

# Study shows how we spend our time

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Research into how we spend our time – in this country and other countries around the world – is the focus of an international conference, hosted this week by the University of Oxford and sponsored by the Economic and Social Research Council and the Office of National Statistics.

‘Time use scholars’ from across the world, researchers who collect and analyse official datasets over decades, will reveal how we are changing as a society and whether there are marked differences across European countries and the wider world. For instance, are men doing their fair share of the childcare and chores at home? And how often we do exercise? Evidence assessed by Oxford researchers, suggest that those

working in the medical profession are among the worst for taking exercise.

The Multinational Time Use Study (MTUS) was first developed in the 1980s by Professor Jonathan Gershuny, the founding Director of the Centre for Time Use Research at the University of Oxford. Finding and reconstituting British diary studies from the early 1960s and 1970s (notably from the then BBC Audience Research Department), collecting new UK surveys in the 1980s, as well as acquiring national studies from other countries, Professor Gershuny played a leading role in the European Statistical Office's successful efforts, during the 1990s, to promote harmonised time use data collection across the EU. The MTUS now covers a 50 year historical span, encompassing over 60 surveys from 22 countries.

Professor Gershuny said: "Time diary studies provide an unrivalled range of evidence about the daily life of whole populations. In a properly conducted large-scale diary survey, we capture, in some detail, evidence about all the paid work, the unpaid work, caring and volunteering, the leisure, recreation, rest and recuperation of an entire society. Though studies of this sort have been collected for many years, the applications of these materials are now growing rapidly—ranging from improved estimates of work hours to specific measures of happiness, from understanding the social and economic consequences of the internet, to investigating the impact of patterns of daily life on the environment."

Topics to be discussed at the International Association for Time Use Research Conference this year include:

**\*Why better educated parents seem to spend more time on childcare activities.**

Christina Borra (Spain) and Almudena Sevilla- Sanz (Oxford University) discuss their working paper which finds that with few exceptions highly educated mothers are devoting on average about 10 to 20 more minutes a day to childcare activities than mothers who have not gone into higher education. Fathers who are highly educated were also found to devote about 12 more minutes a day than fathers who were not from a background of higher education. The researchers studied the datasets of 12 countries from 1965 to 2008. However, although the positive link remains over [time](#), it has weakened in some countries, while it has strengthened in some others. They are currently exploring possible reasons for this, in particular, they are looking at whether it is due to an increased concern about the safety of their children, changing attitudes towards more involved parenting, or higher competition for college places, among others.

### **\*Richer people are satisfied with their lives but not necessarily happier with daily experience**

Paul Dolan (LSE) and Robert Metcalfe (Oxford University) have produced a working paper in which they asked people what activities they were engaged in during the previous day, how long these lasted and how they felt during them. When asked about life satisfaction and day satisfaction, those on €110,000 were found to have the highest wellbeing but interestingly, one third of the highest income band (€150,000 and above) reported unhappy days. They found poorer people were more likely to report negative intrusive thoughts about money and having these thoughts were associated with overall lower life satisfaction and daily happiness. Interestingly, although richer people reported higher levels of satisfaction with their lives, when they had a negative thought about money they were more adversely affected.

The researchers suggest it might be that those who are richer have more

intense negative thoughts or that wealthy people are more affected by intrusive financial worries because they have fewer of them: if a person is not used to worrying about money, each episode of worry may be less familiar and more alarming.

Provided by Oxford University

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