

When work interferes with life: Study reveals new insights about a common stressor

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As many as 50 per cent of people bring their work home with them regularly, according to new research out of the University of Toronto that describes the stress associated with work-life balance and the factors that predict it.

Researchers measured the extent to which [work](#) was interfering with personal time using data from a national survey of 1,800 American workers. Sociology professor Scott Schieman (UofT) and his coauthors Melissa Milkie (University of Maryland) and PhD student Paul Glavin (UofT) asked participants questions like: "How often does your job interfere with your home or family life?"; "How often does your job interfere with your social or leisure activities?"; and "How often do you think about things going on at work when you are not working?"

Schieman says, "Nearly half of the population reports that these situations occur 'sometimes' or 'frequently,' which is particularly concerning given that the negative health impacts of an imbalance between work life and private life are well-documented."

The authors describe five core sets of findings:

- People with college or postgraduate degrees tend to report their work interferes with their personal life more than those with a high school degree;

- Professionals tend to report their work interferes with their home life more than people in all other occupational categories;
- Several job-related demands predict more work seeping into the home life: interpersonal conflict at work, job insecurity, noxious environments, and high-pressure situations; however, having control over the pace of one's own work diminishes the negative effects of high-pressure situations;
- Several job-related resources also predict more work interference with home life: job authority, job skill level, decision-making latitude, and personal earnings;
- As predicted, working long hours (50-plus per week) is associated with more work interference at home—surprisingly, however, that relationship is stronger among people who have some or full control over the timing of their work;

"We found several surprising patterns," says Schieman. "People who are well-educated, professionals and those with job-related resources report that their work interferes with their personal lives more frequently, reflecting what we refer to as 'the stress of higher status.' While many benefits undoubtedly accrue to those in higher status positions and conditions, a downside is the greater likelihood of work interfering with personal life."

More information: The study was published in the December 2009 issue of the journal *American Sociological Review*.

Provided by University of Toronto

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