

Chapter

2

Employment and Work Environment

Overview

Employment status and conditions in the work environment can affect the health of parents and their children. Generally speaking, people are healthier when they are employed, have a high degree of control over their work circumstances, and have fewer stress-related job demands. Stable employment and adequate salary determine child and family income and social status. Chronic unemployment or excessive work-related stress for parents can negatively affect the mental and physical health of all family members.

The increased participation of women in the paid labour force has had a profound effect on the organization of family life, including the necessity or requirement that care arrangements be made for children while their parents are at work. For this reason, the availability and quality of child-care services are of paramount concern.

Employment, unemployment and workplace social supports are important to youth as well as adults. A high proportion of Canada's teenagers are employed — many work on a part-time basis, gaining valuable experience as they complete school and earning money towards their future education expenses.



Relationship to Healthy Child Development

Employment contributes to better health for parents and children.

Employment can be a protective health factor for parents and children. Employment status and working conditions strongly influence the economic opportunities of parents. These factors can affect their ability to carry out parenting responsibilities and, consequently, to develop healthy relationships with their children.

Conversely, unemployment is associated with poorer health. A major review by the World Health Organization found that high levels of unemployment and economic instability in a society adversely affect the mental and physical health of unemployed individuals, their families and their communities (Wescott et al., 1985). Similarly, a Canadian study found unemployed people have significantly more psychological distress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, disability days, activity limitations, health problems and hospitalization visits than do those that are employed (D'Arcy, 1986, p. 127).

In turn, these factors can have a negative impact on the health of children, who may encounter mental health problems, lowered self-esteem and a decreased ability to manage stress. They may also be less sociable and distrustful during such a difficult family time.

A healthy workplace means better health.

People who have control over their work circumstances and few stress-related demands of the job (e.g. fast work pace, frequent deadlines) are healthier and tend to live longer than those in more stressful or riskier work activities. In addition, people who have strong workplace social support (measured by the number and quality of interactions with co-workers) are more likely to be healthier than those without this type of support (Federal, Provincial and Territorial Advisory Committee on Population Health, 1994, p. 18).

A supportive workplace — coupled with workplace policies that recognize and support the needs of parents — can reduce stress and improve parents' ability to meet the demands of both working and parenting.



High-quality, accessible child care is vital.

The entry of increasing numbers of women into the paid labour force over the past several decades has resulted in a dramatic shift in child-care arrangements. Accessible child-care services are essential in supporting and promoting employment. They also give parents the opportunity to complete or continue their education and/or to participate in job training programs (Lero and Johnson, 1994, p. 31).

Moreover, the quality of child-care services is important. “When child care providers are responsive and warm, have some understanding of child development and are not responsible for too many children, child care can be just as beneficial, or more beneficial, than parent care — particularly in social and language skill development. When caregivers are neglectful or harsh, unable to give individualized attention because they are responsible for too many children and there is inadequate stimulation, research shows that non-parental care can be harmful to children” (Guy, 1997, p. 81).



Conditions and Trends

The literature identifies a number of employment-related issues that have strong links to healthy child development. This section provides recent data describing four of these issue areas: parents’ labour force participation, working and parenting, child care, and youth employment.

Parents’ Labour Force Participation

Most parents of young children are in the labour force, a situation that both benefits children and presents challenges to family life and healthy child development. Some of the facts about parents’ labour force participation are provided below.

Many parents are working.

Working parents are the norm in most families, but not all. The National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) shows the breakdown for two-parent and lone-parent families. In 1994–95, more than a third (35.5%) of children under age 12 lived in families where both parents were employed full time, and another third (33.2%) lived in two-parent families where one parent was employed. The situation was strikingly different for children in lone-parent families. More than one half (54.9%) lived in families where the parent was not employed, while for just over one third, the parent worked full time (Ross, Scott and Kelly, 1996, p. 35). See **Exhibit 2.1**.

Two-parent families with children under 18 have increased their combined weeks of employment an average of 5.7 weeks — from 72.6 weeks in 1984 to 78.3 weeks in 1994 (CCSD, 1996, p. 15).



