

Revisiting Work-Life Issues in Canada: The 2012 National Study on Balancing Work and Caregiving in Canada

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Two decades ago (1991), we conducted the first national study of work-life conflict in Canada to “explore how the changing relationship between family and work affects organizations, families and employers.” Just over 10 years ago (2001) we undertook our second national study of work-life conflict in Canada to determine how the “demographic, social and economic changes that occurred throughout the 1990’s increased the percent of the Canadian working population at risk of high work-life conflict.”

A lot has happened over the course of the past decade (e.g. demographic changes, economic factors, technological advances, impact of generational cohort on work values) that may change the landscape surrounding work-life issues in Canada. Taken together, these changes suggest it is time for another rigorous empirical look at the issue of work-life conflict. Accordingly, in 2011-12 we undertook a third national study of work-life balance in Canada (referred to in the text as the 2011 study). Just over 25,000 employed Canadians participated in this study. This report, which focuses on work-life conflict, is the first in a series of three reports produced using the 2011-12 data. Reports two and three will focus specifically on the experiences of employed caregivers.

The study looks at the work-life experiences of 25,021 Canadians who were employed full time for 71 public, private and not-for-profit organizations. Just over half (52%) of these respondents were public servants, 34% worked in the NFP sector and 10% worked in the private sector. The data were collected between June 2011 and June 2012.

Sixty percent of the respondents were women. The age distribution of the sample is similar to the Canadian workforce with respect to age (10% Gen Y, 46% Gen X, 44% Baby Boomers). Also worthy of note is the fact that the sample is geographically well distributed with respondents living in all Canadian provinces as well as the Yukon/NWT in various sized communities.

Characteristics of the sample

To understand an employee’s ability to balance work and life it is necessary to appreciate the constraints imposed and opportunities available in two domains: work and non-work. This

section described the key features of the respondent's personal and work life that may impact work-life balance.

Sample is dominated by well educated and well paid knowledge workers

The sample is skewed with respect to job type and socio-economic status. Respondents were very well educated (22% with a college diploma, 38% with one university degree, 17% with at least one post graduate degree) and socio-economically advantaged (two thirds of the respondents had personal incomes of \$60,000 or more per year). More than half the respondents were "knowledge workers" with just over 60% of the sample working in managerial and professional positions.

Implications: Findings from this study will be relevant to organizations who are interested in recruiting, retaining and engaging knowledge workers.

Respondents live in a multiplicity of family situations

In the majority of families represented in this sample (75%) both partners work for pay outside the home: 24% of respondents are part of a dual career family, 20% of respondents are part of a dual earner family, 15% are part of a dual income family where the male is considered the primary breadwinner, and 18% of respondents are part of a dual income family where the female is considered the primary breadwinner. Only 6% of respondents are part of a "traditional" (i.e. male breadwinner - female homemaker) family and 1% are part of a Mr. Mom family (i.e., female breadwinner, male partner does not work outside the home). Sixteen percent of the respondents (16%) are single and live alone.

Implications: These data indicate that the multitude of family situations needs to be considered in any analysis of this issue.

Many live in families where the "breadwinner" role is shared

A plurality of respondents of both genders in our sample live in families where the breadwinning role is shared (i.e., both partners work full time outside the home and contribute to the financial well-being of the family) - a finding that is consistent with the fact that three quarters of the respondents said that they and their families are able to live comfortably on their joint incomes. That being said, money is tight for one in four of our respondents.

Implications: These data support the idea that raising a family in Canada requires two incomes.

One in four live in families where responsibility for childcare is shared

Two thirds of the employed Canadians in this sample are parents. The majority of parents (82%) have one or two children. There is a lot of variety within the sample with respect to children's age: 25% have children under the age of 5, 34% have children aged 5 to 12, 30% are parents to teenagers who still live at home, and 44% are parents of children who are older than 18 years of age.

Responsibility for childcare is shared in just over one in four (27%) of the families in our sample. That being said, women are still more likely than men to assume primary responsibility for childcare within their families. Our previous research in this area identified a strong relationship between responsibility for childcare and stress.

Implications: Balancing work and childcare, while still more likely to be challenging for women, is now problematic for many younger men.

Many employees balance paid employment and the need to provide eldercare

The distribution of the sample with respect to eldercare responsibilities is skewed: while 28% of the respondents report that they have no eldercare, 31% say that they are responsible for the care of 3 or more elderly dependents! The rest of the sample has responsibility for the care of one (20%) or two (22%) elderly dependents.

