



# Canadians' Work-Life Balance: What Gives?

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Peter Jon spent nearly a decade with the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada where he co-authored the report “The Marriage Gap between Rich and Poor Canadians” that received national media attention. His articles have appeared in the *National Post*, *Toronto Sun* and *Law Now* magazine, and he has been active in radio, television, and print media.

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# About one in three working Canadians are dissatisfied with their work-life balance.

## Executive Summary

It will come as no great surprise that two challenges cast long shadows over Canadians who strive to create a satisfying family life: time and money. When Nanos Research conducted a survey for Cardus Family in May 2016, the results suggested that for many Canadians these two commodities are in short supply.

What is surprising is that in a country as wealthy and peaceful as Canada, one in three Canadians are dissatisfied with the balance between work and home.

The main challenges in creating a satisfying work-life balance according to Canadians are heavy workloads, inflexible or long hours, and having to work after hours.

When respondents were asked open-ended questions about what would improve their family life, the summation of responses could be distilled to one simple statement: we want to work less and earn more.

For a significant portion of Canadians, the issue is not so much about achieving perfect balance, but navigating the tension between obligations at work and duties of caregiving and other family responsibilities at home. Put differently, Canadians feel a tension between their vocations as spouses, parents, and family members on the one hand, and their economic vocations on the other.

This report provides a snapshot of how Canadians view this important concern and explores how Canadians think these tensions can best be navigated.

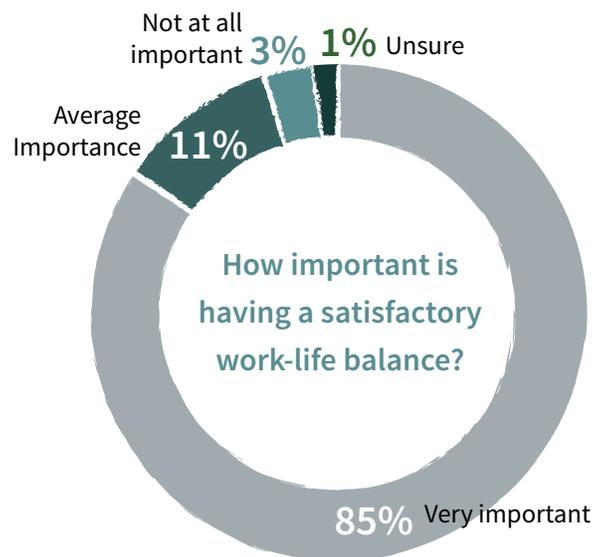
In addition to work-life balance, the Nanos Research survey explored Canadians' satisfaction with family life and their aspirations for partnership, fertility, caring for aging parents and millennials' attitudes toward marriage. These results were previously released as part of Cardus Family's Canada Family Life Project.

## The Importance of Work-Life Balance

As the Canada Family Life Project reveals, time and money are significant stress points in family life. In an open-ended question, respondents were asked what their number-one challenge was in achieving a satisfactory family life. The top response according to 24 percent of respondents was the cost of living and their financial situation. The second highest response was work-and-life balance and time with family and friends, at 17 percent.

It follows, then, that when respondents were asked to identify the “most realistic solution for you to improve your family life,” the top response, at 14 percent, was securing a better income and having more money. The second most popular reply was to work less, retire, or have more flexible hours, accounting for 11 percent of respondents. Interestingly the third most common response was “no challenges” and “I’m satisfied already.” Many Canadians are successfully navigating the tensions between their responsibilities.

Canadians overwhelmingly responded that having a positive work-life balance was very important to them, at 85 percent. About 11 percent said it was of average importance.

