Control Over Time and Work–Life Balance: An Empirical Analysis

Report prepared for the Federal Labour Standards Review Committee

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Disclaimer: The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the policies of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.

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Executive Summary

This paper examines the research and relevant Canadian empirical evidence on work schedules, work time and work–life balance. It assesses trends and current practices in Canadian workplaces, particularly in sectors under federal jurisdiction. The paper also reviews empirical evidence on problems regarding work–life balance, increasing work-life pressures, and the need to accommodate evolving family structures. It also considers possible legislative and non-legislative solutions.

Work–life balance is not a new issue. Since the 1980s, researchers have been calling for family-responsive workplaces. But the context has changed dramatically. In less than 10 years, the debate over work time has shifted almost 180 degrees. In the 1990s, shorter work hours and flexible work arrangements were viewed as one solution to the crisis of high unemployment. Today, population aging, a strong economy, and historically low unemployment pose new challenges in terms of skill and labour shortages, productivity, and worker retention. Furthermore, high female labour force participation rates, the predominance of the dual-earner family, and emerging trends such as elder care make work–family balance a major personal challenge for many workers.

Work schedules and work time

While the average length of the workweek looks fairly stable in recent decades, the more telling pattern is one of work-hour polarization, as more Canadians worked longer hours (40 hours or more weekly) and more worked part-time (less than 35 hours weekly).

For some workers, a dominant trend in the 1990s was a combination of growing work pressures and feelings of insecurity. It is unclear if these trends have persisted in the 21st century. But regardless, this research raises questions about the most accurate way to measure work effort, suggesting that work intensification involves more than longer work hours.

Detailed industry-level data on the prevalence and utilization of alternate work schedules is lacking in Canada. Using available Statistics Canada and other national data sources, the following more general trends can be identified, some of which relate to industrial sectors containing industries under Part III of the Canada Labour Code.

- The average workweek is 36.2 hours in the workforce. Finance, insurance and real estate mirrors this norm. However, information, culture and recreation industries are below the norm, and transportation and warehousing is above it. These trends differ by gender, with men generally working longer workweeks than women.
- Close to 1 in 4 workers in Canada spent more than 40 hours a week at their main job in 2004. Within industrial sectors containing federally regulated employers, two sectors (finance, insurance and real estate; and information, culture and recreation) are slightly below the national norms. However, a substantially higher

proportion of workers in the transportation and warehousing sector report long hours, with over 1 in 5 working 50 or more hours weekly.

- Looking at occupations, 29 percent of transportation and equipment operators work 50 or more hours weekly in their main job. In contrast, only 4 percent of clerical workers (a group employed in all sectors) worked long hours. Senior managers report the highest incidence of long workweeks: 36 percent put in workweeks of 50 or more hours, and the average workweek is 45 hours.
- Workers in transportation and warehousing report a slightly higher than average incidence of overtime work, suggesting that long workweeks influence what constitutes overtime.
- For some individuals, long work hours are episodic. However, nearly half of the workers in one panel study consistently worked long hours over a five-year period.
- A large majority of Canadians work a daytime, Monday to Friday schedule. This standard work schedule is very prevalent in finance and insurance. The two other sectors with federally regulated firms are slightly above the national average in terms of Monday to Friday schedules. Weekend work is not common in these three sectors.
- Very few workers in Canada work a reduced week through special arrangements with their employer, a compressed workweek, or a rotating shift schedule. These arrangements are used by between 6 and 8 percent of the workforce. The three industries of interest to the Review are close to or below these national averages.
- One in three Canadian workers have flexible schedules, and just over 1 in 5 have work-at-home (telework) arrangements. Information and cultural industries are considerably above these averages.

Outcomes related to work hours and schedules

Work hours and schedules can affect the health and well-being of workers. Long work hours and certain kinds of shift schedules are known to create elevated risks for a range of mental and physical health problems. Stress is one of the more commonly documented outcomes of long work hours, and is recognized as a determinant of employee health and productivity.

Research evidence suggests the following:

- In 2003, 7 percent of the Canadian workforce reported their work to be “extremely stressful” most days. In the three industries of interest to the Review, between 8 and 9 percent of these workforces report extreme levels of work stress on a regular basis.
- Factors most strongly associated with high stress are being a senior manager or a single parent of either gender.

- Working long hours contributes directly to unhealthy lifestyles – such as increased cigarette and alcohol consumption, poor nutrition, and sleeping problems – which are well-documented risk factors in heart disease and serious health conditions. These risk factors differ by gender.
- Shift workers' lack of sleep can affect quality of life as well as pose safety risks. Health problems directly related to shift work include gastrointestinal disorders, cardiovascular diseases, cancer, and menstrual and pregnancy complications in women. Parents' shift schedules may also affect the well-being of their children.
- For both genders, working evening and rotating shifts is associated with a higher prevalence of job strain, and working evening shifts is associated with increased risk of psychological distress.
- Men who work evening, rotating or irregular shifts have higher probabilities of experiencing one or more chronic conditions over a four-year period, compared with men who work days. These conditions included asthma, arthritis, rheumatism, back problems, high blood pressure, migraines, chronic bronchitis or emphysema, diabetes, epilepsy, heart disease, cancer, and stomach or intestinal ulcers.

From a regulatory perspective, the Review Committee should focus on long work hours and shift work. Arguments for a range of regulatory options or voluntary guidelines include workers' rights and equity in terms of access to good quality jobs, as well as health care and productivity costs that result from a relatively small percentage of workers in jobs requiring workweeks of 50 or more hours or shift schedules.

Five percent or less of workers in the three federally regulated industries work shift schedules, which is less than the national average. This trend needs to be monitored for changes over time. But given that some of these workers are operating transportation equipment, public safety may be an additional consideration. The same applies to long work hours, given the prevalence of long work hours in the transportation sector.

In terms of finding incentives to encourage employers to act on any of the problems identified above, one of the major barriers is the fact that managers, on average, work long hours.

Work–life balance

Typically, researchers have focused on work–family conflict rather than the broader and most positively framed concept of work–life balance. Work–family conflict is hypothesized to have causes, predictors, and risk factors that are found at the individual, family role, work role, and work environment levels of analysis.

While work–family conflict can be thought of as a result of work stressors, it also has been studied as a stressor since the 1970s. In short, work–family conflict can be conceptualized as either cause or effect in models of stress. Both areas of research

emphasize how role demands, and control over these demands, affect workers' health and well-being.

Research evidence suggests the following:

- The prevalence of work–family conflict varies, depending on how it is measured. According to a major Canadian study, 1 in 4 employees experience high levels of conflict between work and family, based on work-to-family interference and caregiver strain. If role overload is included, then close to 60 percent of employees surveyed experience work–family conflict. Only 10 percent of respondents reported high levels of family–work interference.
- Three national US surveys found that the prevalence of work–family conflict ranged from 26 percent to 55 percent, depending on the measures used.
- There are no published studies that focus specifically on employees in federally regulated organizations.
- Using federal government employees as a benchmark, work–life balance is moderate: 25 percent of employees always can "balance my personal, family and work needs in my current job," 43 percent are able to do this often, and 25 percent do this sometimes.
- The presence of young children in the household is related to higher levels of family-to-work conflict, and this type of conflict increases among single parents who have children under 18.
- Compared to non-parents, male and female working parents have higher role overload, job stress, and family-to-work interference. The prevalence of role overload is especially high among working mothers, who continue to carry a disproportionate share of child-care and domestic responsibilities.
- Regarding job factors that influence work–life conflict, the amount of work time is the strongest and most consistent predictor. The higher levels of work-to-family conflict reported by managers or professionals often is a function of their longer work hours.
- Other job characteristics related to work–family conflict include job security, support from one's supervisor, and support from co-workers.
- Exposure to work stressors predicts work–family conflict, especially work demands or overload, work-role conflict, work-role ambiguity, and job dissatisfaction.
- Other work characteristics related to work–family conflict include lack of coordination with others at work, and extensive use of communication technology that blurs the boundaries between home and work.
- Organizational cultures that encourage and support work–life balance can have positive influences. Crucial are the norms and expectations for working outside normal hours and the potential career repercussions for using family-friendly

policies. What matters is not the formal presence of work–family policies, but rather, their use.

- At all educational levels, women place higher value than men on flexibility and work–life balance. However, 34 percent of men and 38 percent of women had large discrepancies between what they expected or valued, compared to their current job conditions, regarding work–family balance and flexibility.
- Individual attributes also can 'mediate' the impact of work–family conflict. These include the level of psychological involvement in one's job, coping strategies, or reacting to work-role pressures with resignation or avoidance.
- Definitive research on historical work–life balance trends over time is scarce. Available evidence suggests that work–life balance is becoming somewhat more difficult, especially for certain groups of workers (i.e., professionals and managers with dependent care responsibilities).

Outcomes of Work–Family Conflict for Employees

There are well-documented outcomes of work–family conflict when this construct is treated as a stressor. In terms of mental health, negative outcomes of work–family conflict include reduced general mental health and well-being, dissatisfaction with life, stress, psychosomatic symptoms, depression, general psychological distress, use of medication, alcohol consumption, substance abuse, clinical mood disorders, clinical anxiety disorders, and emotional exhaustion.

Both work-to-family and family-to-work conflict predict poor physical health and concurrent multiple chronic health problems. These causal pathways are through mental health and health-related behaviours, and would be expected over longer time periods of exposure to work–family conflict. People experiencing work pressures may lack time to take care of themselves by eating properly, exercising, and getting enough sleep.

Research evidence suggests the following:

- Managers and professionals, compared with other groups of workers, tend to have high stress, role overload, work-to-family interference, and negative spillover. But paradoxically, they also are more committed to their organization, more satisfied with their job, and have better mental and physical health than individuals with other kinds of jobs.
- Individuals in private sector organizations (compared with the public and not-for-profit sectors) have moderate work–family conflict (this is highest in the not-for-profit sector), higher commitment, and higher job satisfaction.
- Gender differences diminish or disappear when job type and specific components of work–life conflict are taken into account, so these really are job-related differences rather than gender differences.

- Workers with high role overload, compared with those reporting low role overload, are significantly more likely to experience high job stress, to be absent from work due to emotional, mental, and physical fatigue, and to miss work because of child-care obligations.
- Strong employment relationships contribute to work–life balance and overall quality of work life. Individuals with strong employment relationships tend to have helpful and friendly co-workers, interesting work, assess their workplace as both healthy and safe, are supported in balancing work with their personal life, and have reasonable job demands. Strong employment relationships also have productivity benefits.
- Caring for elderly relatives is a growing trend. As with child care, women are more involved than men in elder care. Workers who care for dependent children and seniors – the "sandwich generation" – sometimes cut their work hours, and have lost income to provide this care, and are more likely to feel higher stress levels, compared to peers with no dependent care responsibilities. Respite care and flexible work/study arrangements would help these sandwich generation workers.

Outcomes of work–family conflict for employers

There are a range of other costs that employers can incur as a result of high levels of work–family conflict. These include recruitment and retention, individual productivity, employee attitudes and behaviour related to performance, and efficiency. Empirical evidence on employer outcomes is mixed, mainly because research is still developing.

Research evidence suggests the following:

- There is cumulative evidence that work–life policies can have positive effects on retention. This will be an increasing focus as employers up their efforts to recruit and retain professionals and other knowledge workers.
- While there is some evidence that on-site child care does not improve productivity in terms of reducing absenteeism or improving employee performance, it may contribute to recruitment and retention. Typically, on-site child care can't be justified in a cost-benefit analysis, so firms do this for other reasons.
- Teleworking has direct performance benefits, but this may be a result of self-selection.
- A few studies show that giving employees more control over work schedules and time may contribute to process efficiency. Some effects may be industry specific.
- Work–family and family–work conflicts influence the psychological reactions to one's job, including overall job satisfaction. Family-to-work conflict is associated with lower job effectiveness. Work-to-family conflict predicts intentions to quit.

- Both men and women with large deficits (i.e., their current job conditions do not meet their expectations) in work–family balance and flexibility are more likely to have looked for a job in another firm in the past year.

- Estimates of the direct costs of absenteeism due to high work–life conflict range from $3 to $5 billion annually in Canada.

Employer policies and practices

Employers have introduced two approaches to addressing employees' work–family needs: substitute services of the family caregiver, and giving employees more control over their work time through leave provisions and flexibility over work schedules or location.

Research evidence suggests the following:

- On-site child care is expensive and has limited benefits for the total employee population. Parental leave imposes a temporary loss of an employee's contributions but has low financial costs.
- Flexible work schedules are low cost but impose burdens on managers to reorganize work and schedules, which may partly explain the slow diffusion. Flexible schedules can produce significant benefits to the firm.
- Generally, caregiver replacement policies have administrative costs. But they do not require changes in how work is organized or how employees are supervised.
- Family-supportive attitudes and behaviours by front-line supervisors and managers are absolutely crucial for successful work–family programs.
- From the employees' perspective, work–life balance requires a manageable workload, flexible work hours, and being able to choose the days they work.
- However, employees are reluctant to make trade-offs (i.e., in pay, or in career advancement) to achieve job flexibility now.
- According to the best available data in Canada, 2 in 5 employees reported that their employer offers "personal support or family services." Two of the sectors containing employers under federal labour standards have almost twice this national average. Transportation and warehousing is slightly below the national average.
- Very few Canadian employees have child-care support or elder-care services provided by their employer. In the three sectors of interest to the Review, these services are somewhat more prevalent.
- Generally, the number of work–family arrangements has increased in most industrial nations in the last two decades. However, these arrangements are

optional, and their use can be restricted in work sites by the discretion of supervisors.

- Evidence suggests that improvements in people management practices, especially work time and work location flexibility, and the development of "supportive managers," contribute to increased work–life balance.
- There also are public costs, which include mental and physical health risks, created by work–life conflict. This affects national productivity, quality of individual and family life, and imposes burdens on the health care system.

Based on the evidence, public policy must move in the direction of greater employee choice and flexibility over work time. Employees who experience higher levels of family-to-work conflict want more work flexibility, and may do this informally. A smaller percentage of employees experience family-to-work conflict, and this group places more importance on family supportive programs in their workplace.

An international perspective on Canada

Based on Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) data for 2001, Canada ranked fourth out of 15 countries in average annual hours worked. There appears to be a correlation between work hours and the level of unionization in a national workforce, with highly unionized countries having shorter work hours. Among 17 OECD countries, 54 percent of workers work 40 or more hours weekly, and Canada is right at this average.

From an international comparative perspective, a somewhat higher proportion of workers in Canada, compared with other OECD countries, seem to be able to achieve a fit between work hours and non-work commitments. However, from a Canadian perspective, most relevant is that less than half of workers have achieved the ideal fit between hours of work and family or social commitments.

National differences in cultural values, politics, and regulatory frameworks influence work arrangements and work time. Illustrative of these differences is France's attempt to legislate a 35-hour workweek, the relatively high proportion of part-time employment in the Netherlands, the low rate of female labour force participation in Japan, and the extensive parental leave provisions in Scandinavian countries.

Research in Britain raises questions about the choices workers make to change jobs in search of suitable work hours within a full-employment economy. In many parts of Canada, the lowest unemployment levels in 25 years has given employees more choices. However, the very same economic conditions provide incentives to employers to increase work hours.

Public policy internationally tends to address child care and parental leave. National variations in worker behaviour can be attributed to different public support for work–

family balance. A major policy focus for work–life balance is on providing adequate support for child care. This approach is seen as contributing to the well-being of children and families.

In the absence of a high floor established by public policy, work–life balance policies and practices are left to individual employers. This results in wide variation and inconsistencies and, therefore, unequal access among employees within and across firms to these provisions. Without a comprehensive public policy framework that provides adequate minimum standards, firms are less likely to do anything because they will incur higher costs than their competitors.

The European Commission is seeking ways to reconcile employers' need for increased workforce flexibility and adaptability with workers' needs for job security and more flexible work-time arrangements. Flexibility covers a range of work organization and employment practices, including the use of temporary and contract workers, subcontracting and outsourcing, internally giving workers more choice over work schedules and time, performance-based pay systems, and multi-skilling, job rotation, and other forms of functional and organizational flexibility.

