertisements). Such changes are necessary to address the issues identified for female managers and professionals in this report.

Structural Changes

This issue has multiple stakeholders and it is unrealistic to think that the various levels of government can, on their own, make the changes that are necessary. The following recommendations address these issues in that they involve cooperation across the various levels of government with respect to this issue, changing of priorities and actions within. To this end we recommend that governments:

11. Create one central web site that serves as an electronic distribution center for knowledge and best practices in this area. This web site should provide information on both the financial and social benefits of change.

⁸ While the Compassionate Care Leave benefit is an important first step in the support of elder caregiving, it will not benefit the majority of caregivers who provide long term care.

Currently, information is scattered across the country, efforts are being duplicated, and many are not aware of best practice solutions.

12. Partner with communities and employers to find solutions to these issues.
13. 'Lead by example' with respect to the availability and accessibility of flexible work arrangements, workplace health promotion and work-life balance initiatives. As one of the largest employers in the country, governments need to take a leading role with respect to this issue by tangibly showing the way.
14. Governments at all levels need to place the work-life balance of Canadians at the top of their agenda if they want the country to remain globally competitive and the health care system to be financially viable.

Provide financial support for empirically sound research in the area

Unfortunately, there is still a need to 'prove' the business value of workplace health and work-life programs, and to develop the business case for change. There is a need for timely, accurate and reliable data. More research needs to be directed toward studies that specify the link between performance and productivity and work-life practices, work-life conflict and the decision to have children, and work-life conflict and demands on Canada's health care system. We recommend that the government:

15. Support research and pilot projects that establish best practice in work-life management and support the development of sound public policy in this area.
16. Ensure that measurement systems are put in place to collect the data that is needed to track costs and change in this area.

What Can Unions Do To Reduce Work-life Conflict?

Unions have an important role to play in the establishment of family-friendly practices in the workplace. We recommend that unions:

1. Become advocates of employee work-life balance by undertaking public campaigns to raise awareness of work-life issues and suggest ways in which the situation can be improved. This advocacy should be done outside the collective bargaining process.
2. Include work-life provisions (i.e. flexible work arrangements, family-friendly benefits) in negotiations during the collective bargaining process, with the objective of gaining new accommodations in collective agreements.
3. Include work-life provisions (i.e. flexible work arrangements, family-friendly benefits) in negotiations during the collective bargaining process.
4. Support the implementation of cafeteria-style benefits packages.
5. Set up educational campaigns to:
 - increase individual worker's knowledge of work-life balance issues, and
 - give employees the tools they need to effectively deal with situations as they arise

Closing Comments

The growing stress on the working population caused by role overload and conflict between work and family responsibilities is both an economic and social problem. Productivity is impaired, costs of production are unnecessarily high, and personal health and family well-being are at risk. The dimensions of the problem have increased over time. This stress affects both men and women in professional and unprofessional jobs. This is a societal issue. Individuals, families, employers and governments can all take actions to moderate the stress, and they can all share in the benefits if action is taken. Most of the actions reduce costs in both the short- and long-term. All that is required is a shift in attitudes, and a recognition that workers are family members and family members are workers. Canada relies on families to carry the responsibility for nurturing their children, their elderly and other dependants. We also expect people of working age to work and earn their own living. Supporting them in meeting all those responsibilities is a positive sum game.

The findings outlined in this study are somewhat disturbing in terms of what they say about Canadian values. Why is caring for our seniors and our children causing so much strain? Why are Canadian men and women foregoing having families or reducing the number of children they have? Has there been a change in values in Canada? Do Canadian organizations with a culture of work or family and a culture of hours reflect what is important to Canadians? Do such cultures give us a competitive advantage globally or are we hurting our chances of future success by focusing on short-term gains? Are we asking too much of families? Are we asking too much of employees? The data outlined in this report suggest that Canadians need to take a step back and reassess these issues.



Canadian employees and employers 'survived' the 1990s. Our ability to thrive in this millennium may well depend on how we move forward with respect to the issues outlined in this report.