2.1 Distribution of children aged 0 to 11, by labour market status of parent(s), Canada, 1994–95

	Two-parent families (%)	Single-parent families (%)
Both full-time (except single-parent)	35.5	34.1
One full-time, one part-time	21.8	n/a
One full-time, one not employed	33.2	n/a
Part-time only ^a	2.9	10.9
Not employed	6.6	54.9

a. Includes two-parent families in which one parent is employed part-time and the other is employed part-time or not employed.
n/a Not applicable

Source: Adapted from D.P. Ross, K. Scott and M.A. Kelly (1996). "Overview: Children in Canada in the 1990s." In *Growing Up in Canada: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth*. Catalogue No. 89-550-MPE, No. 1. Ottawa: Human Resources Development Canada and Statistics Canada, p. 36.

More women are working.

Analysis of 1991 census data shows that the participation rate of women in the labour market more than doubled between 1961 and 1991, increasing from 29% to 60%. The participation rate for men declined over the same period, dropping from 81% to 76% (Gunderson, 1998, p. 23).

Women with young children have higher participation rates than women in general. Looking back to 1976, only 50% of mothers with children under the age of 3 were in the labour force (CICH, 1994, p. 7). See **Exhibit 2.2**. While 1991 data show that more than 70% of women with a preschooler and 78% with a child between 6 and 14 years old participated in the labour force (Gunderson, 1998, p. 28). In 1995, most married fathers (94%) were in the labour force, regardless of the age of their children (Marshall, 1998, p. 73).

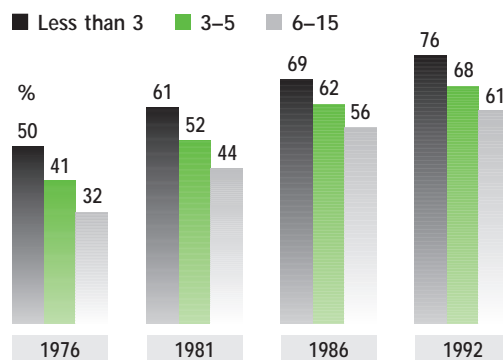
Unemployment is higher among Aboriginal and lone-parent families.

The percentage of families with at least one parent unemployed for more than six months increased from 7.1% in 1981 to 12.2% in 1994 (CCSD, 1996, p. 19).

In 1994–95, 6.6% of children aged 0 to 11 years in two-parent families lived in homes where neither parent was employed, while 54.9% of children in lone-parent homes lived with a parent who was not employed (Ross, Scott and Kelly, 1996, p. 35). See **Exhibit 2.1**.

In 1991, 10% of Canadians were unemployed compared with 25% of all Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal people living on reserve have the highest rate of unemployment at 31% (Statistics Canada, 1993, as cited in CICH, 1994, p. 138).

2.2 Labour force participation of women,^a by age of youngest child, Canada, 1976 to 1992



a. Includes full-time and part-time participation.

Source: Canadian Institute of Child Health (1994). *The Health of Canada's Children: A CICH Profile*, 2nd edition. Ottawa: CICH, p. 7.

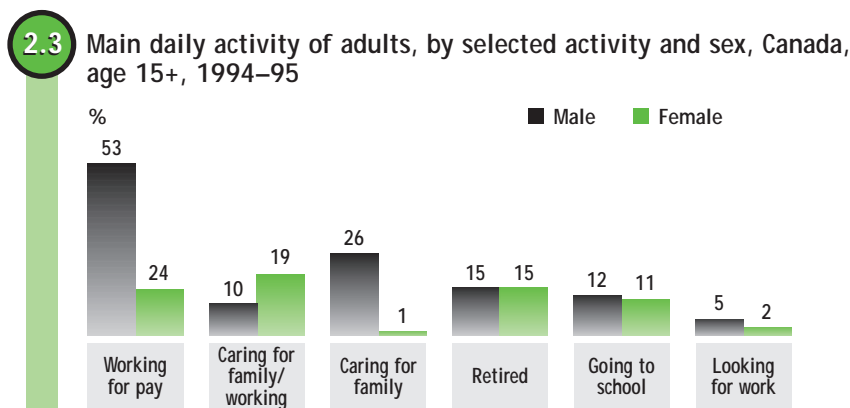


Working and Parenting

Increased participation of women in the labour force has created new challenges for parents, employers and communities pertaining to the integration of work and family responsibilities. Regardless of their employment status, women still play the primary role in child care and housework. This dual role has been linked to significant stress and health problems for women (Marshall, 1994, pp. 27–29).