The European Working Time Directive, which came into effect on October 1, 1998, restricts an individual's work hours to an average of less than 48 hours per week over a 17-week period. Workers can voluntarily work more. This directive has been extended to excluded sectors, such as transportation. However, company practices have been slow to change.

In the United Kingdom, the government has addressed a range of quality of work–life issues by making a "business case" to encourage action by employers. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has been addressing workplace stress since the mid-1990s. Work–life balance and work time are integrated within this approach. The focus of HSE-sponsored research and recommended interventions by employers is to reduce exposure to excessive pressure, which leads to stress, resulting in ill health for workers, reduced performance, and increased costs for employers.

Unions' direct involvement in work–life policies varies widely internationally, and the impact of collective bargaining in this regard is not uniform. In Europe, in contrast to North America, unions have championed shorter workweeks and attempted to limit employers' expanded use of flexible scheduling. Generally, unions have philosophical difficulty supporting policies that promote individual flexibility in work schedules because this makes it more difficult to monitor overtime use and managerial favouritism.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Long-term exposure of workers to excessive work hours, evening and rotating shift schedules, and high levels of work-to-family interference elevates their risk of mental and physical health problems. Additionally, there are productivity and human resource costs to organizations in which these conditions prevail. Moreover, solutions to these potential problems must address workload and job demands, employee choice and flexibility in work hours and arrangements, organizational cultures, and the behaviours of managers at all levels.

The review of Part III of the Canada Labour Code provides a timely opportunity to engage stakeholders in discussions about shared responsibilities for addressing work–life and work-time issues. All of the major issues addressed in this report are large, systemic, and complex. Realistically, legislation should be viewed as one element of a multi-pronged, multi-stakeholder strategy.

Based on the evidence, arguments, and practices discussed in this paper, the following recommendations are offered to the Federal Labour Standards Review Committee for consideration:

1. From a regulatory perspective, the Review Committee should focus on long work hours and shift work.

2. The Review Committee should construct a comprehensive framework that integrates regulation, education, and compliance. This is the only way to ensure that legislated standards on work time and family-related leave actually guide workplace practices.

3. The Review Committee should explore how the federal government can raise awareness of the problems posed by long hours through education and dissemination of best practices.

4. The Review Committee should consider issuing best practice guidelines for shift work. Some of the most negative effects of shift work on health can be ameliorated by improved scheduling and consultation with affected employees in this process.

5. Labour standards is a small component of a comprehensive policy needed to support work–life balance for Canadian workers. This calls for horizontal policy-making, given that work–life issues affect the well-being of children and families, the health care system, and productivity.

6. The Review Committee needs to address ways of encouraging, for the long term, the creation of workplace cultures that support the use of maternity and parental leave, and compassionate care leave, with no career penalties.

7. The federal government's recent funding commitment for child-care support, through agreements with provinces and territories, is an effective policy response to some of the caregiver replacement needs of employees.

8. Elder care is becoming a growing area of work–family need. The Canada Labour Code's compassionate leave provisions should be extended to support ongoing care requirements of elderly dependents.

9. The Review Committee should give separate consideration to targeted policy and program interventions required to address the work–life needs of the self-employed, workers in small firms, workers in temporary and contract jobs, and workers in low-wage jobs and/or in marginal industries and regions covered by federal labour standards.

10. The Review Committee should articulate the ways in which long work hours, certain shift schedules, work–life conflict, and a lack of control over work time and demands undermine key public policy goals related to quality of life, productivity, and population health.

11. Canada requires an integrated approach to monitoring and reporting changes in work environments and job quality. The Review Committee should recommend that the federal government sponsor a regular national survey similar to the European Foundation's Working Conditions survey.

Introduction

Purpose of paper

The purpose of this paper is to examine the research and relevant Canadian empirical evidence on the related topics of work time, work schedules and work–life balance. I provide an overview of the main arguments and theories in the academic literature, weighing the supporting evidence.

I also present and assess the most current and relevant Canadian data that shed light on work-time and work–life issues, trying to fill gaps in the international research. The report ends by identifying the key evidence-based patterns and trends that have implications for policy and practice. I provide recommendations for the Federal Labour Standards Review ("the Review," hereafter) Committee to consider in the context of its broader deliberations.

Demographic, social and economic context for the Review

In less than 10 years, the debate over work time has shifted almost 180 degrees. In the 1990s, shorter work hours and flexible work arrangements (such as job sharing) were viewed as one solution to the crisis of high unemployment. The 1994 federal Advisory Group in Working Time and the Distribution of Work called for redistributing and reducing work time.[1] Commentators predicted the 'end of work' and enforced unemployment by workers who had been affected by organizational downsizing, industrial restructuring, or technological change. There also was growing concern that increasing labour market polarization was a result of growing inequality in the distribution of work hours, as industrial transformations pushed more people into part-time and contingent work, and more people into workweeks of 50-plus hours.

While some of these trends persisted into the new millennium, today's labour market poses new challenges. By 2026, 1 in 5 Canadians will be 65 or older.[2] This reality of population aging is complicated by a strong economy and unemployment at a 25-year low. In some industrial sectors, employers have already experienced labour and skill shortages as growing numbers of baby boomers enter retirement. Another signal demographic trend of the last quarter of the 20th century was rising female employment rates and emergence of the dual-earner family as the most common family type. Now, some baby boomers face family-care responsibilities for children and aging parents – the so-called sandwich generation. This powerful combination of social, demographic and economic trends highlights the importance of addressing work time and work–life balance through public policy.

Yet, work–life balance is not a new issue. While we lack Canadian historical evidence on work–life balance prior to the 1990s, US research shows that this was a challenge almost 30 years ago. One of the first thorough investigations of the quality of work life in the United States is the 1977 Quality of Employment Survey, and it found that 1 in 3 respondents reported inconvenient or excessive work hours, work schedules that interfered with family life, and lack of control over work time.[3]

A pioneering analysis in the 1980s of the need for employers to be more responsive to the changing needs of the workforce was largely motivated by the need for higher labour productivity, the transformation of social welfare, rising female labour force participation, the decline of the traditional male breadwinner, and a growing diversity of family types.[4] Now, in the early 21st century, demographics and economic imperatives figure largely in arguments for employer responsiveness to employees work–life needs.

Writing almost 20 years ago, Sheila Kamerman and Alfred J. Kahn urged an updating of corporate supports for employees, arguing that the social policy of the firm and the social policy of the state are intertwined.[5] Kamerman and Kahn's words still resonate: "…changes in the labour force do require significant changes in labour/management relations and in employment policies and practices." Effective management practices must, they argue, be responsive to workers' values and needs. They predicted that paid and unpaid leave and alternative work schedules will be "the number one benefit of the future" for full-time permanent employees.[6] In 2005, it is close to the top of many workers' priorities.

Guiding questions

The following questions guided the research and analysis presented in this paper.

1. What are current practices regarding the organization of working time (including hours of work, overtime, flexible schedules, leaves of all kinds [maternal, parental, compassionate care, family responsibility, emergency leave, sick leave], vacations and holidays) and other work-time issues in Canadian workplaces – particularly sectors under federal jurisdiction?

2. How have these trends evolved in recent years, and is there evidence to assess whether current practices meet or exceed minimum legislated standards?

3. How have demographic trends, especially population aging and changing family structures, interacted with changes in the workplace relating to work time?

4. Does recent empirical research indicate problems regarding work–life balance specific to workers under federal jurisdiction?

5. Is there evidence of increasing work–life pressures and the need to accommodate evolving family structures?

6. What are the specific problems and possible solutions, especially those relevant to federally regulated industries?

7. What are innovative legislative and non-legislative solutions? What are the implications of any solution for workers, employers, the state, and the public?

Approach

Methodology for literature review

The scholarly research literature on work time, work schedules and work–life balance is enormous. Indeed, the scope of research on work–life issues is broad and international.[7] Thus, I have taken a selective approach, focusing on the English language academic literature with an emphasis on what has been published in the past five years. I cannot claim to be exhaustive in this coverage. However, given that there is consensus on some key findings and policy implications – and many unanswered questions and debates – I doubt that casting a wider net would change this report's conclusions or recommendations.

I conducted key-word searches in three major academic databases (PsychINFO, ABI Inform, and Social Sciences Citation Index) using variations on work–life balance, work–life conflict, work arrangements, work hours, work time, and flexible schedules. I limited the search to refereed journal articles and academic books published since January 1, 2000, focusing on empirical studies and literature reviews. I also identified major policy studies from government and non-governmental organizations (NGO) websites. My main criterion for selecting material for review is that it contribute to evidence-based decision-making by policy-makers, employers, unions, and other labour market stakeholders. What follows is a stylized synthesis that illustrates key findings, arguments, and policy implications, rather than an exhaustive literature review.

Methodology for data analysis

In order to provide the most current and policy-relevant evidence available in Canada on work time and work–life balance, I present an analysis of data from the following Statistics Canada surveys using measures of work–life balance, work time, and work schedules. While my intent is to describe current trends and practices, I also briefly examine selected outcomes associated with long work hours and work–life conflict, as well as possible solutions. However, it should be noted that none of these studies was specifically designed to explore these latter issues.

- The 2001 Workplace and Employee Survey, employee sample
- The Labour Force Survey
- The 2003 Canadian Community Health Survey
- The 1990, 1995, and 2001 General Social Surveys

All of the above surveys have large samples and therefore permit population estimates. While no single survey addresses all the central issues for the Review, by assessing them side by side, I have attempted to create a composite picture of current trends and challenges.

I also supplement these Statistics Canada sources with other available national studies. The most recent national data that address work–life balance and work schedules comes

from Rethinking Work, a syndicated project conducted by EKOS Research Associates and The Graham Lowe Group. The project conducted a representative survey of workers in late 2004 (n=2002), and a representative survey of employers in the spring of 2005 (n=600). In addition, I selectively draw on other relevant national surveys to extend the discussion in fruitful directions. In particular, I rely on the 2000 CPRN-EKOS Changing Employment Relationships Survey of Canadian workers (n=2500).

Studying federally regulated industries

There are no surveys that provide an accurate national perspective on the detailed industries regulated by the Canada Labour Code. This is a basic limitation of the data presented in this paper and, as such, makes it difficult to assess the extent to which legislated standards are being met. None of the Statistics Canada data files noted above can be analyzed at the three-digit North American Industrial Classification System (NAICS), which would be the only way to separate out federally regulated industries. Therefore, I have used two-digit NAICS categories that include federally regulated employers. These are described in Figure 1.

The three major NAICS industries of interest to the Review are:

- transportation and warehousing;
- information, culture and recreation; and
- finance and insurance.

Figure 1: Number of workers and share of labour force, NAICS industries with federally regulated employers, 2004

	Number in labour force (1000s)	Share of labour force
Transportation and warehousing (NAICS 48-49)	843.8	4.9%
Information, culture and recreation (NAICS 51)	778.1	4.5%
Finance and insurance * (NAICS 52)	692.8	4.0%

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Historical Review 2004.
*Reported as part of Finance, Insurance and Real Estate (FIRE) in subsequent Labour Force Survey data. The FIRE sector comprised 5.7% of the labour force in 2004.

Numbers of employees in these industry groups range from approximately 690,000 to 844,000. Each comprises between 4 percent and 5 percent of the national labour force. The classification limitations are clear enough. For example, transportation (which is

regulated federally, with the exception of intraprovincial transportation not involving airlines and airports) is combined with warehousing (which is not federally regulated). Regulated telecommunication industries are combined with culture and recreation service providers. Similarly, banks (which are regulated) are grouped with non-federally regulated financial institutions and insurance companies.

In light of this data limitation, I have looked as much as possible for interindustry variations. To the extent that these are small across the economy, we can assume that federally regulated industries would not deviate from the overall pattern. However, in instances where significant variations are present across industries, more research may be required to fully understand what is going on in the federally regulated sector. The concern, of course, is drawing inferences about federally regulated industries from general patterns when we don't know if these industries are unique regarding work-time and work–life balance issues.

Using the analytic approach of multiple comparisons, we can see in Figure 2 that the three NAICS industries relevant for the Review have different demographic profiles, in some instances quite divergent from the national workforce. These demographic profiles should be kept in mind as we proceed, below, with data analysis and interpretation.

Figure 2: Demographic profile of NAICS industries with federally regulated employers, 2001

	All employees	Transportation and Warehousing	Information and Cultural Industries	Finance and Insurance
Percentage of all employees	100%	4.2%	2.8%	4.7%
Gender				
Men	49.5%	74.9%	48.8%	33.0%
Women	50.5%	25.1%	51.2%	67.0%
Age				
Less than 25	11.9%	3.8%	9.5%	6.9%
25–44	53.5%	53.6%	59.2%	59.6%
45 or more	34.6%	42.6%	31.3%	33.5%
Educational attainment				
Less than high school	12.9%	20.5%	3.9%	2.9%
High school	20.6%	23.6%	19.6%	22.3%
Non-university post-secondary education	39.0%	37.9%	36.5%	35.3%
Some university	9.3%	8.9%	12.9%	14.3%
University degree	18.3%	9.1%	27.2%	25.2%

Source: Statistics Canada, Workplace and Employee Survey (WES), Employee sample, 2001. Federal government employees not included in WES sample.

The transportation and warehousing industry grouping is unique in terms of the gender and age composition and educational attainment of its workforce. Compared with the labour force as a whole, and with the two other NAICS industries, workers in this sector are predominantly male and are older than the labour force average and the two other

NAICS industry groups. Furthermore, workers in this sector are less likely to have university education and more likely to have less than high-school education. The other two industries of interest to the Review are fairly similar in terms of the age and education of their workforces. Both have a higher proportion of university-educated workers than the Canadian labour force, so they fit the image of knowledge-based industries. The finance and insurance sector has a much higher proportion of female workers compared with the two other industries in Figure 1 and the national labour force.

Work Time and Work Schedules

Key theories and arguments

The amount of time spent at work is a prominent theme in employment research. Two key concepts frame discussions of work time: polarization and control. At the aggregate level, polarization of work hours and the implications for social inequality have received considerable attention from researchers and policy-makers. At the individual and organizational levels, there is extensive research on the determinants, outcomes, and solutions to control over work time, work schedules, and workload.

Since the late 1970s in Canada, the proportion of workers reporting 35–40 hour workweeks declined from 47.4 percent in 1978 to 39.5 percent in 2001. While the average length of the workweek looks fairly stable in recent decades, the more telling pattern is one of work-hour polarization, as more Canadians worked longer hours (40 hours or more weekly) and more worked part-time (less than 35 hours weekly). Work-hour polarization is linked to rising weekly earnings inequality. This has prompted some researchers to use the term 'hours inequality.'[8]

Work-hour polarization is associated with the rise of a knowledge-based economy. High-skilled workers, particularly managers and professionals, have experienced increasing work hours while less-skilled workers have had a decline. Compared to their counterparts in the rest of the economy, university graduates employed full time in knowledge-based industries worked, on average, either longer hours or more hours of unpaid overtime.[9] Their total workweek, including unpaid overtime, averaged 46.6 hours per week – well above the national average. By contrast, full-time employees of knowledge-based industries with some post-secondary education or less do not work longer hours, on average, than their counterparts in other industries. The paradox here is that highly educated managers and professionals in knowledge-intensive industries – whom American analyst Richard Florida calls the 'Creative Class' – may work the longest hours and experience high stress levels, but they are among the best paid and have the most job autonomy of any workers.[10] However, more research is needed to examine work-hour patterns within those groups working longer than average hours.