The first priority is to reduce the demands on working Canadians

The data suggest that employers and governments who wish to improve the health of their workforce, reduce tax burdens on their citizens, and positively influence the health care system need to pay attention to role overload. This form of work-life conflict is strongly associated with heavy work demands, longer hours at work, higher amounts of unpaid overtime, greater amounts of work-related travel and a culture of face time – where the emphasis is on 'presence' as opposed to actual output. It also represents the highest levels of relative and absolute risk to poorer physical and mental health, and to all measures of use of Canada's health care system included in this study.

The link between hours in work and role overload, burnout and physical and mental health problems suggest that these workloads are not sustainable over the long term. The data from this study reinforce this conclusion. Canadians are subsidizing, through their tax dollars and financial support of the health care system, organizational practices such as 'doing more with less', downsizing, basing promotions on hours at work, setting unrealistic work expectations, managing by crisis, etc. Organizations that employ such strategies should bear the financial costs of such strategies – not Canadian taxpayers.

The second priority is to reduce caregiver strain

This form of work-life conflict appears to be closely linked to physical health problems and higher use of medical care services and prescription medications. The proportion of the workforce experiencing high levels of caregiver strain is expected to increase dramatically in the next decade as, first the parents of the baby boomers, and then the baby boomers themselves, require care. If steps are not taken now to put policies, procedures and institutions into place to help employees care for their aging parents, the costs associated with this kind of strain can be expected to increase dramatically in the near future.

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Box 1

Defining Work-Life Conflict

Four forms of work-life conflict are examined in this study: role overload, work interferes with family, family interferes with work, spillover from work to family, and caregiver strain. The working definition of each of these constructs is given below.

Role Overload is having too much to do in a given amount of time. This form of work-life conflict occurs when the total demands on time and energy associated with the prescribed activities of multiple roles are too great to perform the roles adequately or comfortably.

Role Interference occurs when incompatible demands make it difficult, if not impossible, for an employee to perform all roles well. Role interference is conceptualized as having two distinct facets:

- **Work Interferes with Family:** This type of role interference occurs when work demands and responsibilities make it more difficult to fulfil family role responsibilities.
- **Family Interferes with Work:** This type of role interference occurs when family demands and responsibilities make it more difficult to fulfil work role responsibilities.

Caregiver Strain: The term 'caregiver' refers to anyone who provides assistance to someone else who needs it (i.e. disabled or elderly dependent, disabled children). Caregiver strain is a multi-dimensional construct that is defined in terms of 'burdens' or changes in the caregivers' day to day lives, which can be attributed to the need to provide care. Three forms of caregiver strain resulting from stress are considered in this study: emotional strain (i.e. depression, anxiety, emotional exhaustion), physical strain, and financial strain. It should be noted that research on caregiver strain has typically focused on strains associated with the provision of eldercare or care for a disabled dependent rather than those linked to child care

Box 2:

Findings from the Balancing Work, Family and Lifestyle National Study

Report One: The 2001 National Work–Life Conflict Study: puts the series into context by describing the sample of employees who participated in the research and examining the various risk factors associated with work–life conflict.

Website: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/work-travail/index-eng.php>

Report Two: Work–life Conflict in Canada in the New Millennium: A Status Report: makes the business case for change by looking at how high levels role overload, work to family interference, family to work interference, caregiver strain and spillover from work to family affect employers, employees and their families.

Website: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/work-travail/report2/index-eng.php>

Report Three: Exploring the Link between Work–Life Conflict and the Use of Canada's Health Care System: focuses on how work–life conflict affects Canada's health care system (i.e. quantifies the system demands associated with high work–life conflict and attempts to put some kind of dollar value on how much it costs Canada to treat the health consequences of such conflict).

Website: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/work-travail/report3/index-eng.php>

Report Four: Who Is at Risk? Predictors of High Work–Life Conflict: identifies key risk factors for role overload, work interferes with family, family interferes with work and caregiver strain.

Website: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/work-travail/report4/index-eng.php>

Report Five: Reducing Work–Life Conflict: What Works? What Doesn't?: examines what employers, employees and their families can do to reduce work–life conflict.

Website: <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/pubs/occup-travail/balancing-equilibre/index-eng.php>