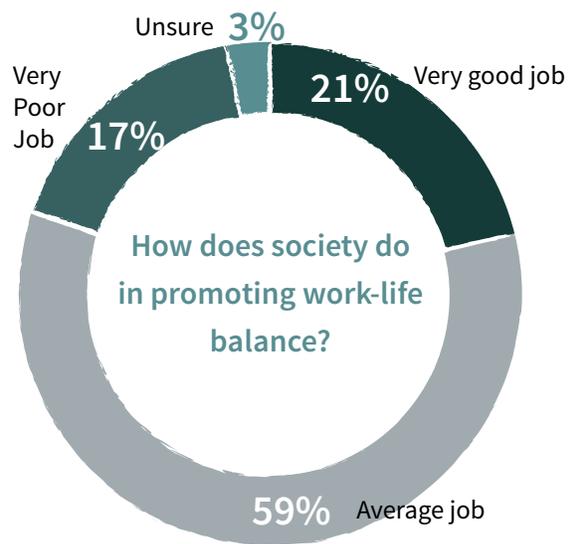


Source: Nanos Research, RDD dual-frame hybrid telephone and online random survey, April 28 to May 3, 2016, n = 1000, accurate 3.1 percentage points plus or minus, 19 times out of 20.

\*Note: Charts may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

## Promoting Work-Life Balance

Though Canadians highly value a positive work-life balance, nearly 60 percent of respondents perceive that society is doing only an average job in promoting this. About 21 percent believe society is doing a very good job, and 17 percent believe society is doing a very poor job.

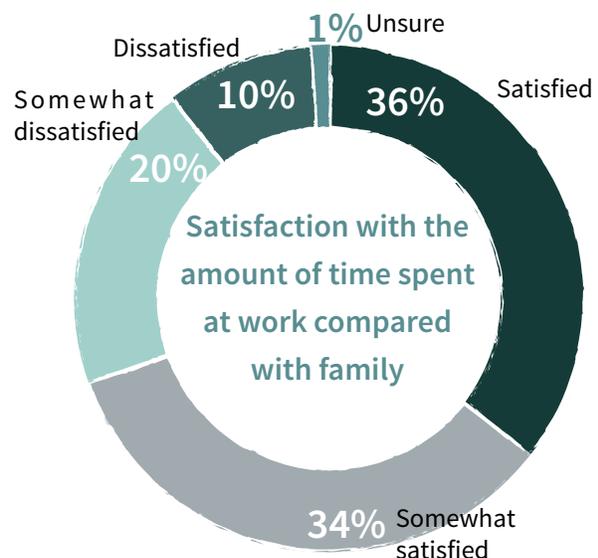


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## Canadians Rate Satisfaction with Their Work-Life Balance

Nanos Research asked respondents working full and part time to evaluate their own level of satisfaction with the amount of time they spend at work compared to the amount of time spent with family. Again, almost a third of respondents report some level of dissatisfaction with their work-life balance, with 20 percent being somewhat satisfied and 10 percent being dissatisfied. Considering the high importance Canadians place on being able to achieve work-life balance, this finding is significant. At the same time, most Canadians have positive feelings regarding their current situation, with 36 percent reporting being satisfied and 34 percent reporting they are somewhat satisfied.



Source: Nanos Research, RDD dual-frame hybrid telephone and online random survey, April 28 to May 3, 2016, n = 619, accurate 4.0 percentage points plus or minus, 19 times out of 20. [Work part or full time only]

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## Current Challenges

Previous research confirms what many Canadians already know: working longer hours and engaging in supplemental work at home after hours increases stress. Working non-regular work schedules also increases tensions at home.<sup>1</sup> When the BlackBerry is always buzzing, people don't ever get to really relax, nor is it likely they are fully engaged in work. The line between work and downtime is decidedly blurry in the modern age. For workers who engage in flexible schedules, there is a tension in managing connectivity to the workplace while safeguarding the time and attention required for responsibilities at home.

Working fewer hours has been associated with lower levels of work-life conflict. Part-time work, particularly for women, is associated with increased access to flex-time scheduling and increased measures of well-being and happiness.<sup>2</sup> While part-time work can facilitate a more satisfying work-life balance, it results in lower pay and less job security as well as less access to benefits.<sup>3</sup>

## Elder Care

One of the most striking findings from the Canada Family Life Project concerns Canadians' perceived future elder-care responsibilities. Respondents reported that they expect the number of seniors they provide care for to double in the next ten years. Canada's aging population will increase caregiving responsibilities, affecting the relationship between work responsibilities and caregiving relationships. For a number of Canadians, this will require managing the tension between work responsibilities and care for children and senior adults. A Statistics Canada study finds that 28 percent of people giving care to elderly, chronically ill, or disabled family members are also raising at least one child under age eighteen.<sup>4</sup>

## Bringing Work Home

Working respondents were asked what their number-one challenge was in achieving a satisfying work-life balance. About 22 percent answered the open-ended question by identifying heavy workloads, inflexible or long hours, and having to work after hours. Bringing work home can quickly add up to many extra hours.