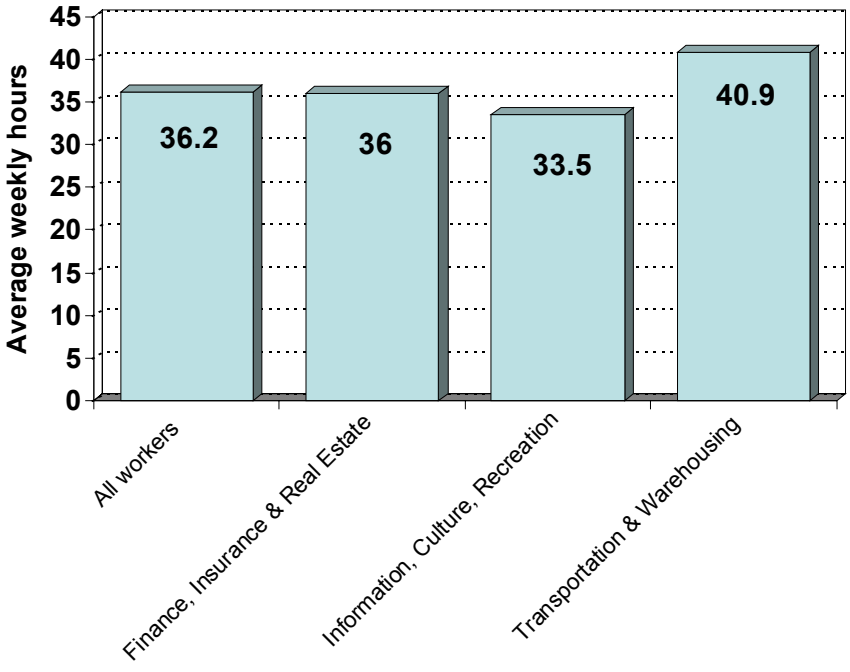
Other analysts argue that, for many workers, a dominant trend in the 1990s was a combination of growing work pressures and feelings of insecurity. From this perspective, work speed and effort increased in the 1990s to keep up with rising performance expectations and workloads. Studies in Canada, the United States, and Britain provide

some supporting evidence.[11] It is unclear if these trends have persisted in the 21st century. But regardless, this research raises questions about the most accurate way to measure work effort, suggesting that work intensification involves more than longer work hours. From this perspective, the evolution in information technologies, the Internet, deregulation of labour markets, and economic globalization are the meta-trends affecting work-effort control over work time.

Work-hour trends and patterns in Canada

To briefly review the basic trends and patterns in work hours nationally, we begin with average hours actually worked weekly (Figure 3).[12] We see that the average workweek is 36.2 hours in the workforce. One industry that includes federally regulated businesses (finance, insurance and real estate) mirrors this norm. However, information, culture and recreation industries are below the norm, and transportation and warehousing is above it. We should note that these trends differ by gender. Generally speaking, men work longer workweeks than women (39.5 hours, compared with 32.3). This largely is due to a higher incidence of part-time work among women, and a higher incidence of long work hours among men.

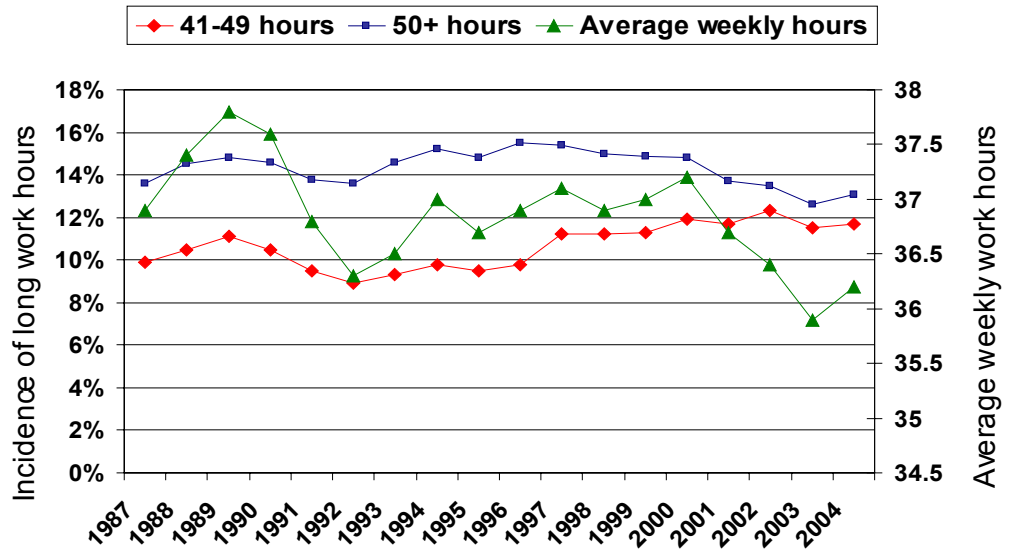
Figure 3: Average actual weekly hours worked, all workers and NAICS industries with federally regulated employers, Canada, 2004



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Historical Review 2004.

The right-hand axis on Figure 4 shows that the average workweek has fluctuated in the 36 to 38 hour range since 1987. However, these are averages that mask variations in the distribution of work hours. For example, firms in the transportation and warehousing sector are more likely to have employees putting in long workweeks.

Figure 4: Incidence of long work hours, actual hours worked, total employed, Canada, 1987-2004

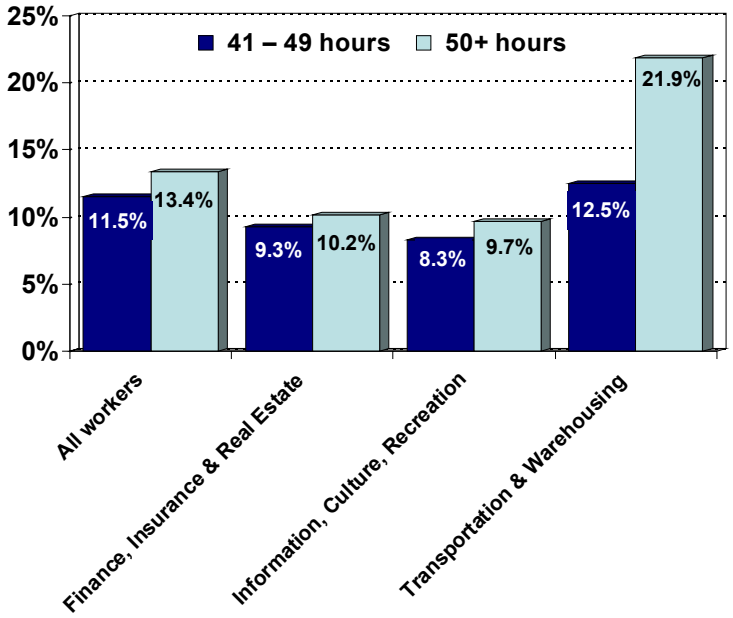


Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Historical Review 2004. Graph reports actual paid and unpaid hours in main job, excluding individuals reporting 0 hours, and average actual hours worked.

Turning to trends in long workweeks (i.e., more than 40 hours), Figure 4 documents that the proportion of workers reporting in the Labour Force Survey work weeks of between 41 and 49 hours, a slight upward trend since 1987, from around 10 percent of the workforce to 12 percent in 2004. A higher proportion of individuals – between 12 and 15 percent, depending on the year – have worked 50-hour-plus weeks since 1987. Over this period we note a slight downward trend. This trend is gendered: In 2004, 5.8 percent of women, compared with 17.8 percent of men, put in workweeks of 50 or more hours. Overall, close to 1 in 4 workers in Canada spent more than 40 hours a week at their main job in 2004.

Focusing on long workweeks within industrial sectors containing federally regulated employers, Figure 5 shows that two sectors (finance, insurance and real estate; and information, culture and recreation) are slightly below the national norms. However, a substantially higher proportion of workers in the transportation and warehousing sector report long hours. Most striking is that over 1 in 5 workers in this sector worked 50 or more hours weekly in 2004.

Figure 5: Incidence of actual workweeks longer than 40 hours, all workers and workers in NAICS industries with federally regulated employers, Canada, 2004



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Historical Review 2004. Usual hours refers to normal paid or contract hours excluding overtime. Actual hours includes all paid and unpaid hours worked.

A more finely grained picture of work hours in federally regulated industries is not available. However, further insights can be gained by examining 2004 Labour Force Survey data on occupational groups employed in the regulated sectors, though these groups are also found in other sectors of the economy.[13] For example, 29 percent of transportation and equipment operators worked 50 or more hours weekly in their main job. In contrast, only 4 percent of clerical workers (a group employed in all sectors) worked long hours, as did 11 percent of workers in arts, culture and recreation occupations. Some 15 percent of professionals in business, finance and administration worked 50 or more hours weekly. Of any occupational group, senior managers report the highest incidence of long workweeks: 36 percent put in workweeks of 50 or more hours, and the average workweek is 45 hours. Among other managers, 28 percent work long hours.

These long work hours could be considered overtime. However, the definition of 'overtime' will vary by firm and industrial sector, depending on formal and informal policies and practices, as well as collective agreements. Figure 6 provides details on overtime work in Canada during 2004. Just over 1 in 5 workers reported working overtime, which mirrors the incidence of workweeks that exceed 40 hours. The incidence of overtime work shows only minor variations across the three industries containing federally regulated firms. Workers in transportation and warehousing report a slightly higher than average incidence of overtime work, but not as high as the proportion of this group who report working 40 or more hours weekly (see Figure 5). Regardless of how

overtime is measured, workers in this sector are slightly above the national average and the average for the two other sectors of interest to the Review. This suggests that long workweeks are the norm in this sector, and such practices affect the understanding of what constitutes overtime.

Figure 6: Incidence of overtime work and average overtime hours, all employees and employees in NAICS industries with federally regulated employers, 2004

	All employees	Transportation and Warehousing	Information and Cultural Industries	Finance and Insurance
Employees working overtime	21.5%	23.3%	20%	22.5%
Working unpaid overtime	11.0%	8.0%	12%	16.4%
Working paid overtime	9.8%	14.6%	7.0%	5.4%
Working both unpaid and paid overtime	0.7%	0.7%	1.0%	0.7%
Average overtime hours of all employees	1.8	2.1	1.6	1.6
Average overtime hours of overtime workers	8.5	8.9	8.2	7.3
Average overtime hours of employees working unpaid overtime	8.6	9.2	8.4	7.5
Average overtime hours of employees working paid overtime only	8.2	8.6	7.5	6.2
Average overtime hours of employees working both unpaid and paid overtime only	12.0	12.2	12.5	10.3

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Historical Review 2004.

Furthermore, most overtime hours in the transportation and warehousing sector are compensated. Specifically, 15 percent of workers in that sector reported paid overtime hours in 2004, while 8 percent reported unpaid overtime. In contrast, in the finance and insurance sector, 16 percent of workers reported unpaid overtime and only 5 percent paid overtime. This industry difference reflects variations in collective agreement coverage and the proportion of salaried professional and managerial employees, who often are ineligible for overtime.

There is one important caveat when interpreting the above aggregate trends: We can't assume that the same individuals are working long hours year after year. The Survey of Labour Income Dynamics (SLID) documents variability in annual work hours among individuals.[14] The SLID provides the best data in Canada for studying labour market experiences, because it follows the same people over several years. This adds important nuances to our understanding of chronic overwork. Between 1996 and 2001, a minority of individuals worked long or short hours consistently. Some workers were both overworked and underemployed. More specifically, 47 percent of those working 2400 or more hours in 1997 also worked these hours in 2001, while 33 percent of this group had reduced their hours to the 1750–2199 range. This suggests that time crunch is more

episodic than persistent. Still, from a policy perspective, the finding that nearly half of those in the SLID panel consistently worked long hours raises questions about the effects of this on their health and well-being.

Turning to work schedules, these typically are at the discretion of the employer, reflecting the nature of the business or industry, or collective agreement provisions. Figure 7 summarizes different types of work schedules and work arrangements, benchmarking the three industrial sectors of interest to the Review with national norms from Statistics Canada's Workplace and Employee Survey (WES).

Figure 7: Work schedules and arrangements, all employees and employees in NAICS industries with federally regulated employers, 2001

	All employees	Transportation and Warehousing	Information and Cultural Industries	Finance and Insurance
Work regular Monday to Friday	69%	72%	79%	86%
Regularly work 6 hours or more per day	88%	88%	90%	92%
Generally work between 6am and 6pm	76%	71%	80%	91%
Work reduced workweek by special arrangement with employer	8%	4%	5%	6%
Work compressed workweek	6%	6%	4%	4%
Generally work same hours each day	30%	32%	24%	18%
Generally work same days of the week	29%	31%	26%	16%
Work on a schedule of rotating shift	8%	5%	5%	1%
Usual workweek includes Saturdays or Sundays	22%	20%	13%	6%
Work flexible hours	34%	35%	43%	32%
Carry out the duties of the job at home	22%	18%	36%	29%

Source: Statistics Canada, Workplace and Employee Survey (WES), Employee sample, 2001. Federal government employees are not included in the WES sample.

Despite popular images of a '24-7' global economy, a large majority of Canadians work a daytime, Monday to Friday schedule. This standard work schedule is most prevalent in finance and insurance, where 86 percent of employees work weekdays, and over 90 percent work between the hours of 6 AM and 6 PM. The two other sectors with federally regulated firms are slightly above the national average in terms of Monday to Friday schedules. Transportation and warehousing workers are less likely than other Canadian workers to work daytime schedules. Weekend work is not common on a regular basis, with 22 percent of all employees reporting this, and even fewer in two of the industries with federally regulated employers (information and cultural industries; and finance and insurance).

Considering other work arrangements, very few workers in Canada work a reduced week through special arrangements with their employer, a compressed workweek, or a rotating shift schedule. These arrangements are used by between 6 and 8 percent of the workforce.

The three industries of interest to the Review are close to or below these national averages.

Considering the emphasis on flexible work hours as a solution to work–life imbalance, discussed in more detail below, it is interesting to note that 1 in 3 Canadian workers reported flexible schedules in 2001. Unfortunately, we do not have more recent data from Statistics Canada surveys to know if this has increased. Nor does the WES examine the details of these arrangements, such as what a compressed workweek or flexible hours mean in practice. Information and cultural industries have above-average use of flexible schedules (43 percent of workers). This is complemented by being able to carry out job duties at home. While the national prevalence of work-at-home arrangements (in most instances, 'teleworking') is 22 percent, this rises to 36 percent in information and cultural industries.

Practices in the federal government offer one reliable benchmark at the organizational level. Findings from the 2002 Public Service Employee Survey (PSES) document the use of flexible work options, some negotiated through collective agreements.[15] Respondents were asked if they were currently working according to specific alternate work arrangements. Results show that 19 percent worked a compressed workweek, 33 percent had flexible work schedules, 5 percent teleworked, and 2 percent job-shared. As the country's largest employer with a highly unionized workforce, it is interesting that these practices mirror patterns in the national workforce (see Figure 7), with the exception of more access to compressed workweeks. These programs may be meeting employees' needs, given that the PSES also found high levels of satisfaction with current work arrangements (87 percent mostly or strongly agree they are satisfied).

There is an anomaly in Figure 7, however. If only one-third of workers reported flexible hours, why do only 30 percent claim to regularly work the same hours or the same days? Based solely on these two latter measures, we might be tempted to conclude that the majority of Canadian workers do have choice in their work schedules. There is no obvious explanation for this apparent discrepancy. The WES question on flexible work arrangements asked respondents if they worked a certain number of core hours, with flexible start and stop times as long as the equivalent of a full week is worked. This implies choice in one's daily work schedule, whereas the two other questions about schedules make no such inferences. It is possible that while individual choice in daily schedules is limited, many more workers have varied hours and days as set by their employer.

