



life / work
balance

QUALITY
OF WOMEN'S
LIVES SURVEY

FINDINGS

Updated:
SEPTEMBER 2011



national
union



KEY FINDINGS
of the
**Quality of Women's
Lives Survey**

National Union of Public and General Employees

Updated September 2011



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executive summary

Executive Summary

The act of juggling work and home responsibilities is an issue for all working Canadians and studies show it is getting more and more challenging.

The workplace has changed, and the employment rate for women has increased substantially in recent decades. As of 2010, women in their so-called prime working years aged 25 to 54 have experienced the greatest shift, with 82% now in the paid labour force, compared to 52% in 1976.¹ Although women have taken on more paid work, they have not seen a corresponding drop in unpaid work in the home, making life / work balance more stressful for women.²

Numerous studies and data compiled by Statistics Canada make it clear: women are experiencing higher levels of time stress and life / work conflict than men. Women involved in child care and / or elder care have the highest levels of stress and the highest number of unpaid work hours.³ Women still perform the larger part of household chores, child care and increasingly provide care to their parents and other relatives.⁴



Although statistics on time use show that ‘the gap is closing’ between men and women in terms of hours spent on housework, a more detailed analysis of the numbers in 2011 showed that most of the increased share of the housework is occurring in younger men, so-called generation “Y” between the ages of 20 to 29. The study also showed the gap widening again when children enter the picture.⁵

The current economic crisis can be expected to worsen the situation for women. A 2010 study of Ottawa hospitals revealed three out of five workers were at risk of burnout due to excessive demands put on them after decades of spending cuts and downsizing and even now they are bracing for more cuts.⁶

The Quality of Women’s Lives survey conducted by NUPGE reveals that life / work balance is a significant issue for the membership (89% of survey respondents were NUPGE members) and demonstrates that women are experiencing high levels of stress as they try to balance work with home responsibilities.

KEY FINDINGS

OF THE NUPGE QUALITY OF WOMEN’S LIVES SURVEY

— I —

Women are experiencing high levels of life / work conflict.

— II —

Life / work conflict is having significant impacts on women’s lives; they report stress, health problems and injuries, missing work, losing sleep, missing important family events and having little time for exercise.

— III —

Key issues identified include access to affordable, regulated child care and elder care, unequal division of labour at home and lack of control over time (no paid time off for family responsibilities, long hours and lack of flexible hours).



s u m m a r y

Summary of Survey Findings

Profile of Survey Respondents

- The majority of respondents are in the 36-51 age group; the second highest age group are 18-35; the smallest age group is 52+.
- All provinces and territories are represented. The response was lowest in Quebec and highest in Newfoundland.

Type of Paid Work

- 89% of respondents are unionized workers
- 74% hold permanent full-time jobs
- 20% of respondents are shift workers
- 11% work in temporary full-time positions
- 9% are working in permanent part-time jobs
- 4% hold on call/casual jobs
- 1% work in temporary part-time positions
- 1% are self employed

Caregiving

- 58% of respondents are parents or caregivers of at least one child
- 24% of parents surveyed are single parents
- 18% of respondents are providing care for at least one other family member, whether a grandparent, parent or sibling
- 12% of parents care for at least one child with special needs

Equity Seeking Groups

- 6% identified as Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender workers (LBT)
- 5% identified as workers with a disability
- 3% identified as workers of colour
- 2% identified as Aboriginal workers
- 1% identified as immigrant workers

I. How much life / work conflict are women experiencing?

High levels of stress and life / work conflict were reported

- 62% say that work interferes with family
- 48% say that the stress of work / life conflict is getting harder
- 46% of women reported feeling “quite a lot” of life / work conflict
- Only 14% report things getting easier

Women report working longer hours and taking work home

- 90% reported that managing stress was a problem for them
- 56% said they check their work email at home
- 50% of women reported taking work home
- 45% receive work related phone calls at home
- 41% work on weekends

II. What impact is life / work conflict having on women's lives?

Health Impacts

- 90% of women surveyed felt overly stressed by life / work conflict
- 78% lose sleep due to family stress often or regularly
- 75% cited illness as a major challenge when balancing life and work
- 72% of women said they miss out on time for exercise
- 70% lose sleep due to workplace stress
- 34% of survey respondents said they suffered an illness or injury as a result of work pressure in the last six months

Impacts on Family and Community Life

- 83% (of parents) miss out on school events
- 68% (of parents) miss their children's bedtime
- 58% miss out on social events
- 49% miss family gatherings
- 40% miss sporting events
- 39% miss out on holidays
- 36% of women surveyed said their life / work conflict is limiting their ability to work for their union

Absenteeism

- 76% reported missing work due to family concerns in the past six months
- 38% missed work four or more times in the last six months
- 12% reported missing work more than 11 times in the past six months

III. What are the key issues for women?

1. Unpaid Caregiving

- 58% of respondents are parents of at least one child
- Between 35% and 50% perform some caregiving duties for elders or dependents
- 18% take care of elders or relatives other than children, in their home
- 12% of survey respondents provide care to a dependent with special needs