According to Professor Linda Duxbury of Carleton University and Professor Christopher Higgins of Western University, who have conducted ongoing research of work-life-balance issues among knowledge-economy workers in government and the private sector, this is what sometimes occurs. Though their sample skews to a well-educated workforce with a significant proportion

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1 Magali Girard, "Effects on Non-standard Work on the Work-Family Balance: A Literature Review," *McGill Sociological Review* 1 (September 2010): 46-58; <https://www.mcgill.ca/msr/volume1/litreview> Linda Duxbury and Christopher Higgins, *Revisiting Work-Life Issues in Canada: The 2012 National Study on Balancing Work and Caregiving in Canada* (2012), 5.

2 Girard, "Effects on Non-Standard Work."

3 bid.

4 Maire Sinha, *Portrait of Caregivers, 2012*, Spotlight on Canadians: Results from the General Social Survey (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2013), 12. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-652-x/89-652-x2013001-eng.pdf>

of managers and professionals, their findings shed light on the working lives of many Canadians. The professors found that among their sample, 54 percent completed supplemental work at home in the evenings and weekends, accounting for an additional seven hours of work time a week. About 62 percent of the sample had partners who also regularly brought work home.<sup>5</sup>

Duxbury and Higgins found that a majority of their sample (56 percent) were happy with the number of hours they worked. About 28 percent indicated that given the choice, they would spend less time at work for proportionally less money. Further investigation found that those who choose to work less and receive less pay all engaged in supplemental work at home and worked more than forty-five hours a week.<sup>6</sup> Working more hours and completing work at home in the evenings and weekends means increased stress: these activities are correlated with increased challenges in balancing work and life responsibilities. For these workers, the sphere of work crowds the sphere of family life.

Why do some employees continue to work longer hours and perform supplemental work at home? Duxbury and Higgins believe there are combinations of factors that compel employees to take on longer hours. They note that supplemental work at home and longer hours are often part of an organization's work culture. Many employees engage these work behaviours to meet the demands of their workload.

Interestingly, Duxbury and Higgins found that about 16 percent of respondents would like to take on more hours and pay. This group consisted mainly of younger workers.<sup>7</sup> Still other employees work long hours out of concern for their job security. Of course, for some employees bringing work home or working longer hours is a matter of personal choice.<sup>8</sup>

## Traffic Jams

Consider your own commute—navigating traffic by travelling at off hours in larger Canadian cities is par for the course. The Nanos Research survey found that 5 percent of respondents listed commute times and travel for work as their number-one challenge in achieving a satisfying work-life balance. Five percent sounds like a small portion of the total respondents, but it is significant considering the question was open-ended. That the concern registered among a group of respondents as a number-one challenge means it is an issue worth noting. Indeed, the 2012 Canadian Index of Wellbeing found that commute times for working Canadians have increased from a daily average of 42.6 minutes per day in 1994 to 53.2 minutes per day by 2010. The increase translates to an additional forty-five hours of commuting time a year.<sup>9</sup>

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5 Duxbury and Higgins, *Revisiting Work-Life Balance*, 4–5.

6 *Ibid.*, 5.

7 *Ibid.*, 8.

8 *Ibid.*, 7.

9 Canadian Index of Wellbeing, *How Are Canadians Really Doing? The 2012 CIW Report* (Waterloo: Canadian Index of Wellbeing and University of Waterloo), 52.

## Child Care

About 1 percent of respondents said finding affordable child care or good child care was their number-one challenge. Again, though child care was the top concern for only 1 percent of respondents, its inclusion suggests this is an issue to be noted. Child care is a perennial policy issue, but it affects only a certain section of society for a particular period of time, since children needing child care do grow up. As a result, Duxbury suggests that in the future, elder care will eclipse child care as a policy issue as the population ages.<sup>10</sup>

### Number-one challenge in achieving a satisfactory work-life balance

Challenges	Frequency (n = 643)
Heavy workload/long or inflexible hours/work after hours	22%
Financial problems/stability/security	19%
Not enough time with family/outside of work	16%
No challenges/not an issue	13%
Commute times/travel for work	5%
Health issues/stress	4%
Want to work more/don't work enough hours	2%
I am semi-retired	1%
Cannot find good/affordable child care	1%
Other	2%
Unsure/no opinion	14%

Source: Nanos Research, RDD dual-frame hybrid telephone and online random survey, April 28 to May 3, 2016, n = 619, accurate 4.0 percentage points plus or minus, 19 times out of 20. [Work part or full time only]

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## Exploring Solutions

The Nanos Research survey approaches questions on solutions to work-life-balance challenges from two angles.