Outcomes related to work hours and schedules

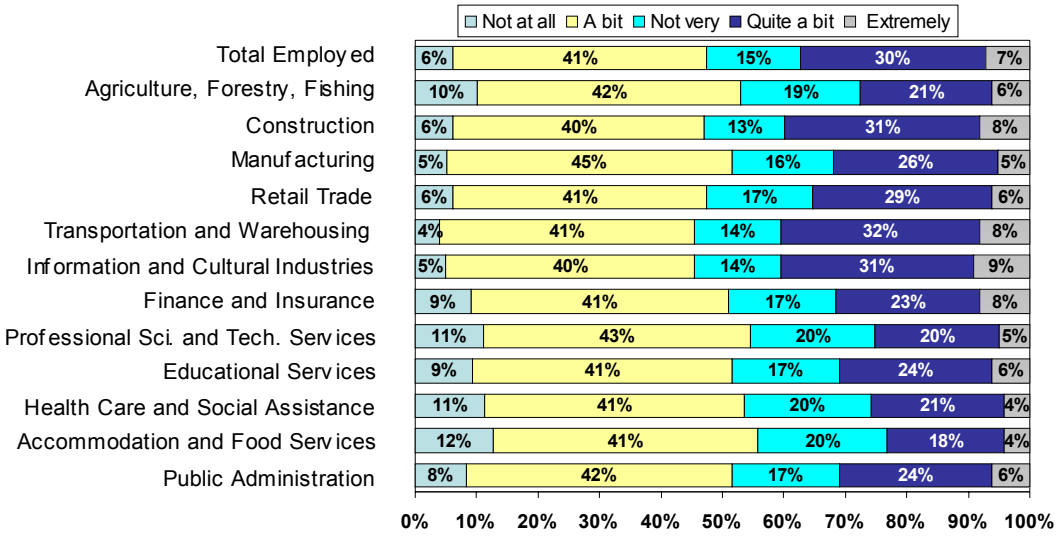
Work hours and schedules can affect the health and well-being of workers. Most of the research on negative effects focuses on three areas: insecurity associated with unpredictable work hours associated with contingent or 'non-standard' work arrangements; shift work; and long work hours. We will focus on the latter two categories outcomes, as the first does not fall within the mandate of this report.[16] Long work hours

and certain kinds of shift schedules are known to create elevated risks for a range of mental and physical health problems.[17]

Stress is one of the more commonly documented outcomes of long work hours. A national survey of workers in Canada, conducted in 2000, found that 37 percent of individuals working 45 or more hours weekly strongly agreed with the statement "my job is very stressful," compared with 22 percent of those working 30 to 44 hours, and less than 17 percent of those working fewer than 15 hours.[18] The experience of chronic stressors (or strain) is used in theoretical models as a predictor of increased risk of mental and physical health problems, including chronic conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, asthma, migraines, and ulcers.[19] Research on work stress relies on worker self-reports because an individual's perceptions of their objective work environment is what mediates how it may affect their health and well-being. As one expert explains, "in order for something in an organization to be a 'stressor,' it must be perceived and labeled as such by the employee."[20]

Job stress is increasingly recognized as a determinant of employee health and productivity. Therefore, policy options to deal with work schedules, workloads and shifts will be addressing factors that contribute to stress. So, it is useful to provide national benchmarks to establish the scope of the problem. The Canadian Community Health Survey, the most reliable source of evidence on population health, measures self-perceived work stress. Figure 8 reports that in 2003, 37 percent of workers experienced their work most days as either extremely stressful or quite a bit stressful.

Figure 8: Self-perceived work stress by NAICS industries with federally regulated employers, Canada, 2003



Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey 2003. Includes employed population. Respondents were asked: "The next question is about your main job or business in the past 12 months. Would you say that most days were (not at all stressful, a bit stressful, not very stressful, quite a bit stressful, extremely stressful)?"

Figure 8 provides a breakdown of the incidence of self-perceived work stress by industry. First note that 7 percent of the workforce reported their work to be 'extremely stressful' most days. Looking at the three industries of interest to the Review, between 8 and 9 percent of these workforces report extreme levels of work stress on a regular basis. While such numbers may appear small, stress can have substantial impacts – health impairment, health benefit plan costs, disability costs, and lost productivity. There are signs that these costs are motivating some employers to develop comprehensive strategies that address underlying causes, including work-time pressures and work–life conflict.[21]

Canadian evidence from the SLID suggests that long work hours do not have to be chronic to be associated with possible negative effects on workers' well-being.[22] Heisz and LaRochelle-Côté identified about 8 percent of paid workers in a 'hi-lo group,' working at least 2400 hours in at least two years during a five-year period, and fewer than 1750 hours in at least one year. This group is more likely than average to be stressed, which is interesting because this outcome is usually associated with overwork. The hi-lo group is the only labour market group to be both stressed and financially constrained. Stress levels among overworked and hi-lo workers are the same. Factors most strongly associated with high stress (i.e., occurring at least once in a very stressful situation over a five-year period) are being a top manager or a single parent of either gender.

The research just described uses a standard model of job stress that views job demands (in this case, work hours) as creating job 'strain,' which in turn increases the probability of negative health outcomes over time. However, long work hours alone can have a direct effect on individuals' health. A meta-analysis of 21 studies of the effects of long work hours on health concluded that the cumulative evidence points to a small but statistically significant relationship between longer hours and increased health problems.[23]

Exploring this causal mechanism, researchers have discovered that working long hours contributes directly to unhealthy lifestyles – such as increased cigarette and alcohol consumption, poor nutrition, and sleeping problems – which are well-documented risk factors in heart disease and serious health conditions. This explains what the Japanese call 'Karoshi,' which means death from overwork. Longitudinal data from Canada's National Population Health Survey (NPHS) shows, for example, that men who moved from a standard workweek of between 35 and 40 hours to longer work hours during a two-year period had twice the likelihood of unhealthy weight gain, compared with men continuing to work standard hours.[24] For women, increased work hours were not associated with unhealthy weight gain, though high job strain was (an odds ratio of 1.8). Compared to individuals continuing to work standard hours, men who moved to long work hours had more than twice the likelihood of increased daily smoking, whereas for women, the odds were more than four times higher. Increased work hours also was associated with higher alcohol consumption for women, but not for men.

Shift work also undermines health and well-being, largely because of disruptions to the body's internal clock (circadian rhythms). Lack of sleep is a common complaint among shift workers, and this can affect quality of life as well as pose safety risks.[25] Beyond these concerns, health problems directly related to shift work include gastrointestinal

disorders, cardiovascular diseases, cancer, and menstrual and pregnancy complications in women.[26] There also is evidence suggesting that parents' shift schedules may affect the well-being of their children.[27]

Canadian research, using the NPHS longitudinal data file, provides detailed evidence between the relationship of shift work and health.[28] To set the context, 30 percent of men and 26 percent of women in this study worked a shift schedule. Rotating and irregular shifts were the most common, with between 10 percent of women and 11 percent of men reporting each type. Only 7 percent of either gender worked evening or night shifts. The study found a greater prevalence of high job strain among workers on evening and rotating shifts.

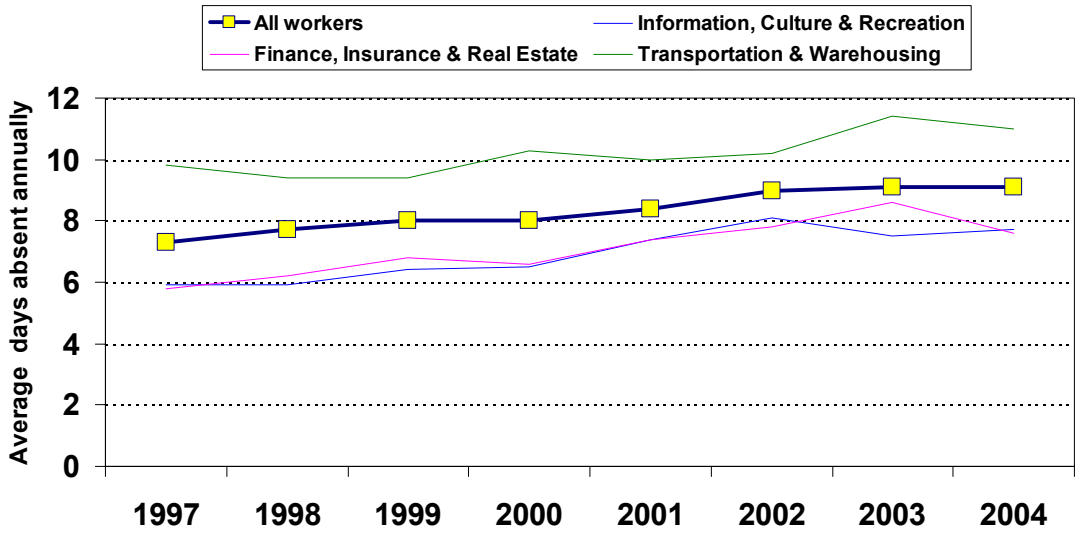
For example, while 17 percent of men in regular daytime shifts had high job strain, this increased to 30 percent among men on evening shifts, and 29 percent among those on rotating shifts. Among women, 29 percent of those working regular daytime shifts had high job strain, and this rises to 40 and 45 percent for women on night and rotating shifts, respectively. For both men and women, working evening shifts is associated with increased risk of psychological distress.

Furthermore, controlling for a range of factors known to influence health outcomes, men who worked evening, rotating or irregular shifts had higher probabilities of experiencing one or more chronic conditions over a four-year period, compared with men who worked days. These conditions included asthma, arthritis, rheumatism, back problems, high blood pressure, migraines, chronic bronchitis or emphysema, diabetes, epilepsy, heart disease, cancer, and stomach or intestinal ulcers. For example, men working evening shifts were twice as likely as those working regular daytime hours to have one or more of these chronic conditions.

Given the correlation between long hours and shifts, on the one hand, and morbidity on the other hand, we would expect this to be reflected in absenteeism trends (see Figure 9). Rising work pressures do not necessarily lead to increased absenteeism, because some workers may feel compelled to work even when sick or injured – a phenomenon called 'presenteeism.'[29]

As a backdrop to the Review, it is relevant that absenteeism is trending upward in the Canadian labour force as a whole and in the three NAICS industries with employers under the Canada Labour Code. This is an important observation, because stable or declining absenteeism would not fit the theories and arguments about the health impacts of work hours, workloads, and shifts reviewed above. As a final point on absenteeism, there was a very small increase in maternity leave absences between 1997 and 2004.

Figure 9: Absenteeism due to illness, disability or other personal reasons (excluding maternity leave), labour force and NAICS industries with federally regulated employers, 1997–2004, Canada



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Historical Review 2004. Excludes maternity leave.

Evaluation of supporting evidence

In Canada, we have good quality data on work hours and work absences for the workforce.[30] We also have several longitudinal studies in Canada that document the impacts of long work hours and certain shift schedules on worker health and well-being. These national findings are corroborated by many studies elsewhere. While the WES provides some information on access to flexible work arrangements, we do not have detailed industry-level data on the prevalence and utilization of alternate work schedules. In other words, there are significant limitations to data on flexible work arrangements in Canada.

There is cumulative empirical evidence showing a relationship between work hours, and work demands, and stress. Validated theoretical models of the stress process link high levels of stress to a range of mental and physical health problems. Work time, variously measured, is one predictor of these individual outcomes. It is widely assumed that work stress related to long work hours and other work pressures is on the rise. While this view has been overstated in the media, the weight of the evidence seems to support the claim that various sources of work pressure increased in the 1990s.[31] Less clear are the emerging patterns for the 21st century. In Canada, we lack reliable national data on the prevalence of work stress over time. However, one study documents increased stress between 1991 and 2001 due to a higher prevalence of work–family conflict, particularly role overload.[32] However, the two studies (discussed in detail below) supporting this conclusion use samples that are not entirely comparable or representative of the national workforce.

To expand this discussion of work hours, it is useful to consider the issue of work intensification. This suggests that in addition to work hours, growing work pressures to work faster and harder may affect worker well-being. The broader context of work has been transformed by the spread of information technologies, deregulation of labour markets, and economic globalization.[33] While solid Canadian evidence on work intensification is lacking, this concept underscores the need to expand our view beyond work hours to include performance pressures and work effort. In short, a 37.5-hour week may place quite different demands and expectations on workers today, compared to their counterparts in the same job and industry 10 or 15 years ago.

Relevance for labour standards review

From a regulatory perspective, the Review Committee should focus on long work hours and shift work. Rationale for considering a range of regulatory options or voluntary guidelines include workers' rights and equity in terms of access to good quality jobs. From a broader policy perspective, arguments for taking action to limit these work arrangements, or to minimize their negative effects, are based on health care and productivity costs that result from a relatively small percentage of workers in jobs requiring workweeks of 50 or more hours or long hours or shift schedules.

These problems are real; what the Review Committee will have to debate is whether a sufficiently large number of workers in the federally regulated sectors are exposed to these risks to warrant intervention. Five percent or less of workers in the three federally regulated industries work shift schedules, which is less than the national average. This trend needs to be monitored for changes over time. But given that some of these workers are operating transportation equipment, public safety may be an additional consideration. The same applies to long work hours, given the prevalence of long work hours in the transportation sector.

In terms of finding incentives to encourage employers to act on any of the problems identified above, one of the major barriers is the fact that managers work long hours on average. In many organizations, managers set informal expectations that other employees should model their behaviour. Because long work hours are the norm for almost 2 out of 5 senior managers, this could reduce their sensitivity to other employees' needs for shorter or flexible work hours. No country has effectively regulated the work hours of salaried managers, however. So, raising awareness of the problems posed by long hours, especially for managers and other knowledge workers, through education and dissemination of best practices, should be considered. This extends the well-established educational role the federal government has played in other employment policy matters.

Decades of research on work schedules has led to the adoption of regulations of the hours of work and shift work. The International Labour Organization has recommended limits to work hours and shifts. The European Union's Directive on Work Time restricts the workweek to 48 hours on average, though workers can choose to work more, and eight hours work in a 24-hour period for night workers, as well as specified daily rest periods

of 11 hours, one day off per week, four weeks paid leave annually, and a right to a rest break if working longer than six hours a day.[34]

The Review Committee should be aware that workers may self-regulate their exposure to shift work.[35] Canadian evidence suggests that most workers do not stay in shift work; and within a two-year period most individuals working shifts had changed their schedule or left the workforce. This is the 'healthy survivor effect,' whereby more robust and resilient individuals withstand the stresses of shift work. From a policy perspective, two salient issues here are lost productivity due to workers leaving the workforce to escape undesirable work schedules, and the social and productivity costs of chronic health conditions and psychological distress among those who stay in shift schedules. Some of the most negative effects of shift work on health can be ameliorated by improved scheduling and consultation with affected employees in this process. Again, these issues, however, suggest support and education for employers, unions, and other labour market stakeholders rather than labour standards regulation.

Work–Life Balance

Key theories and arguments

There is enormous research literature on work–life issues. Typically, researchers have focused on work–family conflict rather than the broader and most positively framed concept of work–life balance. The emphasis has been on trying to understand the prevalence, determinants, and outcomes of a lack of balance. However, some studies do go further, examining factors that contribute to work–family balance and assessing the effectiveness of specific interventions. Work–family conflict is hypothesized to have causes, predictors, and risk factors found at the individual, family role, work role, and work environment levels of analysis.

There are three major theoretical perspectives on work–family conflict.[36] Ecological systems theory examines how a person's development is shaped by the interaction between their characteristics and their environments. More influential in work–family conflict research is role theory, which examines how people meet the expectations of multiple roles. The notion of interrole conflict is central to work–life conflict research. Extending role theory, boundary and border theory looks at how roles in life are separated with boundaries or borders. Permeability and flexibility are key related concepts to examine how boundaries between life domains affect integration, transitions, and conflicts between domains. Increasingly, researchers are able to identify whether the source of conflict is work or family, as well as exploring reciprocal relationships between different types of conflict.

While work–family conflict can be thought of as a result of work stressors, it also has been studied as a stressor since the 1970s. In short, work–family conflict can be conceptualized as either cause or effect in models of stress. Some theoretical models examine how the work–family interface affects individual health and well-being, and in turn how this affects a person's performance in work and family roles.[37] The similarity to

job stress research is illustrated by the emphasis in both areas on how role demands, and control over these demands, affect workers' health and well-being.

A good example of a study that neatly conceptualizes work–life conflict is the 2001 National Work–Life Conflict Study in Canada. Researchers Linda Duxbury and Chris Higgins use several complementary definitions of work–life conflict. Role overload refers to "having too much to do in a given amount of time."[38] Using this definition, 58 percent of their sample reported high role overload. Work-to-family interference occurs when the demands of work make it difficult to meet responsibilities at home and to take care of oneself. In larger organizations, 1 in 4 workers reported that meeting responsibilities at home was a major problem for them. Looking further at the work–family interface, there was considerable negative spillover from work to family. Indeed, only 9 percent of the sample stated that work experiences have a positive influence on their family life. And almost half of respondents working for larger firms reported negative spillover. One in four respondents reported high levels of caregiver strain, from providing support to a disabled or elderly dependent.

The prevalence of work–life conflict will reflect how it is conceptualized – an important caveat when drawing policy implications from this body of research. Many studies of work–family conflict do not separately conceptualize and measure work–family and family–work conflict. Duxbury and Higgins do make this distinction, finding that family-to-work interference is much less prevalent than work-to-family interference.

Overall, Duxbury and Higgins conclude that 1 in 4 employees in their study experienced high levels of conflict between work and family. This conclusion is arrived at by combining work-to-family interference and caregiver strain. If role overload is included in the estimate, then close to 60 percent of employees surveyed experience work–family conflict. Only 10 percent of their respondents reported high levels of family–work interference, and 1 in 3 respondents reported moderate levels.