Types of Care Provided:

Providing emotional support	49%
Accompanying to a doctor's appointment	48%
Running errands	45%
Grocery shopping	39%
Household chores	38%
Cooking	37%
Handling financial responsibilities	34%
Dressing	19%
Feeding	14%

Concerns Facing Caregivers:

- 28% reported missing work due to problems with elder care or child care
- 25% of respondents had difficulty finding care during the hours needed (child care or elder care)
- 23% of respondents were concerned about lack of quality elder care services
- 23% were concerned about the cost of quality care
- 23% of respondents reported transportation problems

2. Lack of Control over Time

Biggest Challenges in Balancing Work and Home:

Long work hours	64%
Lack of flexible hours	62%
Missing work to care for a sick family member	55%
Lack of paid leave for family emergencies	48%
Mandatory overtime	31%

Workplace Policies:

- 58% of survey respondents feel their employer should do more to help balance work and home responsibilities

Most Wanted Workplace Policies:

Flexible work hours	77%
Paid leaves for personal reasons	75%
Paid family illness leave	72%
Legislation to increase the amount of vacation time	69%
The ability to work from home	62%
Worksite seminars on stress, nutrition and fitness	58%
Increasing the number of staff in your workplace	57%
Reduced workweek (legislated)	47%
Ability to move to part-time	46%
Job sharing	45%
Cap on overtime	23%

3. Unequal Division of Labour in the Home

- 64% of women surveyed cited 'lack of shared responsibilities at home' as one of the biggest challenges they face in balancing work and life

NUPGE's survey found that a significant number of women are still doing *most* (75% to 100%) of the household chores:

- 72% of women do most of the house cleaning
- 66% of women do most of the cooking
- 66% of mothers reported doing most of the child care



b a c k g r o u n d

Background Life / work Balance in Canada

The Time Crunch

When it comes to life / work balance, most of us are worse off than we used to be. Canadians are experiencing a time crunch that has been getting worse over the past 15 years, says a 2010 report from the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW).

“People are struggling to meet the competing demands of a workplace that can reach out to them 24/7, caring for children and aging parents, and their own need to refresh body and mind. As individuals and as a society we are paying a steep price for this time crunch. We’re less healthy, both physically and mentally, and we have less time for leisure and relaxation with family.”⁷

Roy Romanow, chair of the CIW advisory board and former Saskatchewan premier

Recent data from the General Social Survey shows Canadians aged 24-54 are working longer hours, on average 8.8 hours per day, which is about 200 hours more per year than in 1986.⁸

The current economic crisis can be expected to bring more challenges – studies show that life / work conflict increases markedly as workers take on the extra load from downsizing and restructuring.⁹

The workplace has changed; there are fewer stable full-time jobs and more employers are outsourcing or employing casual labour. Hours of work have increased, and technological changes such as blackberries and laptops mean that employees are bringing more work home, and expected to be on-call even when off-duty.¹⁰

More cutbacks are expected due to the global financial crisis, and workers are already struggling to cope with the competing demands of understaffed organizations. A 2010 study of life / work balance in health care workers at four Ottawa hospitals found that three in five workers are at risk of severe burnout from work-related stress. Excessive demands placed on workers have a negative impact on organizations as well, because of increased absenteeism, lower productivity and greater staff turnover.¹¹

Workers have become more stressed, physical and mental health has declined, and so has satisfaction with life. On the whole, jobs have become more stressful and less satisfying, and employees are more likely to be absent from work due to ill health.¹²

Life / work conflict occurs when the demands of the job interfere with the time workers need to fulfill responsibilities to their families, do the work that needs to be done at home, and pursue healthy activities such as exercise and sleep. Household responsibilities include varied tasks such as housework, home and yard maintenance, child care, putting food on the table and shopping for necessities. It also includes managing the health and wellbeing of others in our care, which increasingly includes elderly relatives.

The number of roles people take on, as employee, parent, elder caregiver or spouse, all add up to 'role overload' which is another big factor in the time crunch. The more roles we play, the greater our stress.¹³

Life / work Balance is an Important Issue for Women

Life / work balance is an important issue for all working Canadians. However, the experience of life / work conflict will be different depending on such factors as gender, race and class. The Quality of Women's Lives survey identified issues affecting life / work balance for women overall, looked at the level of stress and examined the impacts on women's lives.

The Double Shift

Women have dramatically increased their participation in the workforce in recent decades, without a corresponding drop in the number of unpaid hours worked at home. Although women have increased their hours of paid work, men have not increased their hours of unpaid work at the same rate.¹⁴

The 2010 General Social Survey shows that women are still putting in more hours per day than men on housework, child care and care of seniors.¹⁵ Wives put in 46% of the total time couples spent at jobs and 62% of the time they spent on housework.¹⁶ The 'double shift' has long been recognized as an important issue for women workers.¹⁷

Despite more awareness of gender issues as women have moved into the workplace in greater numbers in the past few decades, women are actually experiencing higher levels of life / work conflict, and higher levels of stress and depression related to balancing work and family responsibilities.¹⁸

Role Overload: Women as Unpaid Caregivers

Taking on multiple roles means more stress; working mothers and women with other caregiving responsibilities, such as caring for an elderly relative, are particularly time-stressed. Women perform the majority of caregiving work with both children and elderly or disabled relatives.