First, we know that Canadians' work environments are shaped by their employment status, work culture, and the influence of the particular industry in which they are employed. Government plays a direct role through policies and regulations, grants and funding, social safety nets, and even as an employer. Government also influences employment indirectly such as through building and maintaining infrastructure. We wondered how Canadians view the role of government in influencing a satisfying work-life balance. The Nanos Research survey asked

<sup>10</sup> Duxbury and Higgins, *Revisiting Work-Life Balance*, 3.

working respondents, “What would be the most realistic solution you would like governments to advance for you to improve work-life balance?”

About 18 percent suggested shorter workdays, more time off, or flexible hours, reflecting a feeling of work overload. About 12 percent indicated that lower income tax and lower taxes in general would be helpful. One in ten respondents suggested an increase in wages or increase in the mandatory minimum wage. Another one in ten indicated that the government should not be involved, and 5 percent believe there is no government-initiated solution.

The results suggest that some respondents clearly believe the government could do more by doing less—cutting taxes. Others don’t see a role for government in managing work-life balance issues, and still others are unsure or uncertain.

A significant portion of respondents believe government should further regulate work hours to reduce tension between responsibilities at work and home. This raises the question about how much time Canadians actually spend at work.

The data suggest that Canadians maybe finding more balance in their lives than in the past. The Canadian Index of Wellbeing suggests that the portion of Canadians working over 50 hours per week has decreased from 14.3 percent in 1996 to 10.8 percent by 2010. This accounts for 29.6 percent decrease over the seventeen-year period.<sup>11</sup>

The Nanos Research survey also inquired about work-life-balance solutions. The survey offered working respondents seven work and care options and asked them to select the two options that would best assist them in achieving a satisfactory work-life balance. The seven options included the following:

- A compressed work week, where you work longer hours on some days to have more time off
- Flextime that would allow you to work some of the time when it is convenient to you
- Telecommute
- Shifting responsibilities at home
- Longer maternity leave
- More flexible parental/ maternity leave
- None of these

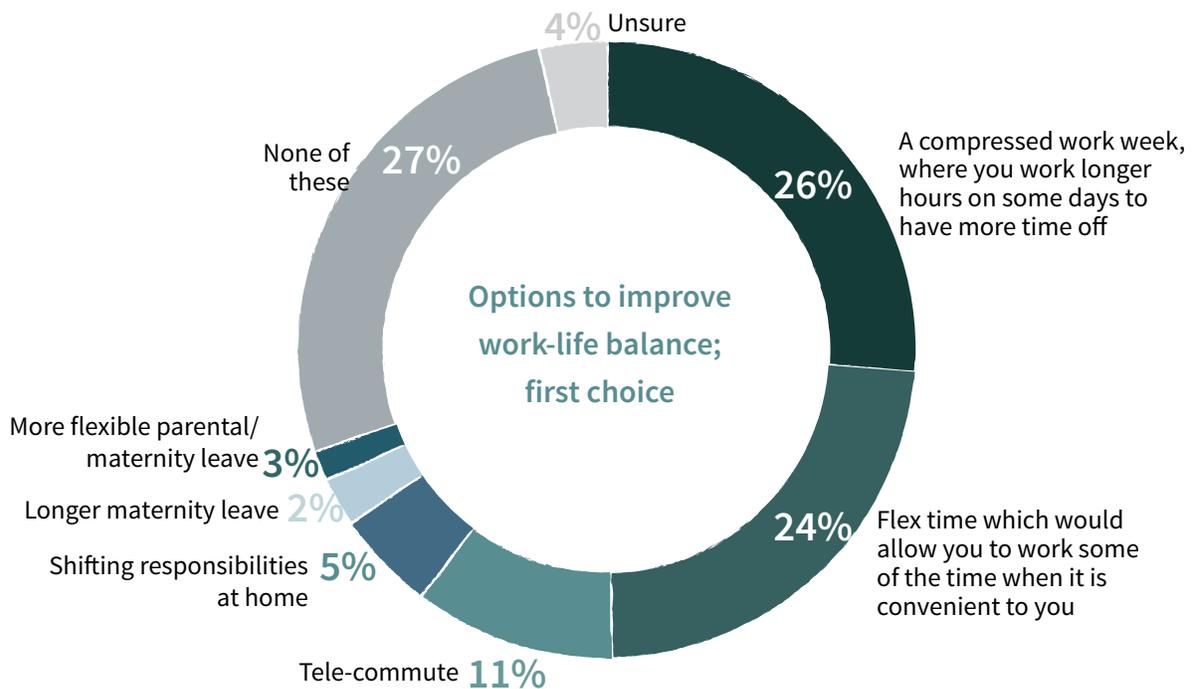
The top two active options were compressed work week (26 percent) and flextime (24 percent). These options were also the highest second-ranked choices with flex time slightly ahead of compressed work week. The expansion of maternity leave and more flexible parental leave accounted for a combine 5 percent of respondents’ first choices.

