

## America's poorly-educated spend less time-off with family or friends, study finds

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Despite having more leisure time overall, stressed-out Americans report having less 'quality time' to enjoy themselves, particularly those with little or no education.

This is according to the findings of a new paper entitled Leisure Inequality in the US: 1965-2003, from Queen Mary, University of London, the University of Oxford and the University of Zaragoza.

The research offers insights on how leisure inequality across educational groups has evolved in the last four decades in the United States in contrast with the inequality in wages and expenditure over the same period.

Dr Almudena Sevilla, from the School of Business and Management at QM, conducted the study with Professor Jose I. Gimenez-Nadal, from Zaragoza and Professor Jonathan Gershuny, Oxford.

They used time-diary information from the American Heritage Time Use Study (AHTUS) collated between 1965 and 2003. AHTUS respondents recorded their activities over 24-hour periods, including leisure e.g. [watching television](#), playing sport and socialising (activities that we cannot pay someone else to do or that are not necessary to live e.g. eating or sleeping).

Data from the AHTUS was used to construct several indicators of the quality of [leisure time](#):

- Pure leisure (recreation without interruption from chores or earning a living, etc)
- Co-present leisure (recreation with a spouse or other adults)
- Leisure fragmentation (the number and duration of leisure episodes, and their proximity to each other in a day)

Poorly-educated Americans (those with a [high school diploma](#) or less) experienced more leisure time by 2003 than people with at least some [college education](#) (approx. 3 hours and 40 minutes extra), but spend less of that time with a partner (6 per cent less for men) or friends (10.5 per cent/4.7 per cent for men and [women](#), respectively).

Highly-educated people (those with some college or more), however, appear to have less time off for leisure, but this is compensated for by the fact that what time is spent in recreation is better quality.

According to the findings, highly-educated American men still spent as much time with their partner in 2003 as in 1965, for example, although they did spend slightly less time with other adults (6.8 per cent). Women with higher education spent over 8 per cent more time with a spouse by 2003, but 4.9 per cent less time with other adults.

For highly-educated men, the number of times a day spent at leisure may have slightly dipped (-0.11), but those leisure periods now last 20 per cent longer compared to 18 per cent for low-educated men.

College-educated women have more leisure times in a day (0.35 per cent compared to 0.26 for low-educated women), and those times last 14.5 per cent longer than in 1965.

Despite working longer hours, there is also a suggestion that highly-

educated people might use their earning power to work at more desirable times than poorly-educated people.

Dr Sevilla explains that this 'bargaining power' may enable people with a better education to "schedule their leisure time to be less fragmented and to coordinate it with other people's time off more easily".

"Evidence suggests that individuals report higher levels of instant satisfaction from activities done in the company of others over those done in isolation."

In addition to painting a more comprehensive picture of inequality in the US, the findings provide a basis for weighing the relative decline in earnings and consumption for the less-educated against a simultaneous growth in leisure.

Leisure [Inequality](#) in the US: 1965-2003, will be published in the journal *Demography* in August 2012. A downloadable PDF version of the paper is available [here](#).

### **Significant findings Between 1965 and 2003:**

- Men's average hours of leisure increased from 28 hours to 33 hours and 30 minutes
- Women's leisure time also increased by three hours and 30 minutes from 27 hours
- By 2003, low-educated men and women had, respectively, three hours and 35 minutes, and three hours and 45 minutes more leisure than highly-educated men and women
- The increase in leisure time for low-educated men accounts for almost five hours and 15 minutes per week
- For women, those of low-education gained 3.5 hours of leisure

against highly educated ones

- By 2003, low-educated women enjoyed 5.5 more hours per week of leisure, compared to an increase of two hours of leisure per week for women with higher education
- The rate of pure leisure decreased 5 per cent and 5.7 per cent, respectively, for men and women
- Pure leisure declined a lot more for low-educated men than those who are highly-educated (one hour and 35 minutes a week versus 50 minutes)
- Low-educated women experienced 1 hour and 50 minutes less pure leisure time compared to one hour for highly-educated women
- Women have more episodes of leisure in a day, but they are more fragmented and the duration of those intervals is shrinking
- For less well educated women, the average duration of leisure intervals increased by 21 minutes a day. It was 14 minutes a day for highly-educated women
- Highly-educated women also experienced more fragmented leisure time than less-educated women
- Leisure time spent in the company of a wife or partner declined by one hour for men of low-education, a trend not experienced by highly-educated men
- Highly-educated women had one hour and 10 minutes per week more leisure time with a spouse. It was only 25 minutes more for their lower-educated counterparts
- The percentage of leisure with adults decreased for men and women by an average of 13 and 7 percentage points, respectively
- Low-educated men and women spent less time socializing in company to a greater extent than highly-educated people

Provided by Queen Mary, University of London

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