The 'sandwich generation' – those caring for both children and the elderly – experiences the highest levels of stress, and much of this also falls on women.¹⁹

Women's Work and the Economic Crisis

Everyone's quality of life has diminished as a result of the global economic crisis which began in 2008. However, the crisis has had and continues to have a greater negative impact on the quality of women's lives – and this is in the context of women already having a tougher life / work balance and greater economic insecurity before the crisis began. Unfortunately, this impact is often overlooked: in particular by governments and the media.

Since the crisis began, much of the attention has been focused on how workers in male-dominated industries (such as construction, automotive and forestry) have been coping. However, the private sector industries which are dominated by women (such as retail, hospitality and tourism) have been equally negatively affected. These female-dominated jobs are often lower paid, part-time and non-unionized compared to male-dominated industries. As a result, women have fewer and less effective buffers to cope with economic insecurity.

Throughout the crisis, many employers in these female-dominated industries have asked women (those who are still fortunate to have a job) to work longer hours; some have reduced or eliminated benefits; and any small mistake is often an excuse for dismissal. In addition, women working in these sectors who have had their jobs eliminated usually don't have severance pay benefits and Employment Insurance benefits are not accessible for many of these women.

At the same time, the economic stimulus packages introduced by governments in Canada have not helped protect jobs in female-dominated industries or help women find new jobs. Instead, the focus of these stimulus initiatives has been infrastructure projects and support for the automotive and construction industries – where men are the vast majority of the workforce. There has been no similar economic investment in sectors which would mainly benefit women workers such as health care, child care, education and social services.

To add insult to injury, governments in Canada are now introducing austerity measures to reduce their deficits which were created by the recession and stimulus packages. These public sector spending cuts in health care, education, child care and social services will have a much greater impact on women than on men. These services are dominated by women workers and they will be directly impacted by job losses and tougher working conditions. These spending cuts will also reduce the quality and availability of these critical public services which women rely on more than men. And women will have to take on more responsibilities of caring for family members who can't access these public services.

Of course, it doesn't have to be this way. Governments in Canada could make different choices. For example, they could fight for greater tax fairness and make better spending choices. As a result of personal income tax cuts over the last decade, the top 1% of Canadians now have a lower total tax rate than the bottom 10%. Corporate tax rates have also been reduced every year for the last 10 years and Canada now has the lowest corporate tax rate of all G-8 nations. At the same time, the federal government is spending tens of billions of dollars on new fighter jets and US-style mega-prisons. Indeed, there is lots of money in Canada to improve the quality of women's lives and provide more support for their life / work balance both during and after the economic crisis. It just requires different choices by our governments.

Clearly, the current global economic crisis, and the response by governments in Canada, have exacerbated the difficult life / work conflicts women are facing: it has increased their job insecurity and financial anxiety; it has made their working conditions tougher in both the private and public sector; and cuts to public services are increasing their burden of unpaid work. It is time for our governments to pursue a new economic agenda which will take into account gender inequalities and the impact on women's lives.

Valuing Women's Work

Women's unpaid work is undervalued: despite the essential nature of this work to the Canadian economy, (an estimated 41% of GDP). It is excluded from a cash-based economy and is rarely even recognized as 'work'. Most unpaid work in Canada and around the world is performed by women.²⁰

"Every time I see a mother with an infant, I know I am seeing a woman at work. I know that work is not leisure and it is not sleep and it may well be enjoyable. But when work becomes a concept in institutionalized economics, payment enters the picture. So my grandmother did not work, and those mothers I see with their infants are not working. No housewives, according to this definition, are workers."

Marilyn Waring

In the current economic crisis, paid work by women is also undervalued. The current Conservative government's emphasis on infrastructure and construction jobs as a solution to the economic crisis, does not benefit the vast majority of women.

Life / work Conflict Impacts Women's Lives

Women with high levels of life / work conflict experience stress and related health issues, and miss out on important family and community events. Women who put their families first can pay the price when competing for promotions in the male-oriented workplace and careers can suffer further because of absenteeism.

The extra load of unpaid hours in the home may prevent women from taking on more challenging careers or becoming active in their union, their community or political life.

The Quality of Women's Lives Survey

In 2009, the Women's Committee of NUPGE identified life / work balance as an important issue for the membership and women in particular.

A survey was designed to explore the extent of life / work conflict among the membership and to identify the critical issues that women are facing. The study also looked at the impacts of life / work conflict on health, family and community participation.

The survey was published on the NUPGE website in 2009, and open to all women, both union and non-union. The data compiled here are based on 464 survey responses.

The following discussion of survey results places the issues raised by our membership into the wider context of Canadian research and statistics to paint a picture of the challenges faced by Canadian women as they juggle multiple roles, responsibilities and inequalities in an attempt to find balance between work, family and community life.



d i s c u s s i o n

Discussion of Key Findings

I. Levels of Life / work Conflict Are High

The Quality of Women's Lives survey found high levels of life / work conflict; women reported high levels of stress and difficulty balancing the needs of work and home.