It is striking how closely the Canadian evidence from the Duxbury and Higgins study parallels research findings in other countries. Three national US surveys on the topic in the 1990s, which focused on 25- to 54-year-olds working at least 20 hours, and with some form of family, found that the prevalence of work–family conflict ranged from 26 percent to 55 percent, depending on the measures used. [39] This fits within the range that Duxbury and Higgins reported for Canada in 2001. Also mirroring the Canadian findings, these three US studies found a much lower prevalence (10 to 14 percent) of family–work conflict, compared to work–family conflict.

There are no studies that focus specifically on employers or employees in federally regulated industries. At the organizational level, one source of benchmarks is Canada's largest employee survey, conducted within the federal public service. The Public Service Employee Survey (PSES) provides insights about work–life balance issues in a large and highly unionized organization that offers a range of work–life policies and programs.[40] Overall, work–life balance is moderate: 25 percent of employees always can "balance my personal, family and work needs in my current job," 43 percent are able to do this often,

and 25 percent do this sometimes. Only 7 percent reported rarely or never being able to balance work and other parts of their life. From an employer perspective, this is a meaningful global indicator of work–life balance, even if it lacks the conceptual and measurement precision of the work–life conflict indicators used by academic researchers.

The PSES also documents a fairly high level of satisfaction with work–life balance in the federal public service, indeed higher than in the US government, where comparable data are available.[41] Yet, some departments do better or worse than average. This underlines the importance of employers documenting the work–life needs of their employees and evaluating how well their work–life policies and programs support these needs within specific operating units.

Work–family conflict determinants and mediators

Research has considered the influence of worker demographics, job characteristics, and work environments on the level and type of work–life conflict. The general pattern found in most studies is that work demands cause work–family conflict, and that family demands cause family–work conflict.[42]

In terms of demographic influences on work–family conflict, three major US studies did not find statistically significant differences by age group, race, and gender per se in work-to-family conflict. Family mediates the experience of work–life conflict. The presence of young children in the household is related to higher levels of family-to-work conflict, and this type of conflict increases among single parents of children under 18. Duxbury and Higgins' 2001 study found that compared to non-parents, male and female working parents had higher role overload, job stress, and family-to-work interference.[43] The prevalence of role overload is especially high among working mothers, who continue to carry a disproportionate share of child-care and domestic responsibilities. For example, 74 percent of working mothers in this study reported high role overload, compared with 55 percent of working fathers and 54 percent of working women with no children.[44]

Regarding job factors that influence work–life conflict, the amount of work time is the strongest and most consistent predictor.[45] Other job characteristics can either elevate or reduce the risk of work–family conflict. These include job security, support from one's supervisor, and support from co-workers. Exposure to work stressors predicts work–family conflict, especially work demands or overload, work-role conflict, work-role ambiguity, and job dissatisfaction. Other work characteristics related to work–family conflict include coordination with others at work and extensive use of communication technology that blurs the boundaries between home and work. Job level shows mixed results, with the higher levels of work-to-family conflict reported by managers or professionals often being a function of their longer work hours.

At the organizational level, cultures that encourage and support work–life balance can have positive or negative influences. Crucial are the norms and expectations for working outside normal hours and potential career repercussions for using family-friendly policies. What matters is not the formal presence of work–family policies, but rather their

use. So, simply documenting the prevalence of such policies tells us little about how they may or may not benefit workers. Evidence consistently shows that the use of specific family-friendly policies helps reduce work-to-family conflict, especially flexible schedules and telecommuting. The latter is shown to reduce both forms of conflict. Dependent-care policies don't seem to reduce work–family imbalance.

Arlie Hochschild's research helps to explain why corporate family-friendly policies alone are not a solution. She documents how modern work life revolves around a 'job culture,' which displaces and diminishes a 'family culture.'[46] Her study of a major US corporation known for its family-friendly policies documents "a cultural contest between work and home."[47] Hochschild reveals the complexities and paradoxes of work–family balance. Most interesting is how the workers in this company opted for work rather than trying to leverage more family time for themselves. They did not resist the incursion of corporate life into their family life. The company had a work–life balance program, but had little real support from managers up the line. For some workers, in fact, work felt more like home, and home more like work. In short, their jobs were an escape from family pressures.

Hochschild's insight for policy-makers is this: workers themselves are at the centre of the work–family balance dynamic. Workers' choices are shaped by – and in turn shape – norms and values that do not support a 'family culture,' as Hochschild calls it. Furthermore, workers may in fact be complicit in the lack of balance.

Other academic studies have identified individual attributes that 'mediate' the impact of work–family conflict on individuals. For example, studies show that the level of psychological involvement in one's job is related to work–family conflict. There is also a line of research on what contributes to 'workaholism.'[48] Furthermore, individual coping strategies also affect how people experience work–life conflict, and those who react to work-role pressures with resignation or avoidance have more difficulties in this regard. These studies are not engaged in blaming the victim; rather, they are simply elaborating on how individuals' attitudes and behaviours interact with factors in their work and family environments to produce work–life conflict.

The CPRN-EKOS Changing Employment Relationships Survey provides a unique perspective on how workers assess work–family balance. The survey does this by calculating the gap between workers' expectations and their actual work experiences.[49] At all educational levels, women place higher value than men on flexibility and work–life balance. University-educated workers of both genders placed considerably higher value on all other forms of job rewards, rather than on flexibility and work–life balance. However, when researchers calculated the discrepancy between the value workers placed on job characteristics and their assessments of their actual job conditions, a different picture emerges. Specifically, 34 percent of men and 38 percent of women had large discrepancies between what they expected or valued, compared to their current job conditions, regarding work–family balance and flexibility. This small overall gender difference increases among university-educated workers.

Outcomes of work–family conflict for employees

There are well-documented outcomes of work–family conflict when this construct is treated as a stressor. For individuals, most outcomes are related to mental and physical health and well-being. In terms of mental health, negative outcomes of work–family conflict include reduced general mental health and well-being, dissatisfaction with life, stress, psychosomatic symptoms, depression, general psychological distress, use of medication, alcohol consumption, substance abuse, clinical mood disorders, clinical anxiety disorders, and emotional exhaustion. Most of these outcomes also hold for family-to-work conflict.

Additionally, high levels of work–family conflict are related to physical morbidity. Both work-to-family and family-to-work conflict predict poor physical health and concurrent multiple chronic health problems. This research locates work–family conflict as a determinant in a psychological strain or distress model, with the outcomes being increased risk of physical health problems. These causal pathways are through mental health and health-related behaviours, and would be expected over longer time periods of exposure to work–family conflict. Practically speaking, people experiencing work pressures may lack time to take care of themselves by eating properly, exercising, and getting enough sleep. Work–family conflict also has, in some studies, predicted obesity.

Canadian evidence on the outcomes of work–family conflict comes from the Duxbury and Higgins 2001 National Work–Life Conflict Study. This study analyzed findings from a survey of over 31,000 Canadian employees in medium (500–999) and large (1000+) organizations in the public, private, and not-for-profit sectors. Half of the respondents were well-educated knowledge workers, and two-thirds were in dual-income families. Moreover, 70 percent were parents, and 60 percent had elder-care responsibilities.

Managers and professionals, compared with other groups of workers, have high stress, role overload, work-to-family interference, and negative spillover. But paradoxically, they also are more committed to their organization, more satisfied with their job, and have better mental and physical health than individuals in other kinds of jobs. There are no detailed industry comparisons provided, but individuals in private sector organizations (compared with the public and not-for-profit sectors) have moderate work–family conflict (this is highest in the not-for-profit sector), higher commitment, and higher job satisfaction. Consistent with other research, gender differences diminish or disappear when job type and specific components of work–life conflict are taken into account, so these really are job-related differences rather than gender differences.

Perhaps most important, 58 percent of the respondents in this study reported high role overload, which results from too many combined demands from multiple roles on an individual's available time and resources. Workers with high role overload, compared with those reporting low role overload, were 5.6 times more likely to experience high job stress; 3.5 times more likely to be absent from work due to emotional, mental, and physical fatigue; and 2.8 times more likely to miss work because of child-care obligations.

The Changing Employment Relationships Study, conducted by Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN) in 2000, provides some further insights about work–life balance. Conceptually, this study offers a broader and more integrated perspective on employment relationships and how these influence the quality of work – of which work–life balance is a key component.[50]

Overall, the strength of an individual's employment relationship reflects the environment in which they work. The CPRN study discovered that a healthy and supportive work environment is the crucial factor, among many, in creating robust employment relationships. Specifically, individuals with strong employment relationships tend to have helpful and friendly co-workers, interesting work, assess their workplace as both healthy and safe, are supported in balancing work with their personal life, and have reasonable job demands. High levels of employee trust and commitment, in particular, are linked to perceptions that their employer cares about them. Strong employment relationships also have productivity benefits in terms of lower absenteeism, higher morale, and better skill development and utilization. Work–life balance is central to this model of employment relationships.[51]

Union membership is associated with weaker employment relationships, as measured in terms of trust, commitment, communication, and employee influence. Employees in more highly unionized workplaces and sectors evaluate their work environments as less healthy and supportive than their peers in non-union settings. However, this union effect could also reflect a higher level of expectations, transparency, and awareness about these aspects of work life in unionized settings. These findings are relevant for the communication and transportation sectors under the Canada Labour Code, which have relatively high levels of unionization. The financial and insurance sector has a 9 percent level of union membership among its employees, and this rises to 25 percent in information, culture and recreation and 42 percent in transportation and warehousing.[52]

Finally, one of the demographic features of the baby-boom generation, compared to earlier generations, is the tendency to delay family formation to a later age, often to acquire further education and establish a career. This delayed family formation, for some, has resulted in the sandwich generation phenomenon: having elderly parents who require care at the same time as having children living at home. As with child care, women are more involved than men in elder care.

The 2002 General Social Survey shows that 27 percent of those aged 45–64 with unmarried children in the home also were caring for a senior, usually a parent or parent-in-law.[53] More than 8 in 10 members of this sandwich generation work for pay. While the majority of those providing both child and elder care were satisfied with the balance they had achieved between care responsibilities and their work, satisfaction with work–life balance was lower than for 45- to 64-year-old workers with no dependent-care responsibilities. Furthermore, in the 12 months leading up to the survey, some 1 in 7 sandwiched workers had cut their work hours, and 1 in 10 had lost income. This group is more likely to feel higher stress levels (70 percent were very or somewhat stressed, compared with 61 percent of their employed peers with no dependent care responsibilities). When asked for a 'wish list' of what would help them the most,

sandwiched workers most frequently mentioned respite care (52 percent) and flexible work/study arrangements (46 percent). We can expect to hear more about this dimension of work–life balance in the future.

To summarize, work–family conflict can have a range of negative consequences. As one team of researchers concluded after reviewing the literature, "…work-family conflict is a stressor that affects many people. In fact, work–family conflict affects more than just the individuals experiencing it; it also directly or indirectly affects family members, co-workers, supervisors, organizations, and communities. Work–family conflict often has been seen as a problem for individual workers. However, given the potentially severe consequences and the widespread impact of work–family conflict, it seems to be a problem best tackled with collaboration from organizations, individuals, and governments."[54]

Outcomes of work–family conflict for employers

In addition to some of the employee outcomes just noted, which also have an impact on the bottom line for employers, there are a range of other costs that employers can incur as a result of high levels of work–family conflict. A recent review of US work–life research examined the following key outcomes for employers: recruitment and retention, individual productivity, employee attitudes and behaviours related to performance, and efficiency.[55] The authors' overall assessment is that the empirical evidence on employer outcomes is mixed, mainly because research is still developing and not yet definitive.

Still, there is cumulative evidence that work–life policies can have positive effects on retention. This will be an increasing focus as employers up their efforts to recruit and retain professionals and other knowledge workers, especially in areas where women comprise a growing proportion of graduates (e.g., business, law, accounting, medicine). While there is some evidence that on-site child care does not improve productivity in terms of reducing absenteeism or improving employee performance, it may contribute to recruitment and retention. Typically, on-site child care can't be justified in a cost-benefit analysis, so firms have on-site child care for other reasons. Another interesting issue is the diffused effect of providing work–family benefits for those employees who do not use them. It can symbolize to all employees that the company cares about employees, which contributes to higher commitment.

Teleworking is one policy that has direct performance benefits, but this may be a result of self-selection rather than this work arrangement per se. There are a few studies showing that giving employees more control over work schedules and time may contribute to process efficiency. Some effects may be industry specific, such as in manufacturing that relies on just-in-time services or where there are peak customer service times. If these can be coordinated with employee work preferences, then efficiency gains may result. The issue is flexibility for whom to do what?

Impacts of work–family conflict on families include lower family satisfaction, decreased involvement in family roles, family-related absenteeism and tardiness, parenting

overload, and less support and assistance from family members. In terms of effects on work, both types of conflict influence psychological reactions to one's job, including overall job satisfaction. Family-to-work conflict is associated with job distress and lower job effectiveness. Work-to-family conflict predicts intentions to quit.[56]

Regarding outcomes associated with job quality deficits, both men and women with large deficits (i.e., their current job conditions do not meet their expectations) on work–family balance and flexibility are more likely to have looked for a job in another firm in the past year, though this is higher among men than women. Furthermore, morale is lower, and absenteeism due to personal illness is higher.[57]

Trends in work–life balance

Is work–life balance becoming more or less difficult to achieve? This is a hard question to answer. There are two approaches to tracking work–life balance trends over time. One is to use a panel design in which the same individuals are tracked over a period of several years.[58] This approach tells us if individuals experience more or less work–life conflict as they move through different life stages, and how these experiences vary over time and across different socio-demographic groups. Another approach is to compare random samples of a population (the national workforce, a province's workforce, or an industrial sector) at different time points. However, both kinds of studies are rare in Canada and elsewhere.

The most thorough analysis of changes in work–life conflict over time in Canada is Duxbury and Higgins' report, *Work–life Balance in the New Millennium*.[59] This report has been widely cited as proof that work–life conflict and work stress increased during the 1990s. The study compares survey data from 1991 and 2001, using samples of organizations that volunteered to participate. This methodology presents limitations. Neither study uses a random sample of the workforce nationally or in one or more provinces.

In short, the study does not use a labour force or employed population sampling frame, and therefore is not representative of the workforce in each of these years. For example, data used in the 2001 comparison is based on employees working in 40 public, private, and non-profit sector organizations with 500 or more employees. Thus, comparisons between the two studies and generalizations to the national labour force must be made with due caution.

Still, these large samples do give the best picture we have in Canada of work–life issues among professionals, managers, clerical and administrative workers, and technical workers in selected major industries. More useful for the Review, perhaps, is that the Duxbury and Higgins 2001 survey included firms in telecommunications, transportation, and financial services. Furthermore, to the extent that the telecommunications and finance sectors have high proportions of knowledge workers, the findings would be more relevant to them than to transportation.

Duxbury and Higgins examined trends in three types of work–life conflict: role overload (too much to do), work-to-family interference, and family-to-work interference. They conclude that all three types of conflicts have increased in the 1990s, at least based on a comparison of their two samples. Role overload increased the most due to rising work demands. Duxbury and Higgins report that the percentage of respondents in these surveys in the high role overload category rose from 47 to 59 percent between 1991 and 2001. There was little change in the high work-to-family conflict category (28 versus 31 percent). High family-to-work conflict increased from 5 percent to 11 percent during this period. In terms of stress, high perceived stress increased from 47 to 55 percent.

On the basis of this study, many Canadians concluded that work–life conflict and work stress are bigger problems now than they were in the past. We do not have gold-standard national data – such as the unemployment rate – on work–life balance determinants or outcomes.

The tentative conclusion from the above research is that for the main groups represented in the Duxbury-Higgins study, work–life balance is harder rather than easier to achieve. An additional problem in extrapolating trends is comparing data from only two years, which raises concerns about immediate contextual effects of economic and labour market conditions.