Dependents requiring care live in a variety of locations. While very few of the employees in our sample (95%) have responsibility for an elderly dependent who lives in their home, just under half (45%) report that they are responsible for at least one dependent who lives nearby and 42% of respondents said that they are responsible for the care of at least one dependent who lives more than an hour away.

Implications: While employees can choose how many children they have, everyone has parents that may require care at some point in time. Balancing paid employment and eldercare is likely to become more of an issue in the next decade as our population ages.

Many Canadians balance paid employment, childcare and eldercare

One in three respondents can be considered to be in the sandwich generation (spend time each week in childcare and eldercare).

Implications: Two important demographic factors (many Canadians are waiting until their early thirties to have children and life expectancy in Canada has increased over time) mean that the number of employees who are faced with balancing the demands of three high energy roles - employment, childcare and eldercare - is likely to increase over the next decade. As such, employers will need to give more tangible attention to work-life issues in order to remain competitive.

Most work a fixed, 9 to 5, work schedule

Most Canadian employees in this sample still work a fixed, 9 to 5, work schedule (i.e. start and stop times set). Two thirds of the respondents (65%) work a fixed work schedule. The use of flexible work arrangements such as a compressed work week (CWW) (15%) and flextime schedules (14%) is much less common. While 15% perform guerilla telework (i.e., work informally at home during regular work hours) fewer than 1% are able to formally telework and no one job shares. One in five of the respondents performed shiftwork.

Implications: Canadian employers need to increase their use of flexible work arrangements in order to be able to recruit and retain employees in a seller's market for labour.

Half are "survivors" of the '90s, one in three are new to the organization

The distribution of the sample with respect to organizational tenure points to a potential issue facing many employers. On the one hand, almost half (43%) of the respondents have been with their current organization for 11 or more years. On the other hand, (36%) have worked for their current organization for 5 years or less. The percent of the sample in the "succession planning pool" (i.e., 6 to 10 years of experience in their current organization) is 21% - less than half as large as the group of experienced employees that our data (years to retirement) suggest that they may have to replace.

One in four of the employees are eligible to retire within five years: Respondents to our survey say that they plan on retiring when they are 59 years of age (not 65!). While the typical respondent in this sample is 14.5 years from retirement, 22% of respondents said that they are less than 5 years from retirement.

Implications: These data suggest that succession planning, knowledge transfer and change management are likely to be a problem for many Canadian organizations.

Many employees have been in their current job for more than four years

Half (52%) of the respondents have been in their current job for 4 or more years. While one in four (28%) have been in their current job for 2 or 3 years only 21% can be considered to be relatively new to their job (been in their position for a year or less). These data suggest that there has been little career mobility within Canadian firms over the past several years.

Implications: These data suggest that career mobility may be an issue in many Canadian organizations - a finding that is problematic given the higher priority accorded to mobility by knowledge workers and younger employees.

Demands on time and energy

Canadian employees devote long hours to work

All things considered the typical employee in this sample spends 50.2 hours in work related activities per week. Sixty percent work more than 45 hours per week while 36% work between 35 and 44 hours.

Many knowledge workers regularly take work home to complete in the evening

Just over half (54%) of the employees in this sample take work home to complete outside of their regular hours on evenings and weekends (a phenomena which is referred to as supplemental work at home or SWAH). These individuals spend another 7 hours in work per week.

Implications: Organizations need to look at workload issues within their workforces given the strong link between time in work, role overload and many of the outcomes included in this analysis.

Competing work demands within families may make balance more difficult.

The partners of our survey respondents also devote a lot of time to their work role. When we exclude those respondents whose spouse does not work, just over half of the employees in this sample (56%) had partners who worked more than 45 hours per week. Furthermore, a majority (62%) had partners who took work home to complete outside of their work regular hours. These partners spent approximately 8.1 hours in supplemental work per week.

Implications: Employers need to be aware that it is not just the demands their own employees face at work but also the demands borne by their employee`s partners that have relevance to the issue of work-life balance. In many Canadian families competing work of the partners makes balance within the family more challenging.

Workloads may need to be re-distributed.

While half (56%) of the employees in the sample are happy with the number of hours they spend in work per week, one in four (28%) indicated that if they had the choice they would spent less time working for proportionally less money. These employees have very heavy work demands (all perform SWAH and all work more than 45 hours per week). Also of note are the 16% of respondents (mostly younger employees) who would like to work more and earn more money. The employees in this group are likely to be underemployed.