- 62% said work interferes with family
- 48% said the stress of life / work conflict is getting harder
- 46% of women reported feeling 'quite a lot' of life / work conflict
- Only 14% reported things getting easier

Women are working longer hours and taking work home.

- 90% reported that managing stress was a problem for them
- 56% said they check their work email at home
- 50% of women reported taking work home
- 45% receive work related phone calls at home
- 41% work on weekends

II. Life / work Conflict Has Big Impacts on Women's Lives

Our survey found the stress of life / work conflict is having significant impacts on women's lives. Time stress affects not only women's health and wellbeing, but women's ability to compete in the workforce and to participate in civil society.

The Quality of Women's Lives survey reveals several types of impact on women's lives:

1. Stress and related health problems, missing out on exercise, nutritious meals and leisure activities related to mental and physical wellbeing
2. Women's careers are impacted by family responsibilities and they suffer wage inequalities linked to the double shift
3. Women are missing out on family and community life – women miss out on family events, school events and community involvement
4. Women have less time to become involved in their unions or to take on the demands of a career in politics
5. Impacts on the bottom line for employers
6. Impacts on the bottom line for governments

1. Impacts on Health

- 90% of women surveyed felt overly stressed by life / work conflict
- 75% cited illness as a major challenge when balancing life and work

Research shows that workers who have high life / work conflict are more likely to be in poorer mental and/or physical health, and more likely to forgo leisure to address work demands. Another study found that role overload in women impacts mental health even more than other factors such as income.²¹

The health hazards of stress are well known; heart disease, migraines, stomach problems and emotional health problems can result. Increasingly stress related health problems have been linked to role overload and control over hours of work.²²

Indeed, 34% of survey respondents said they suffered an illness or injury as a result of work pressure in the last six months.

Women who are time-stressed may not be able to keep up with healthy habits such as regular exercise, adequate sleep and proper nutrition.

NUPGE's survey found:

- 78% lose sleep due to family stress often or regularly
- 72% of women said they miss out on time for exercise
- 70% lose sleep due to workplace stress

When workers are time-stressed, it affects everyone; there are economic costs of employee absenteeism and increased use of health care services.²³

2. Impacts on Women's Careers and Equality in the Workplace

Studies show that women are more likely than men to miss work because of family needs, and to put family ahead of work demands. In many workplaces, this can be limiting to a woman's chances of promotion and advancement. The 'male career model' has not changed despite all the changes in workforce demographics.²⁴

The extra responsibility for unpaid caregiving and household work reduces women's capacity to compete equally with men in the labour market, resulting in ongoing gender wage inequality, and potential loss of wages if there are no provisions for family related leave.²⁵

NUPGE's survey found:

- 76% reported missing work due to family concerns in the past six months



- 38% missed work four or more times in the last six months
- 12% reported missing work more than 11 times in the past six months

Workplace policies and culture have an impact on women's ability to advance their careers and keep the balance with other responsibilities.

Women we surveyed reported lack of flexible hours (62%), long hours (64%) and lack of paid leave for family emergencies (48%) as important problems they face in trying to balance work and home.

3. Impacts on Family and Community Life

Families need to spend time together. Studies have shown that children enjoying more available parental hours (either parent) fare better at school. Other studies link children's health to hours worked by parents.²⁶

NUPGE's survey found that women are missing out on important life events:

- 83% (of parents) miss out on school events
- 68% (of parents) miss their children's bedtime
- 58% miss out on social events
- 49% miss family gatherings
- 40% miss sporting events
- 39% miss out on holidays

4. Impacts on Political Involvement for Women

Women who are time-stressed already from juggling unpaid work and caregiving at home with a paid job, may be less inclined to take on yet another role in order to be active in their community, union or politics.

- 36% of women surveyed said their life / work conflict is limiting their ability to work for their union



5. Impacts on the Bottom Line: Employee Retention and Satisfaction

A Canada-wide study found that organizations as a whole are negatively affected by high levels of life / work conflict among employees. Workers experiencing high life / work conflict were significantly less committed to their employer and tended to be less satisfied with their jobs. They were more frequently absent from work, made more use of employee assistance programs, and more frequently gave serious consideration to quitting their job.²⁷

6. Impacts on the Bottom Line: Strain on the Health Care System

Research shows that employees who experienced high levels of life / work conflict tended to make greater use of the health care system (more physician visits and hospital stays) than those who reported low levels of conflict.