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<sup>11</sup> Canadian Index of Wellbeing, *How are Canadians Really Doing?*, 51.

Alternative schedules including flextime were preferred options. Flextime scheduling allows workers to have some control over their start and end times, while maintaining a required number of hours a week. The Canadian Index of Wellbeing reports that the portion of Canadians with access to flextime work hours has increased from 37.7 percent in 1994 to 44.1 percent in 2010, or an increase of 17 percent.<sup>12</sup>

A 2008 study by Duxbury, Higgins, and St. Francis Xavier University professor Sean Lyons concluded that flexible work schedules correlated with reduced levels of what they call “role overload.” They note that alternative work arrangements are used less in large organizations. Duxbury, Higgins, and Lyons also found that managers and professionals are more likely to utilize alternative work arrangements than workers in other organizational positions.<sup>13</sup> This may suggest a form of time-use inequality, while acknowledging that some forms of work are less adaptable to alternative work arrangements.



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<sup>12</sup> Canadian Index of Wellbeing, *How are Canadians Really Doing?*, 52.

<sup>13</sup> Linda Duxbury, Christopher Higgins, and Sean Lyons, *Reducing Work-Life Conflict: What Works? What Doesn't?*, Health Canada, January 2008, <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/pubs/occup-travail/balancing-equilibre/index-eng.php>.

## Conclusion

This snapshot of attitudes and aspirations toward work-life balance reveals that one-third of working Canadians are dissatisfied with their work-life balance.

A significant portion of working respondents believe compressed work weeks and flextime could help them achieve a more satisfying balance between work commitments and responsibilities at home. Certainly Canadians have diverse views regarding the role of government in contributing to a more satisfactory work-life balance, and employers have a critical role to play and will need to consider these issues. Yet this also highlights the need to deepen and expand our framework for understanding “work” and “life.” For many, work serves multiple needs that go beyond paying the bills. Not only is work an opportunity to earn money, but it is also a place of creativity, service, and genuine community. When we ask about work-life balance and the role of government, we are really asking questions about how Canadians view, and live out, their various *vocations* as citizens, mothers, fathers, and community members. These deeper questions are not easily accessed in the survey format, but are vital to understanding the health of our families, our communities, our economy, and our country.

## Methodology

Nanos conducted an RDD dual-frame (land and cell lines) hybrid telephone and online random survey of 1,000 Canadians, eighteen years of age or older, between April 28 and May 3, 2016, as part of an omnibus survey. Participants were randomly recruited by telephone using live agents and administered a survey online. The results were statistically checked and weighted by age and gender using the latest census information, and the sample is geographically stratified to be representative of Canada.

Individuals were randomly called using random digit dialling with a maximum of five callbacks.

The margin of error for a random survey of one thousand Canadians is  $\pm 3.1$  percentage points, nineteen times out of twenty.

The research was commissioned by CARDUS.

Note: Charts may not add up to 100 due to rounding.



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