Implications: Canadian firms who wish to address issues associated with workload could look at work processes and how work is distributed within their workplace.

Canadian employees are highly dependent on e-mail to stay connected to work

Canadian employees spend a significant proportion of their time at work sending and receiving e-mails. Virtually all (98%) respondents use e-mail at work. While a third (35%) of the respondents spend less than an hour each work day sending and reading e-mails, 37% spend between 1 and 3 hours a day using e-mail and 25% spend more than 3 hours a day processing e-mail.

The majority also check their e-mail on their days off. In fact, the "typical" employee in this sample spends 3 hours per work day and 1 hour per non-work day in e-mail per week (17 hours per week using e-mail). In other words, they spend approximately one third of their working hours using e-mail.

Many employees feel that e-mail has increased stress levels and workloads

The majority of respondents do not feel that work extension technology (WET) such as e-mail has impacted the amount of stress they are under (66% reported no change), the amount of work they do each day/their workloads (59% reported no change), and their ability to balance and family (66% reported no change). That being said, just over one in four (28%) said that their use of WET has increased the amount of stress they are under and the amount of work they do each day/their workloads (36%).

The relationship between the use of WET and work-life balance is more complex and likely depends on how it is used by the employee. While 15% of the sample reported that the technology made it harder for them to balance work and family demands, approximately the same percent (17%) felt that the technology had enhanced their ability to balance competing work and family demands.

The majority of Canadian employees also have substantive demands at home

Half of the respondents spend time each week in childcare and one in five (23%) spend time each week in eldercare. The typical respondent with childcare spends an average of 21.3 hours a week in care or activities with their children. The typical respondent with eldercare spends an average of 6.9 hours a week in care or activities with their elderly dependents.

Implications: The data from this survey suggests that both breadwinning and dependent care are shared in many Canadian families. Employers need to concretely recognize that many of their employees struggle with the need to balance competing demands both at work and at home. They should also be aware that issues with respect to balance are likely to become more complex as family structures and technologies evolve.

Canadians are busy people and balance more than work and family

Most individuals hold a variety of roles, which may change as they move through their career and lifecycles. To fully appreciate the demands faced by the employees in our sample we need, therefore, to look beyond the amount of time spent in work and dependent care and examine the individual's total role set.

Half the respondents were involved in 4 to 6 roles different roles. One in three participated in 7 to 9 roles. While some of the roles employees participate in can be considered optional (exercise, sports, volunteer work), others are not (employee, maintain home, engage in activities with spouse, parenting).

Not only are we engaged in a number of roles, we are also engaged in a number of roles that require a lot of energy with the typical Canadian juggling two to three (37%) or four to five (40%) high energy roles. One in ten is involved in 6 or more high energy roles.

Implications: Employers may have to expand their definition of balance to include more roles than just those of employee and caregiver.

Caregiving and paid employment require higher amounts of energy

What roles require higher energy from the role holder? The answer is clear: caregiving (parenting younger children, parenting older children, caring for a disabled dependent), paid employment and managing the work of others, being married and maintaining ones' home: in other words, work and family roles. Given the above it is no surprise that many Canadians experience conflict between work and family, as roles in both domains require a moderate to high amount of energy for those who take on the role.

Many employees are overloaded by the dual demands imposed by work and family

Role overload is defined as “a type of role conflict that results from excessive demands on the time and energy supply of an individual such that satisfactory performance is improbable.” Three types of overload are examined in this study: total role overload, work role overload and family role overload. Forty percent of the sample report high levels of total role overload, 32% report high work role overload and 26% report high family role overload. These data suggest that Canadian employees are more likely to be "time crunched" at work than at home.

Implications: Organizations who are interested in addressing issues with respect to employee well being and workloads should begin by identifying the key sources of work role overload within their workforce.

Work Attitudes and Outcomes

Most of the knowledge workers in this sample like what they do and where they do it

Almost two thirds (64%) of the respondents report high levels of commitment to their organization (i.e., are loyal to their organization and engaged in their work) and are not looking for another job (75% with low intent to turnover). Fifty-eight report high job satisfaction and most are satisfied with the extrinsic aspects of their jobs (e.g., their work schedule, the amount they are paid, the kinds of activities they perform at work and the number of hours they work).

That being said, a substantive minority of the employees have high intent to turnover (13% are thinking of leaving their current employer several times a week or more, 12% are thinking of leaving once a week) and 35% have mixed feelings about their work (only 7% are very dissatisfied). What aspects of their work are the Canadians dissatisfied with? The data suggest the following answers to this question: career development, their opportunities to meet their career goals, and their workloads.