While several nationally representative surveys corroborate the trend of increased work–life conflict, estimates of the prevalence of work–life conflict and its rate of increase are less than in the Duxbury and Higgins study. Figure 10 compares three General Social Surveys (GSS) between 1990 and 2001 to estimate the prevalence of dissatisfaction with work–life balance among full-time, full-year workers.[60] The proportion of workers feeling somewhat or very dissatisfied with work–life balance rose from 16.7 percent in 1990 to 20 percent in 2001. The largest increases were among women, compared with men, among workers aged 40 and older, and among workers in Ontario, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan.

Figure 11 shows that in 2001, workers in NAICS industry groups containing federally regulated employers had work–life balance dissatisfaction at or above the national average.

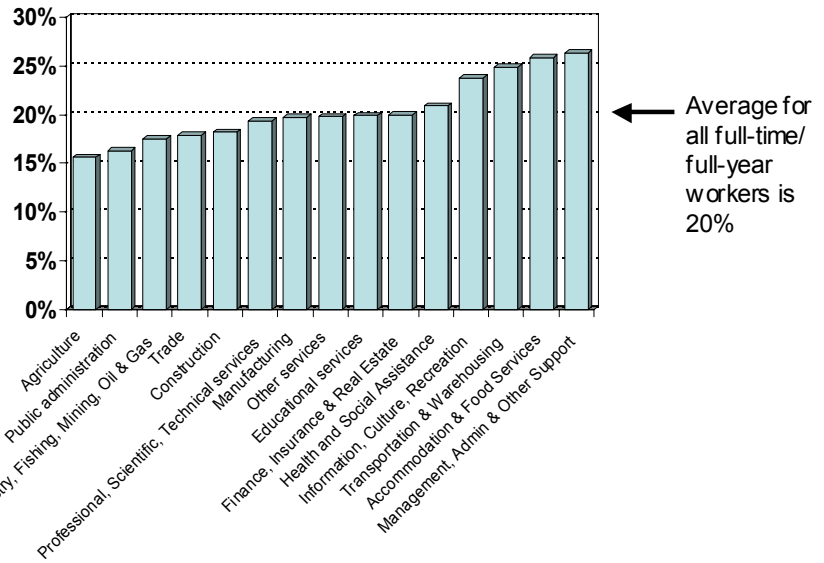
The 2001 GSS also asked workers who reported feeling dissatisfied with work–life balance the main reason why they felt this way. The most frequent reasons given were time related: not enough time for family/spouse/partner/children (46 percent cited this reason), and too much time spent on the job (cited by 42 percent).[61] This finding is further confirmation of the link between work–life balance and work time, suggesting that the Review consider an integrated approach to these issues.

Figure 10: Dissatisfaction with work–life balance among full-time/full-year workers by selected demographic characteristics, Canada, 1990–2001

	1990	1995	2001	Change 1990–2001
Total	16.7%	18.8%	20.0%	3.3%
Men	16.8%	18.3%	18.6%	1.9%
Women	16.7%	19.7%	21.9%	5.2%
Age Group				
15 to 29	17.4%	19.0%	17.4%	0.0%
30 to 39	21.7%	23.2%	23.5%	1.7%
40 to 49	15.9%	18.7%	21.6%	5.8%
50 or older	8.5%	11.3%	15.4%	6.9%
Region of Residence				
Atlantic	17.3%	20.0%	18.4%	1.0%
Quebec	21.9%	18.1%	19.1%	-2.8%
Ontario	13.3%	18.2%	20.2%	6.9%
Manitoba & Saskatchewan	13.5%	17.8%	21.3%	7.8%
Alberta & B.C.	18.2%	20.7%	20.4%	2.3%

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey 2001. Includes workers employed 30 or more hours weekly for 49 or more weeks in the preceding year.

Figure 11: Dissatisfaction with work–life balance among full-time/full-year workers, by industry, Canada, 2001

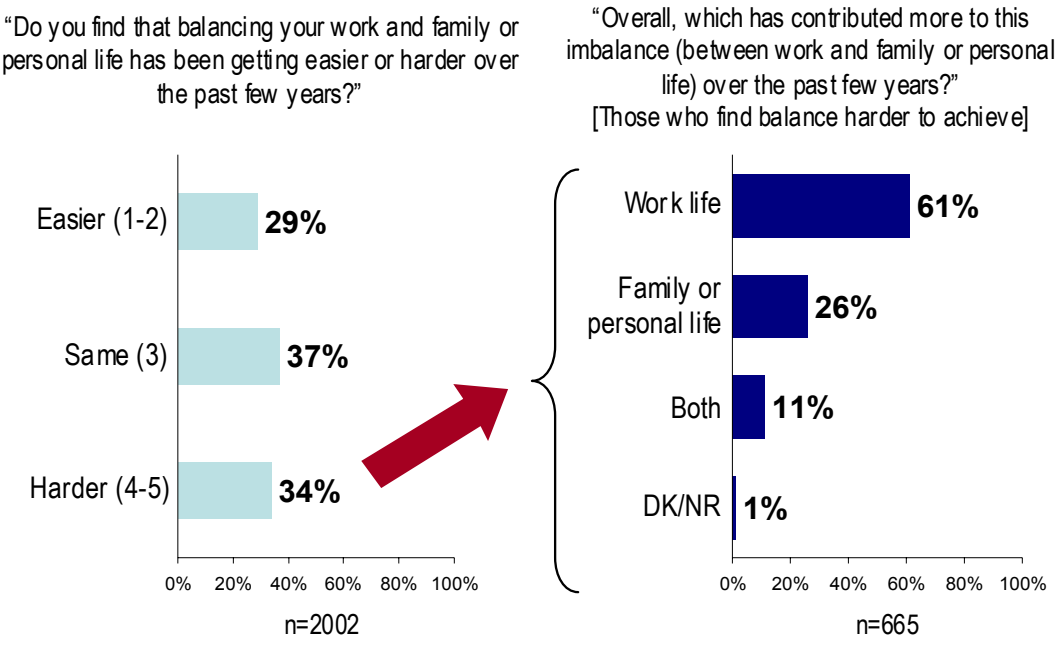


Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey 2001. Includes workers employed 30 or more hours weekly for 49 or more weeks in the preceding year. Utilities excluded because of small sample size. In 1990, respondents were asked: "Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with…the balance between your job or main activity and family and home life?" In 1995 and 2001, respondents were asked: "Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the balance between your job and family and home life?" Response categories for all years were: very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied.

The Rethinking Work 2004 worker survey finds considerable variation on workers' experiences regarding work–life balance, offering a more muted interpretation of changes in work–life balance or conflict in the early 21st century (Figure 12). One in three (34 percent) workers surveyed in late 2004 reported that it has become harder for them to achieve work–life balance over the past few years, while 29 percent have found it easier to achieve. This finding should encourage policy-makers to think in life-course terms, recognizing that individuals' needs change as they move through different phases of life. For employers, it emphasizes that a flexible or 'menu' approach to work–life policies and programs better enables workers to choose what best suits their immediate needs, compared with a 'one size fits all' approach, which can end up being more costly.[62]

The largest group of workers surveyed (37 percent) experienced no change. For those who found it harder to balance work–life, 61 percent attributed this to work-related factors. Far fewer attributed the increased imbalance to family or personal factors (26 percent), or a combination of these and work factors (11 percent). The survey did not, however, explore the prevalence of work–life conflict, or the extent to which it is a problem for individuals. Still, these findings suggest a small increase in difficulties balancing work and family or personal life early this decade.

Figure 12: Recent changes in work–life balance, Canada, 2004



Source: *Rethinking Work*, EKOS Research Associates – Graham Lowe Group national worker survey, fall 2004 (sample n=2002).

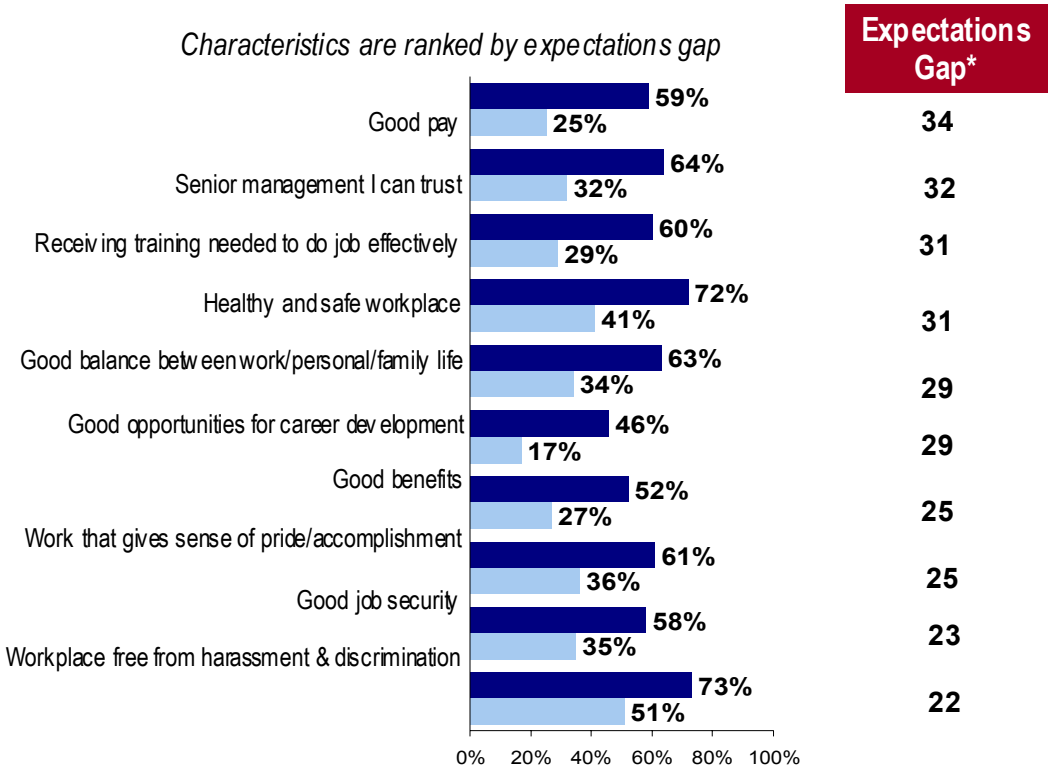
The Rethinking Work survey extends our understanding of the magnitude of work–life conflict. This survey asked workers to rate 21 specific job and workplace characteristics in terms of how important each characteristic is to them– or in other words, how highly valued each is. Later in the survey, respondents were asked to rate their current job on the

same 21 characteristics, in order to determine to what extent they were meeting their expectations. Comparing the difference between these two sets of measures, we are able to calculate an 'expectations gap.' These gaps are reported in Figure 13 for all 21 characteristics.

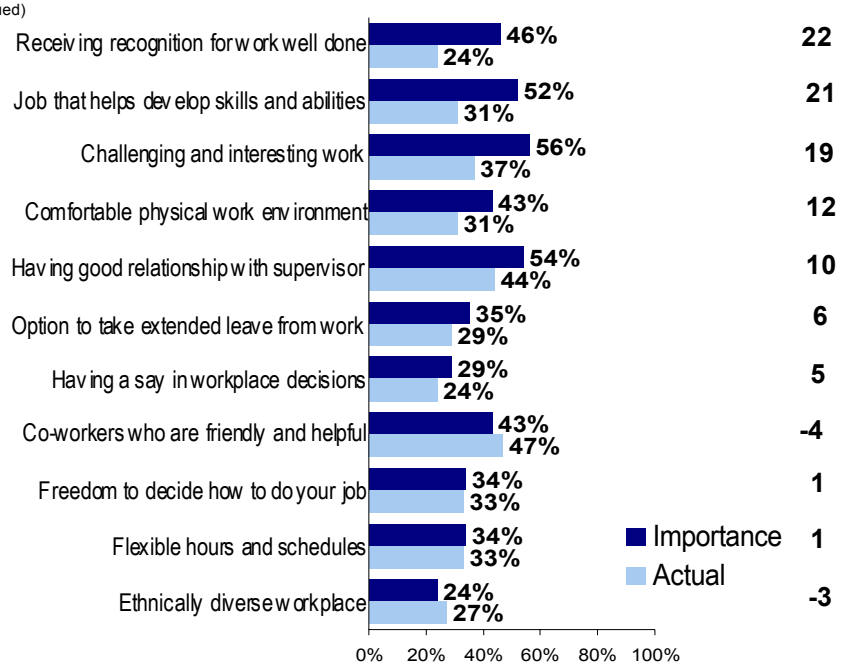
There are three relevant findings for the Review. First, there is a gap of 29 percentage points between the importance Canadian workers place on work–life balance, and the extent to which they can achieve good balance in their job. That is, while 63 percent of survey respondents placed high importance on being able to achieve work–life balance, only 34 percent had achieved 'good' balance in their job.

Second, note the rankings of other characteristics. The pay expectation gap is the largest, followed by a less intangible feature of the work environment: trust. Third, relatively few workers (34 percent) placed high importance on flexible hours and schedules, and, furthermore, their expectations are being met in this regard. While this appears to contradict the scholarly research we have just reviewed, a plausible interpretation is that workers are realists; they rate importance on the basis of what experience has taught them is possible to achieve.

Figure 13: Expectation gaps between importance workers place on job characteristics and current job conditions, Canada, 2004



(Figure 13, continued)



*Difference between the importance of employment characteristic and actual job conditions.

Source: *Rethinking Work*, EKOS Research Associates – Graham Lowe Group national worker survey, fall 2004 (n=2002).

When measuring perceptions, there are other issues to consider. For example, a comparison of nationally representative samples of the workforce from early 2000 and late 2004 found that the proportion of workers placing high importance on having a job that provided "a good balance between work and personal or family life" declined from 70 percent in 2000 to 63 percent in 2004.[63] This finding serves to underscore the caution we must use when interpreting data about changes in work–life trends over time. This could be a result of many factors, including population aging, more effective employer programs, better personal coping strategies, or shifting priorities in terms of what people value in a job.

Regardless of the explanation – and neither survey was designed to provide answers – it is important to consider the salience of work–family issues for individuals and the trade-offs they make in order to achieve overall quality of work life.

Employer policies and practices

Employers (mainly large ones) have introduced two approaches to addressing employees' work–family needs.[64] One approach substitutes services of the family caregiver, the other gives employees more control over their work time through leave provisions and flexibility over work schedules or location. Examples of the former include child-care referral services, subsidized or on-site child care, adult daycare for elderly relatives, emergency back-up care arrangements, and concierge services. Examples of policies giving greater flexibility over scheduling work activities include telecommuting, flex

time, compressed workweeks, reduced work hours, job-sharing, parental leave, and paid family and medical leaves.

Caregiver replacement services and employee flexibility have different implications for employers in terms of demands, costs, and performance.[65] These include on-site child care, which is expensive and has limited benefits for the total employee population; parental leave, which imposes a temporary loss of an employee's contributions but low financial costs; and flexible work schedules, which are low cost but impose burdens on managers to reorganize work and schedules. This range of costs has not been adequately measured in research.

Generally, however, caregiver replacement policies can increase the costs of administrative work. But they do not require changes in how work is organized or how employees are supervised. In this regard, these policies are a form of compensation or fringe benefit. Flexible schedules, in contrast, have low costs and can produce significant benefits to the firm. Family-supportive attitudes and behaviours by front-line supervisors and managers are prerequisites for their success. These same managers, of course, bear much of the burden of the administration and monitoring of such schemes, so it is not surprising that some managers show indifference or resistance.