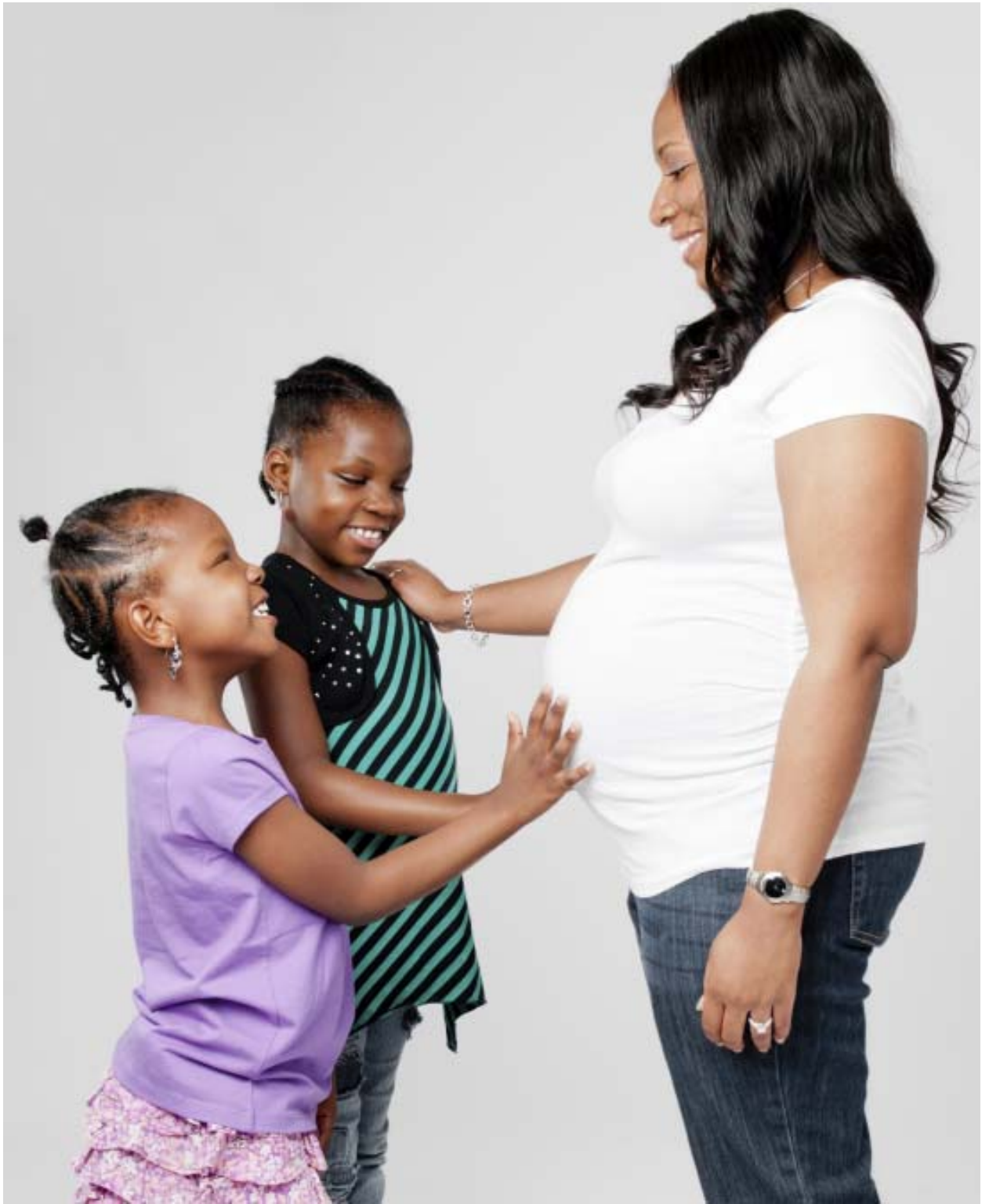
This suggests that governments can help reduce strain on the public system and lower costs by promoting policies that make it easier for employees to achieve better balance between family and work.²⁸

III. Key Issues Identified

1. Unpaid Caregiving Adds to the Time Squeeze

Women still perform the majority of unpaid caregiving tasks, whether it be child care, elder care, or caring for a disabled dependent, and women spend more hours providing these services. Research shows that women who perform unpaid caregiving roles experience more life / work conflict and stress.

Increasingly, as families are having children later in life, women find themselves 'sandwiched' – that is caring for children and aging parents or in-laws at the same time.



NUPGE's survey found:

- 58% are parents or caregivers to one or more children
- Between 35% and 50% perform some caregiving duties for elders or dependents
- 18% take care of elders or relatives other than children, in their home

Caring for our Children:

As dual-income families have become an economic necessity, the majority of women no longer leave the workforce when they have children. In 2010, 82% of women aged 25-54 years were participating in the workforce. Sixty-six per cent of mothers with pre-school children were employed as were 78% of women whose youngest child was aged 6 to 15 years.²⁹ This has meant less available time at home for household work and the necessity of finding affordable child care.