Implications: Addressing issues associated with career development and workloads should make it easier for organizations to recruit, retain and engage knowledge workers.

Work-life conflict

Three types of work-life conflict are considered in this analysis: family interferes with work, work with interferes family and caregiver strain. In the first case, interference occurs when family role responsibilities hinder performance at work (i.e., a child's illness prevents attendance at work). In the second case, problems arise when work role activities impede performance of family responsibilities (i.e., long hours in paid work prevent the performance of duties at home). Caregiver strain refers to the physical, emotional and financial stresses associated with caring for an elderly dependent.

Many employees give priority to their work (not their family) role

The employees in this sample are twice as likely to let work interfere with family as the reverse. One in three Canadians experience high levels of work interferes with family (put work first). Another one in three (30%) report moderate levels of this form of work-life conflict and 41% report low levels of work interferes with family. The reverse trend is observed when one considers family interferes with work. Only 15% of the sample report high levels of family interferes with work (met family demands at the expense of work) while 43% report low levels of family interferes with work. The rest of the respondents (43%) report moderate levels of family interferes with work.

Implications: Why do Canadians give priority to their work role? Is this their choice or do they feel pressured by their employer to be available 24/7 (organizational culture, immediate manager, workloads, concern over job security). The data from this study suggest that it may be a bit of both - knowledge workers who like what they do and organizational cultures (see below) that value employees who put work first.

One in five of our respondents report high levels of caregiver strain

One in five of the employed Canadians in this sample report high levels of caregiver strain. Much of this strain stems from the physical challenges of caring for an adult (29% report physical strain) and from feeling overwhelmed by the caregiver experience (21% report feeling overwhelmed). Very few of the employees (10%) reported high levels of financial strain - a finding that is consistent with the fact that many respondents live in families which are not struggling financially.

Implications: Organizations should consider offering support for those employees engaged in eldercare within their EAP programs (if they do not already).

Work-life conflict negatively impacts work performance

Work-life conflict negatively impacts the work performance of one in four employees. A substantive number of employees report that over the course of the last 12 months work-life challenges have caused them to be absent from work more often (25%), reduce their work productivity (22%), make greater use of the benefits offered by the organization (21%), and reduce their work hours (19%).

Implications: These data support the idea that to increase their efficiency and effectiveness, Canadian organizations need to deal with the issue of work-life conflict.

Work-life conflict negatively impacts employees

One in three of our employees report that work life issues have significantly reduced the amount of sleep that they get (31%), their energy levels (36%) and the amount of time they have for coping activities including finding time for themselves (27%) and time for social activities and recreation (30%).

Work-life issues and workloads contribute to employee absenteeism

Just over three quarters of our respondents (77%) missed work in the six months prior to the study being done. The most common reasons for missing work included health problems (63%) and emotional, mental or physical fatigue (45%). One in three missed work because of childcare issues and one in ten missed work because of eldercare. Finally, just under one in ten (8%) missed work because their organization would not grant a vacation day.

These data show that people who missed work due to health problems missed 9.2 days of work in a 12 month period. Similarly, those absent due to eldercare missed 9.6 days per year, those absent due to emotional or physical fatigue missed 7.6 days per year, and those who missed work due to childcare concerns missed 7.8 days per year.

Implications: These findings support a link between work-life issues, workload and absenteeism and provide yet another reason for addressing these issues: to decrease the costs associated with absenteeism. The high number of days absent due to mental and emotional fatigue (approximately 8 days a year) is worthy of note as emotional fatigue is a precursor to employee burnout.

Mental and physical health

Many of the employees in our sample are in poorer mental health

Perceived stress refers to the extent to which one perceives one's situation to be unpredictable, uncontrollable and burdensome. High levels of stress are systemic in Canadian organizations as 57% of respondent report high levels of stress and a substantive proportion (40%) report moderate levels of stress. Only 3% of the sample report low levels of stress.

Depressed mood is a state characterized by low energy and persistent feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. Just over one in three (36%) of the respondents report high levels of depressed mood (36%), almost the same proportion (40%) reporting moderate levels of depressed mood. Twenty-three of the sample reported low levels of depressed mood.

Life satisfaction provides an assessment of an individual's overall sense of well-being (physical, emotional, social). Two-thirds of our employees report that they are moderately satisfied with

their lives. The proportion of the sample with high life satisfaction (23%) is double the number reporting low life satisfaction (12%).