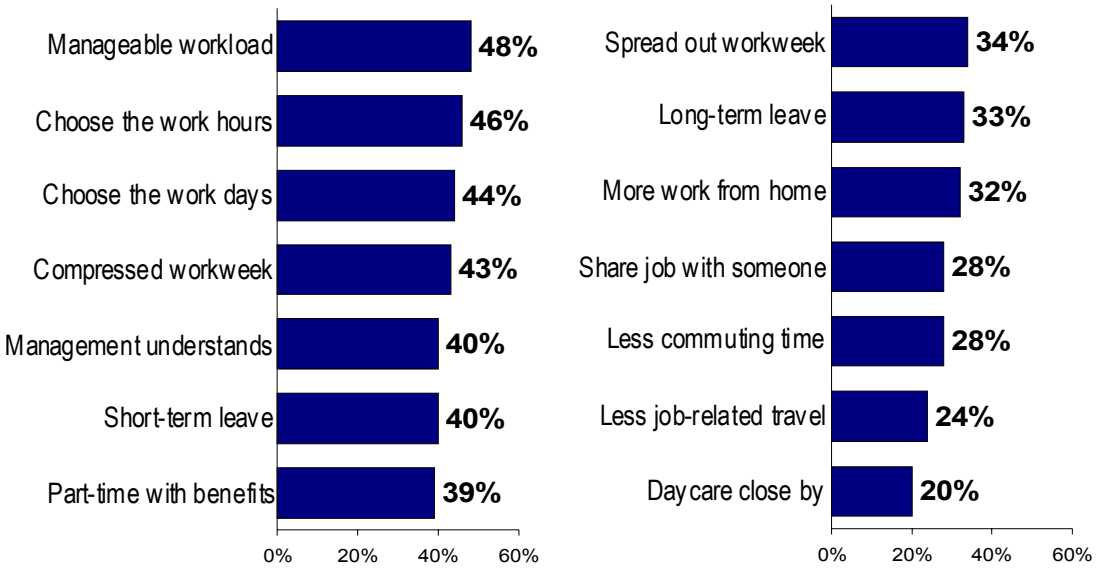
Two main theories have been used to explain why employers adopt family-friendly policies. The rational choice perspective suggests that employers implement family-friendly policies beyond a legally required minimum based on a cost-benefit analysis. This requires a 'business case,' but return on investment data for some work–family policies are not easy to calculate. The most straightforward cost-related measures are absenteeism, turnover, and tardiness. Additional benefits are in the areas of recruitment, retention, and engagement or discretionary effort. These are far more difficult to directly measure and link to the availability of, and participation in, family-supportive policies.

The institutional perspective argues that firms adopt these practices because they are advocated by human resource professionals as good practice. This is a 'follow the leader' effect, and may or may not be based on actual economic benefits. However, firms with human resource departments are also more likely to offer benefits and to consult with employees on work–life needs, and to see people practices as a competitive advantage. So, in these contexts, work–life initiatives are not stand-alone programs but, rather, are integrated into comprehensive human resource strategies.[66]

Evidence from Rethinking Work reinforces the need for employers to address workload and work schedules as root causes of work–life imbalance. Rethinking Work asked respondents for their views on various options to reduce work–life conflict (Figure 14). Among those individuals finding it harder to balance work and family, the single most important change that would help them achieve a better balance is a manageable workload (cited by 48 percent), followed by flexible work hours (46 percent) and being able to choose the days they work (44 percent). Again, these are consistent themes in work–life balance research.

Figure 14: Strategies for achieving greater work–life balance, Canada, 2004

"Which of the following would help you to achieve a good work–life balance?"
[Those who find balance harder to achieve]

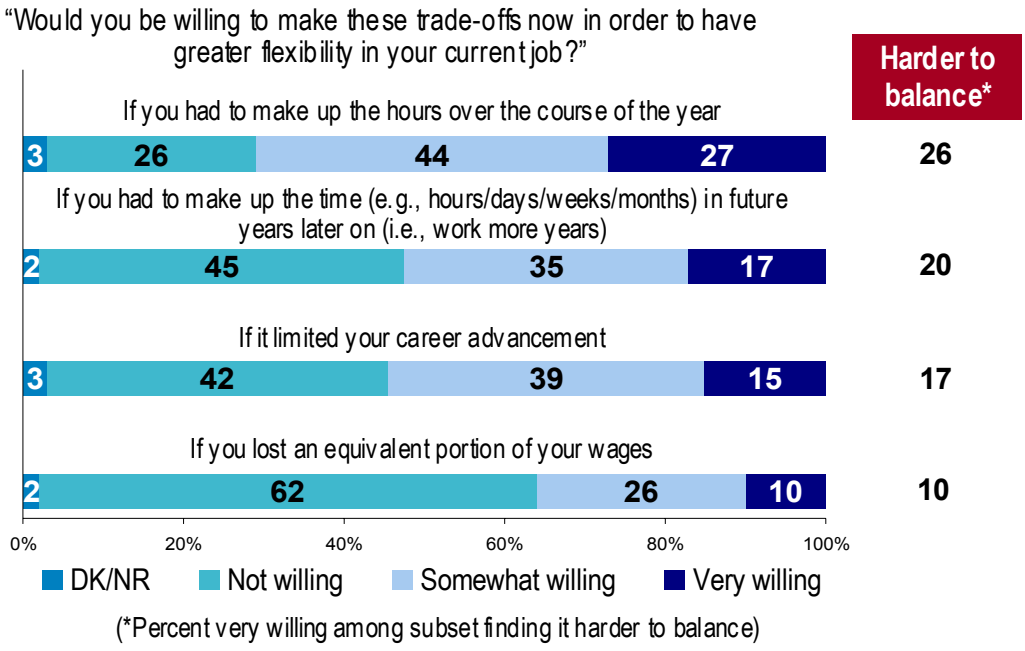


Source: *Rethinking Work*, EKOS Research Associates – Graham Lowe Group national worker survey, fall 2004 (n=2002).
This graph reports multiple responses. Respondents n=665.

However, employers and policy-makers will need to be creative when crafting work–life balance solutions. Rethinking Work found little support, even among those who found it harder to balance work and life, to make trade-offs to achieve job flexibility now (Figure 15). Just over 1 in 4 were 'very willing' to make up hours over the course of the year in return for greater flexibility now, 17 percent were 'very willing' to make up the time in future years, 15 percent were 'very willing' if it meant limiting their career advancement, and 1 in 10 were willing to forego an equivalent portion of their wages.

The most up-to-date review of research in the area of employer responses to work–life balance remarks on the scarcity of accurate data on the prevalence of these family-friendly policies or practices.[67] There often are discrepancies between employer and employee responses, resulting in different estimates of the availability of programs. (Incidentally, this is a standard problem in measuring workplace programs, including training and team-based work, so it does not suggest that work–life issues are in some way more sensitive or contentious than other workplace issues.)

Figure 15: Willingness to make trade-offs to achieve greater work–life balance, Canada, 2004



Source: *Rethinking Work*, EKOS Research Associates – Graham Lowe Group national worker survey, fall 2004 (n= 2002).

Few countries have nationally representative surveys of employer work–life policies, and Canada is fortunate to be an exception in this regard. The Workplace and Employee Survey (WES) asked workers about the availability of a variety of personal and family support programs. Figure 16 provides a general sketch of the extent of family-friendly resources in place in 2001.

Two in five employees reported that their employer offers "personal support or family services." Two of the sectors containing employers under federal labour standards have almost double this national average. Transportation and warehousing is slightly below the national average. Employee assistance, such as counseling, is available to 38 percent of employees, and the same sector trends prevail. Indeed, there is a consistent pattern of greater access to a range of benefits and supports in information and cultural industries, and in finance and insurance. This includes: access to fitness and recreation facilities; non-wage benefits such as pension, life insurance and dental plans; and supplements to EI for maternity or paternity leave. In most of these programs, the transportation and warehousing sector is below the national average.

For work–life balance, it is especially relevant to note that few employees have child-care support (9 percent) or elder-care services (5 percent) provided by their employer. Looking at the three sectors of interest to the Review, note that a slightly higher proportion (13 percent) of workers in information and cultural industries have child-care support, and those in finance and insurance are more likely to have elder-care services (13 percent). Overall, access to these programs is very limited.

Figure 16: Personal and family support programs and non-wage benefits, all employees and NAICS industries with federally regulated employers, 2001

	All employees	Transportation and Warehousing	Information and Cultural Industries	Finance and Insurance
Employer provided personal and family support programs				
Personal support or family services	43%	39%	85%	75%
Childcare (on-site, external assistance, or informal arrangements)	9%	*	13%	9%
Employee assistance such as counseling, etc.	38%	35%	79%	71%
Eldercare services	5%	*	*	13%
Fitness and recreation services	20%	14%	48%	33%
Other personal support or family services	4%	*	*	9%
Non-wage benefits				
Non-wage benefits such as pension plan, life insurance or dental plan	74%	75%	87%	95%
Supplements to EI benefits for maternity/paternity leave or lay-offs	33%	29%	48%	47%

Source: Statistics Canada, Workplace and Employee Survey (WES), Employee sample, 2001. Federal government employees not included in WES sample.
*Sample size too small for reliable estimates.

To emphasize an earlier point, it is crucial to know what percentage of employees in an organization have access to a work–family policy, and how many actually use these provisions. This addresses basic equity issues. Evidence suggests that employees' access to work–family policies is uneven within companies. Professional, technical, and managerial employees are most likely to have access, and in the United States, workers in financial services and health care are more likely than those in other industries to have assistance with child or elder care, and paid maternity or paternity leave. Large organizations, especially multinationals, also are more likely to offer such policies. Generally, the number of work–family arrangements has increased in most industrial nations in the last two decades. However, these arrangements are optional, and their use can be restricted by supervisors, by concerns about negative career repercussions, and by workplace cultures that devalue family responsibilities.

Duxbury and Higgins' evidence of high levels of work–family conflict lead them to conclude that "[t]he majority of Canada's largest employers cannot be considered to be best practice employers."[68] Other experts, however, have detected more employer initiatives being introduced to address work–life issues, though there is no solid evidence of this or the impact of such interventions.[69]

The recommendations of Duxbury and Higgins include improvements in people management practices, especially the work time and work location flexibility and the development of 'supportive managers.'[70] Employees with the greatest work time and location flexibility have lower levels of all three types of work–family conflict, even

when hours of work are controlled. A supportive manager is defined as "one who is a good communicator, focuses on output rather than hours, demonstrates respect for employees and supports their career development."[71] Employees with supportive managers are better able to balance work and family, and have lower levels of all three types of work–family conflict. Also needed are consultations with employees to define their needs and implement supports that will be useful, as well as raising awareness and utilization of currently available programs.

The key point is that a holistic approach to designing interventions is needed, acknowledging that work and family are not separate spheres. As one team of experts observed, "Although many organizations are beginning to implement family-friendly initiatives, such as flextime and provision of child-care facilities, little attention has been devoted to the more fundamental issue of how employment contracts and the very structure of work itself affect individual and family well-being."[72]

Evaluation of supporting evidence

I briefly reviewed conceptual limitations in work–life studies above. Here, I will focus on methodological limitations, which also provide grounds for challenging some of the research evidence. Typically, conceptual and measurement issues are closely linked, because theories and concepts guide the choice of measures used in studies.

One recent review of the literature identified four key measurement problems.[73] One problem is the directionality of work–family conflict. Both directions are not consistently measured, though this has improved in the past decade, and I have given examples of studies that clearly specify causal direction. A second problem is the failure to use parallel questionnaire items when both directions are measured. This is the only way to accurately compare across types of work–family conflict, or to establish the prevalence of each. A third problem is the confounding of causes and consequences, leading some researchers to conclude that different types of causes imply different forms of work–family conflict. For example, it is logical to assume that time, strain, and behavioural causes of work–family tensions are all determinants of work–family conflict, rather than unique variations of it. A fourth problem is the use of appropriate response anchors for measures of work–life conflict. For example, giving statements about work–life balance or conflict that are answered using an agree–disagree response scale do not tell us about frequency or intensity, two important pieces of information for planning policy and program interventions.

There also are methodological weaknesses in the research on employer outcomes related to investments in work–life initiatives.[74] For example, costs are rarely identified or measured, performance improvements are not weighed against costs, performance outcomes are not well defined, family-friendly policies are weakly conceptualized, the intensity of employers' commitment is rarely measured, and effects of work–family policies on organizational performance rely on worker or manager perceptions rather than on direct measures of performance. Some of these limitations stem from the lack of

longitudinal research design, which is the only accurate way to track return on investments.

However, these methodological concerns do not constitute a devastating critique of work–family research. Indeed, many areas of social science are open to similar methodological and conceptual critiques – academics are skilled at leveling these sorts of criticisms at each other's work. Moreover, there are a sufficient number of studies that meet rigorous methodological and conceptual criteria (including those reviewed above) pointing to what would improve work–life balance. For example, a priority need for working parents is control over work time and schedules. From a policy standpoint, we need to ask: How much evidence is enough to warrant action? In response, and criticisms aside, it does seem that the weight and consistency of evidence on the prevalence, causes, and consequences of work–family conflict make it a public policy issue priority.

It is interesting from a knowledge diffusion perspective to view developments in Britain regarding quality of work life. One of the most rigorous longitudinal studies of the relationship between work and health is the Whitehall II study of 7770 British civil servants in London, which began in 1985.[75] The study explains why civil servants in higher job grades have lower chances of disease and ill health than those in lower job grades. It also documents that conflicting work and family demands result in poor mental and physical health for males and females. For women, having lower control at home is associated with higher risk of heart disease. For men, lower control at work is associated with higher risk of heart disease. The epidemiological evidence published from this study has helped to frame work stress and work–life balance as employment policy issues in Britain. The Health and Safety Executive has taken steps (outlined below) to enjoin employers to take preventative steps to alleviate these problems.

There are many questions for a future research agenda. One stands out as especially useful for the policy thinking. Note that most of the studies above focus on work–life conflict. It therefore is important to advance beyond problem identification, exploring the potential benefits of combining work and family. This is called 'work family facilitations,' and is defined as "the extent to which participation at work (or home) is made easier by virtue of the experiences, skills and opportunities gained or developed at home (or work)."[76] This calls for a shift in thinking, beyond the absence of work–family conflict to an understanding of how work and family spheres can positively interact.

Relevance for labour standards review

Despite the above limitations, the consistency of research findings support the conclusion that work–family conflict is a real phenomenon affecting substantial numbers of workers. For employers, there is evidence that high work–family conflict can impose costs in terms of productivity, retention, morale, and employment relationships. Estimates of the direct costs of absenteeism due to high work–life conflict range from $3 to $5 billion annually in Canada.[77] When indirect costs are included, this could rise to $10 billion. Furthermore, there are public costs, which include mental and physical health risks created by work–life conflict. These risks affect national productivity, quality of

individual and family life, and impose burdens on the health care system. So from the employee, and employer and public policy perspectives, work–life conflict is a problem that requires effective and targeted solutions.

A major theoretical theme running through the literature is that work and family are not separate spheres, but are closely integrated. How individuals experience their job and the work environment spills into their family and personal life, and less frequently the influences run in the other direction. From a policy perspective, the quality of life in society and, in particular, the quality of family life, is directly and indirectly influenced by work, and therefore by employer practices.

American analysts of work life observe that the traditional model whereby the role of the state was a third party to the employment relationship ended in the late 20th century.[78] Now, with so many mothers of young children employed, the state is being pressured to develop public policy supportive of working families. By the end of the 20th century, 62 percent of US mothers of children under the age of 6 are employed. These are especially apt comments for Canada, where 70 percent of mothers with preschool children are employed.

The federal government's recent funding commitment for daycare support, through agreements with provinces and territories, may be one effective policy response to caregiver replacement needs of employees. However, a review of employer practices in the United States concluded that: "Limited and unequal access by workers to paid leave, childcare, and flexible schedules is a much larger problem in countries where public policy provides low levels of support for employees with family responsibilities. Unequal access to paid maternity leave or child care is unlikely to be overcome on a voluntary basis."[79]

This is the argument for leveling the playing field through national publicly financed mandated minimum standards for family-friendly policies. So far, however, improvements in productivity, recruitment, and retention are not sufficiently large, or widely known, to motivate employers in many countries to voluntarily introduce adequate work–family policies. Other recommendations flowing from research evidence are at a very general level, but are still worth noting. Additional rationale for a comprehensive policy framework that links work–life balance to other health, wellness, and quality of life objectives is provided by Duxbury and Higgins, who conclude that governments could "reduce health care costs and reduce strains on the health care system by developing policies that make it easier for working Canadians to balance work and family responsibilities."[80] Family physicians would benefit most from this as the first point of contact.

