Cross-National Differences in the Relationship Between Time in Employment and Time Use during Non-Employment Hours

Proposal for the ATUS Early Results Conference

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There is considerable debate about whether the amount of time that Americans spend working for pay has risen in recent decades (see Burtless 1999; Figart and Golden 1998 for reviews). Empirical evidence leaves no doubt, however, that the rise in mothers’ employment rates, in both married and single-parent families, means that more families now have all adults in the workforce. Among married couples, the share in which both partners were employed grew from 36 to 60 percent between 1970 and 1997 (Jacobs and Gerson 2001). During the same years, single mothers’ employment rate increased as well, and it increased again after the 1996 welfare reform, rising to 74 percent by 2000 (Burtless 2002; U.S. Census Bureau 2001).

Furthermore, a large literature establishes that employed Americans spend long hours at work relative to workers in other high-income countries (Jacobs and Gerson 2004). Americans’ long hours are especially evident when we compare annual hours (rather than weekly), the hours worked by couples (rather than individuals), employed single parents’ work hours, and the proportion of workers with extremely long hours, for example, over 50 weekly hours (Jacobs and Gornick 2002; Smeeding 2004).

Americans’ long working hours are worrisome for a variety of reasons. When parents work long hours, time available for family caregiving may be inadequate, which can place children at risk, especially younger children. Paid work hours depress mothers’ and fathers’ time caring for children (Bryant and Zick 1996; Sayer, Bianchi, and Robinson 2004; Yeung et al. 2001). Many parents also feel that they spend too little time with their children, and these perceptions are particularly strong among mothers and fathers with long work hours (Milkie et al. 2004). Furthermore, in part because employed parents strive to protect time with children, long work hours often reduce time for personal care (including sleep) and leisure, sometimes to levels that are unhealthy for workers and their families (Bianchi 2000; Bittman and Wajcman 2000; Mattingly and Bianchi 2003).

Many researchers have called for reducing the number of hours American parents spend in paid employment, arguing that this would ease the time crunch for working parents (Jacobs and Gerson 2004; Williams 2000). Most research on the time crunch compares individuals within countries, but there is some evidence of a negative association across countries between employment hours and caregiving time.
(see Gornick and Meyers 2003). Whether shorter hours in paid work necessarily translate into more time spent in caregiving, however, is an open empirical question. Much more work is needed on how systematic institutional differences across countries may affect the association between work hours and time available for caregiving and leisure.

We propose to do a paper for the American Time Use Survey conference that examines the relationship between paid work hours and time use during non-employment hours from a cross-national perspective. Our plan is to analyze the within and across-country association between time spent in paid work and family caregiving, personal care, and leisure in the U.S., and seven industrialized countries: Australia, Canada, the U.K., France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden. We chose these comparison countries because they have diverse time-related outcomes and varied policy environments. We plan to use the ATUS data in conjunction with data from the Multinational Time Use Study (MTUS), which provides harmonized data files based on time diaries. Similar to the ATUS, the MTUS includes data on time spent in paid work, unpaid work (including family caregiving and domestic work), personal care (including sleep), and leisure, with further disaggregations available in each of these categories.

We propose to focus on two kinds of comparisons using the time use data. First, within each included country we aim to understand the relationship between reported paid work hours, on the one hand, and caregiving time devoted to other family members and children (in the case of workers with dependent children). We will also assess the relationship between employment hours and time spent in personal care and leisure, essential indicators of the quality of work/life balance.

Second, we will compare the sampled countries to determine whether countries, such as the U.S., with high parental employment rates and lengthy hours in paid work have a deficit in caregiving time. Is the amount of parental care provided to children lower in countries that place heavy emphasis on parental employment? The answer cannot be inferred from examining work and caregiving within a single country, but must be answered by comparing patterns of work and care across countries, some of which have low rates of parental employment and others which combine high rates of parental employment with low weekly hours among typical working parents. We will assess the extent to which the U.S. is unique
in its combination of high rates of parental employment with high weekly hours of work, and aim to understand the effects of working “the American way” on parents’ time with children.

REFERENCES


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ACADEMIC POSITIONS
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EDUCATION
2001  Ph.D. in Sociology, University of Maryland, College Park
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PUBLICATIONS


GRANTS


MANUSCRIPTS UNDER REVIEW

Sayer, Liana C. “Gender, Time, and Inequality: Trends in Women’s and Men’s Paid Work, Unpaid Work, and Free Time.”

Sayer, Liana C., Nathan Wright and Kathryn Edin. “Class Differences in Family Attitudes.”

Mattingly, Marybeth and Liana C. Sayer. “Under Pressure: Trends and Gender Differences in the Relationship between Free Time and Feeling Rushed”


SELECTED PRESENTATIONS


RESEARCH AND TEACHING INTERESTS

Gender; Family; Inequality; Social Demography

SELECTED PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES AND AWARDS

Graduate Student Paper Committee. American Sociological Association, Family Section, 2004


George M. Phillips Award for Outstanding Graduate Student Dissertation in the Public Interest, University of Maryland, 2001.
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1990      Danforth Award for Excellence in Teaching (Harvard).
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Books and edited volumes:


Articles, peer-reviewed journals:


**Book chapters:**


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Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

Russell Sage Foundation.

Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.

Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management.

National Governors' Association.

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Recent Books and Monographs (selected)


Recent Articles and Book Chapters (selected)


2003


2002


2001


Recent Unpublished Papers


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BOOKS

CO-AUTHORED


EDITED OR CO-EDITED


Does Money Matter? The Effect of School Resources on Student Achievement and Adult Success, Brookings, 1996.


SELECTED PAPERS ON OLDER WORKRES, RETIREMENT, AND SOCIAL SECURITY