Many of the employees in our sample are in poorer physical health

Taken as a whole, the data indicate that while just half (46%) of the respondents are in good physical health, one in five (16%) are not. Consider the following:

- While 46% say that their health is very good to excellent, 38% say that their health is good, while 16% say their health is poor/fair.
- While 50% have not seen a physician in the last six months, 25% have seen a physician once and 24% have seen a physician 2 or more times. Respondents that have seen a physician, make an average of 3 visits to their doctor in a six month period.

Implications: These data support the idea that to increase their efficiency and effectiveness Canadian organizations need to focus on the health (physical and mental) of their workforce.

How does it all fit together?

A number of important conclusions can be derived from the results obtained when we tested the theoretical model underpinning this study. These conclusions are listed below:

- The more roles the employee occupies, and the more hours they devote to paid employment, the higher the level of work role overload.
- The more roles the employee occupies, and the more time the employee's spouse spends in SWAH, the higher the level of family role overload.
- Family financial status makes a difference. Employees who are economically better off appear to be more able to cope with the demands they face at home (objective family demands) than their counterparts who live in families with fewer economic resources. We speculate that people with higher incomes are more able to purchase services which help them reduce their demands at home. It is also important to note that an employee's work role overload increases as family financial status decreases.
- While total role overload is a function of overload at work and at home, work role overload is a much stronger predictor of total role overload than is family role overload.
- Total role overload is an important predictor of organizational and employee well being as well as work-life conflict.
- Overloaded employees are less likely to be satisfied with their job and committed to their employer. They are also more likely to be thinking of leaving the organization and more likely to report that work-life issues are negatively impacting their performance and productivity at work.

- Overloaded employees are more likely to be in poorer physical and mental health (i.e., report higher levels of perceived stress, depressed mood and poor health).
- Total role overload is a very important predictor of work-life conflict. It explains 55% of the variation in work interferes with family and 19% of the variation in family interferes with work. The greater the overload, the higher both forms of work-life conflict.
- Employees who are overloaded are more likely to let work interfere with family than to let family interfere with work.
- Employees who are already overloaded (i.e., report high levels of total role overload) are less likely to add to that overload by having children (i.e., more likely to say that they have decided to have fewer children/no children).

What can organizations do to address this issue?

What can organizations do to address these issues? Key findings and conclusions from this study are summarized below.

Organizational culture makes a difference

Organizational culture refers to the unwritten rules and corporate norms that dictate how things are done, how things work, what is to be done and what is valued in the organization (i.e., “the way things are done around here”). Many of our employees strongly agree that their employer values and rewards those who keep their work and family lives separate (36% of the sample) and expects them to be available for work 24/7 (25% of the sample).

This is unfortunate as our analysis determined that:

- Employees who work for an organization with a culture that values employees who give work priority over family experience a stronger relationship between work role overload and total role overload than those who work for an organization where such a culture is not in place.
- Employees who work for an organization whose culture expects them to keep work and family domains separate experience a stronger relationship between work role overload and total overload than those who work for an organization where such a culture is not in place.

The importance of organizational culture to the issue of work-life balance can be appreciated by noting that the "culture of work takes priority over family" was found to be one of the strongest moderators in this study.

Implications: Canadian organizations cannot make progress with respect to employee well-being and work-life balance if they do not focus on changing their organizational cultures.

Who you work for (rather than where you work) makes a difference

Our research has clearly demonstrated that work and family policies are ineffective if supervisors do not support them. While just over half (52%) of the respondents work for supportive managers, 16% work for non-supportive managers and one in three work for a "mixed" manager. This is unfortunate as positive management support moderates (in this case weakens) the relationship between work role overload and total role overload (i.e., it leads to lower levels of total role overload).

Implications: Canadian organizations cannot make progress with respect to employee well-being and work-life balance if they focus on policies rather than practice. The key point of intervention appears to be the immediate manager who is the gatekeeper with respect to policy use. To increase management support employers need to promote people into management positions who have the people skills to do the job. They also need to give managers the training and time they need to be successful at this role. Finally, they need to make managers accountable for the management of the people in their group.