The public policy challenge is finding the appropriate levers and incentives that would encourage employers to provide a range of family-supportive programs and to promote their use. Clearly, more action is required and employers must play a key. As a start, the tangible benefits of providing an environment that supports work–life balance need to be more effectively and widely communicated. As we have emphasized, reducing work–life

conflict depends most of all on a workplace culture that values and supports balance by encouraging managers and employees to make use of family-friendly policies and programs, with no risk of career penalties for doing so.[81]

Based on the evidence, public policy must move in the direction of greater employee choice and flexibility over work time. Employees who experience higher levels of family-to-work conflict want more work flexibility, and may do this informally. A smaller percentage of employees experience family-to-work conflict, and this group places more importance on family-supportive programs in their workplace. The Whitehall II study recommends maximizing time spent at home through flexible work hours as a way of reducing stress through better work–life balance. Also recommended are better leave arrangements to help care for children and the elderly, and reducing work-related commuting by working at home.[82] There is long-standing evidence based on organizational case studies that flexible benefits and flexible work schedules better met the needs of a diverse workforce, and are cost-effective for firms.[83]

A challenge for the Review is assessing the consequence of leaving work–life balance and work-time issues to the discretion of employers. Two basic questions arise: Should the state set minimum standards? And should the state provide work–family supports to those groups of workers who are unlikely to benefit from employer policies? These groups include the self-employed, workers in small firms, workers in temporary and contract jobs, and workers in low-wage jobs and/or in marginal industries and regions.[84] The risk, of course, is that the diffusion of work–life policies and programs will parallel the current distribution of 'good jobs,' simply reinforcing advantages already accruing to more privileged groups of workers. For the Review, it is important to know the distribution of small firms, non-standard workers, and self-employed in the regulated sectors as it crafts response to these concerns – issues that are beyond the mandate of this paper.

Overview of Relevant Regulations in Other Jurisdictions

An international perspective on Canada

Assessing the impact of public policy options at the individual and organizational levels is difficult. Cross-national comparisons of differences in legislation and social policy support for work–family balance are confounded by variations in national cultures, political dynamics, and economic conditions. That said, there nonetheless are insights the Review can draw on from comparative research and from recent policy innovations in several countries.

To begin, it is useful to locate Canada in an international context regarding work hours and work–life balance.[85] Based on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) data for 2001, Canada ranked fourth out of 15 countries in average annual hours worked. The 15 country average is 1654 hours, with Canada at 1790, and Spain, the United States and Greece higher. There appears to be a correlation between work hours and the level of unionization in a national workforce, with highly unionized

countries having shorter work hours. Averages are misleading, so it is important to look at the percentage of workers who work 40 or more hours per week. Among 17 OECD countries, 54 percent of workers work 40 or more hours weekly, and Canada is right at this average. In the United States, 77 percent of the workforce work 40 or more hours weekly.

The same study also examines national differences on work–life balance using comparable indicators from the 2000 European Study on Working Conditions and the EKOS Research Associates' 2002 Rethinking North American Integration Survey. In Canada, 45 percent of survey respondents reported that their work hours fit in "very well" with their family or social commitments. This is above the 17 country average of 38 percent. This finding can be interpreted two ways. From an international comparative perspective, a somewhat higher proportion of workers in Canada seem to be able to achieve a fit between work hours and non-work commitments, despite working longer hours and having fewer statutory paid vacations than workers in European countries. We must bear in mind, however, that the survey question focuses specifically on work hours per se – not workload, role overload, or stress – and that workers' responses in each country would be filtered through local contexts, norms, and expectations. From a Canadian perspective, most relevant is that less than half of workers in this survey have achieved the ideal fit between hours of work and family or social commitments – a finding that is not inconsistent with earlier findings about the prevalence of work–life conflict.

Taking these and other conditions into consideration, it is interesting to note that Canada ranked seventh of 17 countries in the percentage of workers reporting being 'very satisfied' with their working conditions in their main paid job. Some 40 percent of Canadian workers surveyed gave this positive rating, compared with a 17-country average of 33 percent. This was slightly higher than Canada (43 percent) despite long work hours. While no single country stands out as having an overall high level of job quality, Scandinavian countries, especially Demark, Ireland, and the Netherlands, tend to rank well above average. A useful question for labour market stakeholders in Canada to collectively discuss is whether a 40-percent positive rating is good enough.

Work schedules and work time

National preferences certainly influence policy responses to work–family needs. Indeed, work-hour variations internationally, and within one country over time, reflect individual and employer preferences, as well as technology, industrial relations, and the business cycle. National differences in cultural values, politics, and regulatory frameworks influence work arrangements and work time. Illustrative of these differences is France's attempt to legislate a 35-hour workweek, the relatively high proportion of part-time employment in the Netherlands, the low rate of female labour force participation in Japan, and extensive parental leave provisions in Scandinavian countries.

One study of these issues has particular relevance for the Review, raising interesting questions about what constrains the choices regarding work hours. Researchers compared

actual and preferred working hours using British panel data.[86] Their objective was to understand to what extent work-hour preferences and availability of desired schedules influence future labour market behaviour. The only way to test this is by using panel data, so they relied on a question asked in a 1991–1999 panel survey: "Thinking about the hours you work, assuming that you would be paid the same amount per hour, would you prefer to work fewer hours, work more hours, or the same number of hours?" Canadian research has addressed a similar question, but using cross-sectional data that do not permit an analysis of how preferences influence labour market behaviour.[87]

The British study concludes that, while most workers are satisfied with their work hours, 'a considerable minority' face constraints. These workers fall into two groups: the over-employed, who want to work fewer hours, and the under-employed, who want to work more hours. Workers from both groups who changed jobs and employers over time are better able to change their work hours. In other words, workers can adjust hours in line with preferences, but this has implications for employers, many of whom do not offer the flexibility that workers desire. This last point especially applies to men. Over-employed women are more likely than men in this situation to leave their jobs.

There are some interesting parallels here with the recent Statistics Canada study using SLID, noted above, which suggests that some workers do move from being over-employed into jobs with fewer hours. However, SLID does not provide information on work-hour preferences. From a policy perspective, this research raises questions about the choices workers make to change jobs in search of suitable work hours within a full-employment economy. In many parts of Canada, the lowest unemployment levels in 25 years have provided employees with more choices. However, the very same economic conditions present incentives to employers to increase work hours. While changes to labour standards must fit all phases of the business cycle, the current scenario suggests that choice for fewer or more flexible hours could be further constrained at the cycle's peak.

Work–life balance

In the area of work–life balance, public policy internationally tends to address child care and parental leave.[88] There are national variations in worker behaviour that can be attributed to different public support for work–family balance. A major policy focus for work–life balance is on providing adequate support for child care. This approach is seen as contributing to the well-being of children and families.[89]

Public child care in France, compared to Germany, is linked to higher labour force participation of mothers in France. In comparing Norway and Sweden, fewer mothers in Norway are in the labour force in large part due to more limited maternity and parental leave policies. Since the 1970s, Sweden has developed a generous combination of policies to support parents, including the right to return to one's job, public child care and elder care.

The United States and United Kingdom have the least supportive policies of industrialized English-speaking countries, though the United Kingdom has had to adopt EU directives on paid maternity leave, which provide 14 weeks of paid leave at 90 percent of weekly pay and then a flat rate for the remaining time.

In Australia, where there is little state intervention in work–life issues, industrial tribunals that operate nationally have encouraged the introduction of 12 months of unpaid parental leave following the birth or adoption of a child, and paid short-term leave to help employees care for ill family members.[90] However, paid maternity leave is provided by relatively few employers – less than 15 percent.

In the absence of a high floor established by public policy, work–life balance policies and practices are left to individual employers. This results in wide variation and inconsistencies and, therefore, unequal access among employees within and across firms to these provisions. Without a comprehensive public policy framework that provides adequate minimum standards, firms are less likely to do anything because they will incur higher costs than their competitors.

Leading practices

There has been increased interest among employers in Europe for more flexible ways of organizing work and work time. The European Commission (EC), and the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, has conducted consultations and research, and issued policy directives in this area.[91] The EC is seeking ways to reconcile employers' need for increased workforce flexibility and adaptability with workers' needs for job security and more flexible working time arrangements.

There is no consensus definition of flexibility used in these European discussions. However, as a policy concept, flexibility covers a range of work organization and employment practices, including the use of temporary and contract workers, to subcontracting and outsourcing, and internally giving workers more choice over work schedules and time, to performance based pay systems, and work organization such as multi-skilling, job rotation, and other forms of functional and organizational flexibility. Given high union density in most European countries, there is emphasis on developing appropriate collective bargaining frameworks that enable flexibility. Concerns about the impact of flexible work practices on health and safety, worker access to training and career development, and quality of work life are all part of the discussion in Europe.

The European Working Time Directive, which came into effect October 1, 1998, restricts an individual's work hours to an average less than 48 hours per week over a 17-week period. Workers can voluntarily work more. In August 2003, this has been extended to excluded sectors, such as transportation. However, researchers suggests "few companies have changed their attitude towards the culture of working many hours."[92] So it is unclear how effective this regulation actually is in regulating the length of the workweek. National governments must adopt the directive through legislation to make it enforceable.

Available research evidence suggests that progress is slow and uneven across European Union member countries.[93]

Of all the European initiatives, perhaps those in the United Kingdom are most relevant for the Canadian situation. The UK government's approach to a range of quality of work–life issues has been to make a 'business case' to encourage action by employers.[94] The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in the United Kingdom has been addressing workplace stress since the mid-1990s.[95] Work–life balance and work time are integrated within this approach. The HSE defines stress as "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them." The focus of HSE-sponsored research and recommended interventions by employers is to reduce exposure to excessive pressure, which leads to stress, resulting in ill health for workers, reduced performance, and increased costs for employers.

Recent research by the HSE in the United Kingdom identified about half a million individuals (a relatively small number in the context of the United Kingdom's workforce) who experience high levels of stress, which they believe makes them ill. However, there are up to 5 million workers who report feeling 'very' or 'extremely' stressed by their work. The productivity costs to employers are documented in terms of absenteeism. The HSE estimates a total of 12.8 million working days are lost to stress, depression, and anxiety, though not all of this is work related.[96]

The HSE is actively trying to partner with employers to help them reduce the level of work stress, raising awareness that stress is a serious organizational problem and therefore a management issue. It has issued voluntary Management Standards for Stress, which includes practical advice on actions managers can take, stress risk assessments, and ways to monitor progress.[97] The HSE is focusing on implementing the Management Standards in five sectors (health, education, central government, local government, and financial services) because these industries have the highest incidence and prevalence of stress. The 1999 Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations place a duty on employers to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of their employees and to assess health and safety risks. These duties cover work-related stress.

However, there is a cautionary tale here. At the same time that UK public policy is promoting these improvements in working conditions, it also is encouraging employers to adopt 'high performance' management practices to increase competitiveness and productivity. Some of these practices may contribute to longer work hours, work intensification, stress, and work–life imbalance.[98]

There are indications that employers are taking some responsibility for addressing quality of work–life issues. The Confederation of British Industry sponsored a handbook for employers, *Managing Workplace Stress. A Best Practice Blueprint*.[99] The goal is to educate 200,000 private sector employers in the United Kingdom about the individual and organizational risks posed by stress and, further, to provide practical tools for auditing stress in an organization and designing interventions. Such employer initiatives

are in part a response to the government's goal of reducing workplace stress – and attendant sickness absenteeism and reduced productivity. While there is no evaluation of the effectiveness of this initiative in terms of raising awareness of workload, work schedules, and work demands that contribute to stress, this sort of educational resource legitimizes the issue as a business priority.

Unions, too, can play a role in work–life policies. However, research suggests that their direct involvement varies widely internationally, and the impact of collective bargaining in this regard is not uniform.[100] In Europe, in contrast to North America, unions have championed shorter workweeks and attempted to limit employers' expanded use of flexible scheduling. Generally, unions have philosophical difficulty supporting policies promoting individual flexibility in work schedules because this makes it more difficult to monitor overtime use and managerial favouritism.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The research I have reviewed in this report provides an empirical justification for innovative policy development around three issues: long work hours, shift work, and work–life conflict. The overall conclusion is that long-term exposure of workers to excessive work hours, evening and rotating shift schedules, and high levels of work-to-family interference elevates their risk of mental and physical health problems. Additionally, there are productivity and human resource costs to organizations in which these conditions prevail. Moreover, it is clear from the research that solutions to these potential problems must address workload and job demands, employee choice and flexibility in work hours and arrangements, organizational cultures, and the behaviours of managers at all levels.

This synthesis of research presents the Review with an agenda that goes well beyond the mandate of Part III of the Canada Labour Code. The Review provides a timely opportunity to engage stakeholders in discussions about shared responsibilities for addressing work–life and work time issues. This is all the more important, given that limited scope of the Canada Labour Code to address most of the major issues raised above. All of the major issues we have considered are large, systemic, and complex. Realistically, legislation should be viewed as one element of a multi-pronged, multi-stakeholder strategy.

Based on the evidence, arguments, and practices discussed in this paper, I offer the following recommendations to the Federal Labour Standards Review Committee for consideration:

1. From a regulatory perspective, the Review Committee should focus on long work hours and shift work. While a minority of Canadian workers are exposed to the risks of workweeks exceeding 50 hours, there is sufficient concern about the negative individual, family, social, and economic consequences to warrant intervention. The Canada Labour Code's maximum work-hour week is set at 48 hours, which is typical in Canadian jurisdictions. At issue is how to deal with exceptions to this, and how to

educate both workers and employers about the economic and social costs of working beyond this maximum, or stated differently, the benefits of compliance.

2. More generally, the challenge for the Review Committee is constructing a comprehensive framework that integrates regulation, education, and compliance. This is the only way to ensure that legislated standards on work time and family-related leave actually guide workplace practices. The Review Committee therefore must continuously look beyond the legislation per se, asking what else needs to be done to encourage and support the use of existing, or revised, standards.

3. The Review Committee should explore how the federal government can raise awareness of the problems posed by long hours through education and dissemination of best practices. Given the well-documented patterns of long work hours in diverse occupations (i.e., senior managers, some professions, transportation and equipment operators), a targeted approach may be appropriate. This extends the well-established public education role the federal government has played in other employment policy matters.

4. The Review Committee should consider issuing best practice guidelines for shift work. Some of the most negative effects of shift work on health can be ameliorated by improved scheduling and consultation with affected employees in this process. The appropriate role of the federal government is to provide support, such as educational resources, and possibly shift planning tools, for employers, unions, and other labour market stakeholders.

5. Labour standards is a small component of a comprehensive policy needed to support work–life balance for Canadian workers. This calls for horizontal policy-making, given that work–life issues affect the well-being of children and families, the health care system, and productivity. The Review Committee should promote this overall approach in its report.

6. The Review Committee needs to address ways of encouraging, for the long term, the creation of workplace cultures that support the use of maternity and parental leave, and compassionate care leave, with no career penalties. Beyond minimum standards set by legislation, the bar can be raised higher by promoting voluntary employer codes of conduct based on best practices for family-friendly workplaces, and through public recognition of excellence in these areas.

7. The federal government's recent funding commitment for child-care support, through agreements with provinces and territories, is an effective policy response to some of the caregiver replacement needs of employees. The Review Committee should recommend monitoring and accountability for public investments in child care to ensure that the needs of workers and their children are being adequately met.

8. Elder care is becoming a growing area of work–family need. The Canada Labour Code's compassionate leave provisions should be extended to support ongoing care

requirements of elderly dependents. The Review Committee should explore ways to support, through legislated provisions, increased access to short-term leave, flexible schedules, and other alternate work arrangements for employees with any form of dependent-care responsibility.

9. The Review Committee should give separate consideration to targeted policy and program interventions required to address the work–life needs of the self-employed, workers in small firms, workers in temporary and contract jobs, and workers in low-wage jobs and/or in marginal industries and regions covered by federal labour standards.

10. Work stress is a constant theme in the research on work time and work–life balance. Building on this research base, it would be timely for the Review Committee to articulate the ways in which long work hours, certain shift schedules, work–life conflict, and lack of control over work time and demands undermine key public policy goals related to quality of life, productivity, and population health. Part III of the Canada Labour Code could provide workers more control and choice regarding work hours and schedules, balancing employees' needs for this type of flexibility with employers' needs for flexible staffing. The Committee should point out the implications of these issues for Part II (occupational health and safety) of the Canada Labour Code.

11. Currently in Canada, relevant measures of work hours and schedules, work–life balance, human resource practices, worker health and wellness, and quality of work life are scattered across a wide range of national surveys. Canada needs an integrated approach to monitoring and reporting changes in work environments and job quality. The Review Committee should recommend that the federal government sponsor a regular national survey similar to the European Foundation's Working Conditions survey.

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