In addition to feeling more time-stressed, working mothers are significantly less satisfied with their life / work balance than women without children, or men with and without children.³⁰

Caregiving is associated with higher stress levels as women struggle to balance multiple roles. Motherhood is measurably more stressful than fatherhood, and fatherhood is associated with lower levels of stress and depression, suggesting that the role of working mothers is qualitatively different from that of working fathers.³¹

This may be because women have more responsibility for child care tasks and men tend to have more enjoyable tasks. In fact, not all unpaid work is equally stressful; for example hours spent on housework are more stressful than those spent on child care, yet women find child care more stressful than men do.³²

Dependents with Special Needs:

- 12% of survey respondents provide care to a dependent with special needs

Women with dependents with special needs experience higher than average rates of poverty and their employment situation is much more likely to be affected. There is increased difficulty in finding adequate and affordable child care services, and extra time requirements for medical and other support services.³³

National Strategy for Child Care Needed:

Canada consistently ranks lowest among developed countries in terms of public funding for and access to early learning and child care spaces. There is no federal strategy for ensuring access to quality, affordable child care and early education and the result is a patchwork of different standards across the provinces and territories.³⁴

Child care fees are among the highest in the world, for those who can find a space.³⁵

Only 18.6% of Canadian children 0-12 were able to access a regulated child care space in 2008.³⁶

The hardest hit are single mothers, many of whom live on low incomes and cannot afford child care fees.³⁷

For women who work shifts or part-time, it is difficult to find child care that can accommodate a non-standard schedule, and part-time workers may find the cost of child care exceeds their wages.

“Research shows that high quality child care is a precondition for women’s equality. Child care promotes school readiness, helps reduce poverty, creates jobs, and contributes to the good health of children; it strengthens appreciation for diversity and promotes equity among classes, levels of ability, racial and ethnic groups, strengthening social solidarity.”³⁸

Susan Prentice

Caring for our Elders:

In 2007, about 2.7 million Canadians aged 45 and over provided some form of unpaid care to seniors with health problems, and about 70% of these people were employed. Between 2002 and 2007, the number of people providing care

to seniors increased by more than 670,000.³⁹ Canadians provide 23 hours of unpaid caregiving per month. Women provided more hours of care at 29 hours per month, compared to 16 for men.⁴⁰

Many people giving care to seniors are balancing this with other responsibilities, such as jobs and care for their own children. In 2007, about 43% of caregivers were aged between 45 and 54, when many Canadians still have children living at home. Caregivers were more likely to be women who were employed and married.⁴¹

Many caregivers must also travel to care for aging parents in other locations, adding time and transportation costs.

Most caregivers report they are happy to provide care for their family members, but need financial support, workplace flexibility, and access to affordable, regulated home care services.

NUPGE Survey: Types of Care Provided:

Providing emotional support	49%
Accompanying to a doctor's appointment	48%
Running errands	45%
Grocery shopping	39%
Performing household chores	38%
Cooking	37%
Handling financial responsibilities	34%
Dressing	19%
Feeding	14%

Elder Care in Canada: The Demographic Squeeze:

Canada's population is aging. A 2011 OECD report estimates that 10% of people in member countries will be more than 80 years old by 2050. This represents a dramatic increase over the 4% in 2010 and 1% in 1950.⁴²

With parents waiting later in life to have children, people find themselves providing care for both their parents and children. Additionally, most of these caregivers (usually women) are now also doing paid work outside the home. According to Statistics Canada, some 712,000 individuals aged 45-64 with children

under the age of 25 living at home were also providing elder care. In 2002, about 80% of these people also did paid work outside the home.⁴³

Despite these facts the number of beds in long-term care institutions has decreased in many provinces. Many of the care services available for elderly Canadians are costly, excluded from Medicare and inconsistently regulated.⁴⁴

The current trend is for seniors to receive care at home instead of being placed in long-term care institutions, and extra caregiving demands are placed on women at a time when most women are employed in the paid workforce without the coinciding supports.

NUPGE Survey: Concerns Facing Caregivers:

- 28% reported missing work due to problems with elder care or child care
- 25% of respondents had difficulty finding care during the hours needed (child care or elder care)
- 23% of respondents were concerned about lack of quality elder care services
- 23% were concerned about the cost of quality care
- 23% of respondents reported transportation problems

(Note: about half of survey respondents are caregivers, so 25% of respondents represent approximately 50% of caregivers)

Caregiving is Undervalued:

Although most Canadians report being happy to provide care for their relatives, the combined effects of paid work, unpaid work in the home and unpaid caregiving contributes to 'role overload' for many women when trying to balance life and work.

Inflexible workplace policies and costly care services increase the levels of stress as women work to provide these unpaid and undervalued services to society.

Research has shown that it would take at least 250,000 full-time people equivalents to replace current levels of unpaid caregiving in Canada.⁴⁵

2. Not Enough Control over Our Time

Life / work conflict occurs when people do not have enough time to get everything done, but also when people lack control over when and where they spend their time. Many of the issues emerging from the Quality of Women's Lives survey revolve around workplace flexibility and policies.