Perceived flexibility makes a difference

While 32% of the respondents report very little flexibility with respect to work hours and work location, 27% have high flexibility and 42% have moderate flexibility. This is unfortunate as perceived flexibility is the strongest moderator of the relationship between work role overload and total role overload (in this case it weakens the relationship). The extent to which workplace flexibility is problematic for many Canadian employees can be appreciated by considering the following data:

- 70% of respondents find it hard to spend some of their work day working from home - a fact that is likely to frustrate the substantive number of respondents who perform work from home during personal/family time.
- Almost 40% of respondents cannot vary their arrival and departure times, or arrange their work schedule to accommodate their family demands. One in three finds it hard to interrupt their work day to deal with personal matters and then return to work. These findings, while not surprising given the low use of flexible work arrangements by our respondents, are cause for concern as analysis done using our 2001 data determined that these three behaviours are key determinants of employee mental health, work-life balance and absenteeism.
- One in three finds it hard to take time off to attend a course or training. Challenges here are likely to frustrate younger workers who place a high value on career development.
- One in three finds it hard to take paid time off work to care for an elderly dependent - a finding that suggests that employers are more supportive or understanding of the need to take time off work to care for children than for elderly dependents.
- One in three finds it hard to take their holidays when they want.

Implications: These findings reinforce the need for organizations to address issues with respect to their organizational culture and the behaviour of their managers. They also speak to the need for the implementation of more flexible work arrangements.

The employees in our sample have very little control of their situation at work

Respondents were more likely to report that they have high levels of control over their home situation (61% report high control while only 5% low control) than their work situation (only 19% report high control while 27% report low control).

In this study neither control over work nor control over family moderated the path between domain specific (work, family) role overload and total role overload - a finding that contradicts much of the research in this area.

How does the situation today compare to that encountered in 1991 and 2001?

What has not changed over time?

There were no meaningful differences over time in any of the measures of physical health collected. Family demands also remained unchanged over time. Also important are data showing that employees feel approximately the same about their organizations (commitment) and their jobs (job satisfaction) as they did in 1991 - and more positively than they did in 2001 - a finding that is somewhat at odds with the fact that intent to turnover has not changed over time (one in four employees in both the 2001 and 2012 samples were thinking of leaving their current employer weekly or more).

What has not changed over time -- but should have?

The data also shows that perceived flexibility and management support remained relatively unchanged over time - an unfortunate finding given: (1) the fact that only a minority of employees reporting high levels of perceived flexibility (29% high in 2001, 27% high in 2012) or high levels of management support (45% of employees in 2001 and 2012 samples rated their manager as supportive), and (2) the data showing that both perceived flexibility and management support help employees cope with higher levels of work and total role overload.

Also problematic are data showing that despite all the talk on work-life balance, the percent of our samples reporting high work interferes with family has not changed over time.

The use of alternative work arrangements such as flextime has declined over time

The use of alternative work arrangements such as flextime has declined over time. Substantially more respondents to the 2011 survey worked a fixed 9 to 5 schedule and fewer worked flextime than was the case in 2001.

Work demands have increased dramatically over time

The amount of time employed Canadians spend in paid employment has increased dramatically over time with a substantially greater proportions of the 2012 sample (68% of the men and 54% of the women) working more than 45 hours per week than was the case in 2001 (55% of the men and 39% of the women).

Absenteeism has also increased over time

The percent of our sample who indicated that they missed work (all causes) increased by 7 percentage points between 2001 and 2011. Much of this increase in absenteeism can be attributed to an increase in the number of people who missed work due to ill health (increased by 17 percentage points over time), challenges with respect to childcare (increased by 17 percentage points over time), and an increase in people who missed work due to emotional and mental fatigue (increased by 12 percentage points over time).

While employee mental health has declined

The data suggest that mental health has been an issue within Canada's workforce for several decades. While the percent with high levels of stress (57% in 2011 versus 54% in 2001 and 44% in 1991) and depressed mood (36% in 2011 and 2001 and 24% in 1991) increased dramatically between 1991 and 2001, the levels have stayed stubbornly high over the last decade. During the same time period levels of life satisfaction have precipitously declined (23% in 2011 versus 41% in 2001 and 45% in 1991).

More Canadians are putting their family first

The data suggest that the percent of the Canadian workforce that puts family ahead of work (i.e. family interferes with work) has increased over time (15% high in 2011 versus 10% in 2001 and 5% in 1991). This increase could be due to the fact that the number of employees in the sandwich group has increased over time.

Changes for the better

Finally, the data suggest that the number of employees with high levels of caregiver strain has declined over time (25% in 2001 versus 20% in 2011). While we cannot tell from the data why this might be the case we speculate that this decline might be due to the increased availability of support networks within the community for people caring for elderly dependents.