Research has shown that workers who are provided with increased control and flexibility regarding when and where they work, report lower levels of life / work conflict.⁴⁶

NUPGE Survey: Biggest Challenges in Balancing Home and Work:

Long work hours	64%
Lack of flexible hours	62%
Missing work to care for a sick family member	55%
Lack of paid leave for family emergencies	48%
Mandatory overtime	31%

Workplace Policies:

- 58% of survey respondents feel their employer should do more to help balance work and home responsibilities

NUPGE Survey: Most Wanted Workplace Policies:

Flexible work hours	77%
Paid leaves for personal reasons	75%
Paid family illness leave	72%
Legislation to increase the amount of vacation time	69%
The ability to work from home	62%
Worksite seminars on stress, nutrition and fitness	58%
Increasing the number of staff in your workplace	57%
Reduced workweek (legislated)	47%
Ability to move to part-time	46%
Job sharing	45%
Cap on overtime	23%

Family Friendly Work Arrangements

Surveys of workers consistently show that employees are very interested in policies that allow for flexibility. While such programs and policies are on the increase, the most recent



statistics reveal that only 37% of workers were able to vary their working hours to some degree. Reduced work weeks (i.e. job sharing, work-sharing) and compressed work weeks were only reported by fewer than one in 10 employees.⁴⁷

While roughly one third of employees have programs for extended benefits of some kind, access to these types of benefits is a function of job type, industry, firm size and unionization. This suggests that work-life policies tend to be the purview of a select group of workers who have the leverage to bargain with their employers for flexible work arrangements. The situation is wholly different from employees engaged in non-standard, low-wage work.⁴⁸

Organizations Benefit from Supporting Life / work Balance:

In 2011, the Corporate Executive Board (CEB) published results of polling more than 50,000 global workers – they found that employees who feel they have a better life /work balance tend to work 21% harder than those that don't. The CEB recommends that employers recognize that the most appreciated service they can provide their employees is the 'gift of time'. In fact, more than 60% of the employees polled identified flexible schedules as the most important life / work practice their employer could provide.⁴⁹

Organizations can reduce costs in two main areas by reducing role overload and supporting life / work balance among their employees:

- Recruitment and Retention: health impacts of life / work conflict mean more absenteeism, higher rates of employee turnover and more use of employee assistance programs.⁵⁰
- Productivity: In a recent study of health care workers, 84% felt they were less productive when they were overloaded. They reported feeling more disorganized, more stressed and anxious, less able to concentrate and focus and more likely to cut corners and make mistakes.⁵¹
- The Conference Board of Canada has shown that life / work programs have been effective in increasing employee morale (62%); reducing employee stress (56%); reducing absenteeism (43%); and increasing productivity (32%).⁵²

Workplace Culture and Backlash:

While important, supportive workplace policies on their own are unlikely to have the desired results for workers if there is chronic understaffing, the culture demands a choice between work and family, and where saying no to more work is a 'career limiting move'.⁵³

Even where 'family friendly' workplace policies exist, workplace culture can be unfriendly to women; old stereotypes mean that women in male-oriented workplaces have trouble taking advantage of existing policies because they would be seen as 'not committed enough'.⁵⁴

There can also be outright objection to the formation or use of policies that help employees balance work and home responsibilities. When there are policies, implementation is often left up to individual managers who either support the policies or do not.

"I have found that when making recommendations or talking about possible programs that may benefit women, men generally don't feel it's necessary. They respond by saying it's not fair that women get extra benefits, but they don't realize there's still some form of gender inequity and glass ceiling that women face in the workplace."⁵⁵

Working Part-Time: Not a 'Solution':

Instead of being rewarded for all the economic and social value women provide in unpaid work, women often pay financial consequences if they make changes that help them cope with the demands of multiple roles.

For many women, the only way to have more control and flexibility over their time is to work part-time, taking the brunt of financial repercussions such as decreased income, pension and employee benefits. Research shows that women are more likely than men to work part-time because of personal or family responsibilities.

Indeed, in 2010, 34% of women 25-44 worked part-time because of child care responsibilities, compared to 3.5% of men. Women were more than twice as likely to work part-time than men.⁵⁶

The involuntary part-time employment rate rose from 12% to 36% over two decades, with 69% of these jobs held by women.⁵⁷

Whether or not women work part-time by choice, it remains a fact that women are bearing an unequal share of the social costs of caregiving.

3. Unequal Division of Labour in the Home

Time use studies show that women are still doing most of the household chores, child care, and increasingly, elder care as well, and this has a big impact on women's ability to balance work and home.⁵⁸ Although men are starting to take on more of the household responsibilities, there is still a significant gap, and women tend to have the more stressful managerial responsibility for child care and household chores.⁵⁹

*"Society views domestic labour as women's responsibility and assumes that it is a donation they should make to the economy."*⁶⁰

Tanya Schecter

- 64% of women surveyed cited 'lack of shared responsibilities at home' as one of the biggest challenges they face in balancing work and life.

NUPGE's survey found that a significant number of women are still doing *most* (75% to 100%) of the household chores:

- 72% of women do most of the house cleaning
- 66% of women do most of the cooking
- 66% of mothers reported doing most of the child care

These results are in keeping with the larger picture in Canada. The General Social Survey undertaken by Statistics Canada in 2008 found that:

- The percentage of women who spent more than 15 hours per week taking care of children in the household was 79.5% compared to men at 57.5%
- 32% of women who spent more than 15 hours per week doing unpaid housework, yard work or home maintenance compared to 17.5% of men



*“Women like me have more than enough to do with full-time work, child care and household responsibilities. However men have not reciprocated by moving in to help with family needs. If family life is to be supported in Canada, housewives need more help – men have got to help at home more”.*⁶¹

Guilt:

Even the reality that women are stressed by life / work conflict can lead to backlash. There is still a segment of society that says women should stay home, and not be in the workforce, if they experience stress and can't 'do it all'.

No one would think of saying “men shouldn't be in the workforce, unless they can also do the housework and child care on top”!

Cultural expectations often put women in a no-win situation with guilt.

*“There is always a feeling of guilt. When you are at work, you feel guilty for not being with your children. When family obligations take you from work, you feel stressed about what you are missing and the additional work needed to catch up.”*⁶²

Women have a right to a career, and the work involved in running a home and raising children is both spouses' responsibility. Women or men who choose to work in the home should also be valued economically. Policies and cultures need to change both at work and at home.

Shift Workers:

Women who work shifts are more likely to experience life / work conflict.

Twenty percent of NUPGE survey respondents are shift workers, and in Canada over four million workers worked something other than a regular day shift in 2005.

According to Statistics Canada, shift workers tend to be more dissatisfied (29%) with their life / work balance, compared with regular day workers (23%). About 31% of shift workers

complained of feeling there was too much to do and not enough time to do it, compared with 27% of regular day workers. Long hours, also associated with life / work conflict, were put in by 46% of shift workers.

Shift workers were more likely to lose sleep, to spend less time with their spouse, and to worry about not spending enough time with family, compared with regular day workers.⁶³

The 'Sandwich' Generation:

The demographic realities of today mean that people are living longer, at the same time as families are delaying having children. A growing demographic is becoming 'sandwiched' between child care and elder care and it is women who provide most of both types of care.

According to Statistics Canada, 27% of those aged 45 to 64 with unmarried children in the home are also caring for a senior. More than eight in 10 of these individuals work outside the home, causing some to change their hours or to lose income. Women were more likely than men to be sandwiched and, on average, provided more hours of elder care per month (29 versus 13).

Sandwiched workers were more likely to experience stress, about 70% compared with about 61% of workers with no child care or elder care responsibilities. High intensity caregivers often had to change their work schedule (one third) and half had to change their social activities.⁶⁴

Single Mothers:

Single working mothers must do double-duty; earning enough income on their own to provide for their family, as well as doing 100% of the housework and child care.

- There were an estimated 1,132,290 lone-parent families headed by women in Canada in 2006.⁶⁵
- 24% of parents in the NUPGE survey defined their household as a single parent family

Single mothers earned an average income of \$39,500 in 2007, and 23.6% were considered to have low incomes, compared with only 10.8% of male single parent families.⁶⁶ The level of

life / work conflict and related stress is much higher for single parents, and even more so for those living in poverty.

Access to affordable and flexible child care is even more important for this group. Single mothers who choose to stay home to raise their children face the unjust stigma of ‘welfare mom’ as if they are unproductive members of society; yet low wages for women and high child care costs often lead to an impossible situation.

“As a single mother, it is very challenging to raise two children and manage a home life and a full-time job. I cannot afford, on one salary, to take a vacation away from home, and I have to pay for daycare.”⁶⁷

Equity Seeking Groups:

Research shows a clear link between level of income and life / work balance; women in lower income brackets tend to report higher levels of life / work conflict.⁶⁸

Discrimination in hiring and promotions faced by equity seeking groups negatively affects employment and income levels. For example, women of colour are over-represented in lower paying jobs, part-time and temporary employment and precarious jobs.⁶⁹ Aboriginal women experience double the rate of poverty of non-Aboriginal women and are more likely to be single mothers. Women with disabilities have lower average incomes and face discrimination as well as physical barriers in the workplace.

The lack of affordable, quality child care and elder care adds to the stresses of working women who are also caregivers. The issue is particularly challenging for women from marginalized groups who may have lower incomes, work in precarious jobs, or work part time or non-standard hours. Child care costs may be out of reach, and schedules may conflict with available care options.

Regardless of income levels, discrimination of any kind in workplace culture affects life / work balance; for example, many women of colour report they feel pressured to work long hours and play down their race/ethnicity/sex in order to succeed.⁷⁰



c o n c l u s i o n s

Conclusions

The key findings of the Quality of Women's Lives survey make it clear that women are experiencing high levels of life / work conflict, stress and impacts on their health and wellbeing. The survey findings are further supported by statistics and current research in the field of life / work balance in Canada.

The current economic crisis will exacerbate life / work conflict for women.

Women are working harder than ever, putting in long hours at work and then coming home to more hours of unpaid housework and caregiving.



Women are missing out on:

- income, pensions and benefits (when they work part-time or stop work to care for children or other family members)
- exercise, sleep and nutrition
- school, family and community events
- opportunities for career advancement
- participation in unions or political life
- leisure time and time with family
- time for 'me'

Women need:

- more control over work time, more flexibility in hours worked
- affordable, regulated child care and elder care services
- an equitable division of labour in the home
- a workplace culture that values healthy employees and families
- a culture that values women's unpaid work

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