Women do more “home” work.

Women are twice as likely as men to describe their main activity as caring for a family and working, and half as likely to describe it as simply working for pay or profit (Federal, Provincial and Territorial Advisory Committee on Population Health, 1996, p. 46). See **Exhibit 2.3**.



Source: Federal, Provincial and Territorial Advisory Committee on Population Health (1996). *Report on the Health of Canadians: Technical Appendix*. Catalogue No. H39-385/1-1996E. Ottawa: Health Canada, p. 48.

In fact, the work that primarily benefits children is done mostly by women, even when women are employed full time, and regardless of whether their husbands are also employed full time. In 1992, in households with young children where the mother and father are both employed full time (in the paid labour force), women did almost twice as much child-related work. For every hour men spent doing child-oriented work, women spent almost two hours (1.86 hours) (Federal-Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women, 1997, p. 29).

The same study also shows that in 1992, women worked a half hour more every day (including paid and unpaid work) than men — the equivalent of five weeks per year at a full-time paid job (Federal-Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women, 1997, p. 21).



Working mothers experience high levels of stress.

Recent research reveals that striving to balance work and family demands is closely linked to significant stress and mental health problems, particularly for women. In *The Progress of Canada's Children — 1996*, the Canadian Council on Social Development (1996, p. 15) found that working mothers report:

- high levels of work/family conflict (40%),
- high levels of stress (50%), and
- high levels of depressed mood (40%).

The stress experienced by working mothers seems to be particularly high among employed lone mothers. A 1993 study reported that this group was more likely to experience high levels of work–family tension than employed married mothers (Vanier Institute of the Family, 1998, p. 29). Lone fathers are likely to experience similar high stress levels.

Research suggests that employers seldom consider the responsibilities of employees who have family obligations as having an impact on their work. Employees are often stressed and in poor health, turn down promotions and transfers, yet feel guilty about the quality of their parenting. Employers tend to focus on the negative effects on work performance, absenteeism, turnover rates and employee morale (Vanier Institute of the Family, 1998, pp. i–ii).

Flexibility is key.

Women with children were more likely than women without children to work part time (26% and 18%, respectively), to be self-employed (17% versus 12%), to have flextime (32% versus 29%) and to have flexible working arrangements (27% versus 16%) (Fast and Frederick, 1996, p. 16).

Child Care

With more and more women entering the labour force, accessible high-quality child care is increasingly important. There is evidence to suggest that child-care arrangements are not meeting the changing needs of Canadian families.

Child-care services and subsidies are in high demand.

In 1994–95, 32.4% of children under age 12 (1.5 million children) were in some form of non-parental child care while their parents worked or studied. Of these, just over one third (34.2%) received unregulated care in the home of a non-relative, and slightly more than one quarter (26.9%) were in regulated



care. Almost one quarter (23.9%) were cared for by a relative (including a sibling), or cared for themselves (Ross, Scott and Kelly, 1996, p. 25). See **Exhibit 2.4**. We also know that in the same year:

- There were 360,000 regulated child-care spaces for children under age 13; for the 1 million preschool children whose parents were working or studying more than 20 hours per week, there were an additional 270,000 such spaces (HRDC, 1994, p. 53).
- Approximately 42% of regulated day-care spaces in Canada were subsidized for low-income families (HRDC, 1994, p. 53).

Between the early 1970s and the late 1980s, the annual growth of child-care spaces Canada-wide ranged from 10% to 16%. However, there has been a slower growth rate since 1990. In 1995, the rate of growth was 4.7%, which is fairly typical of growth rates during this decade (HRDC, 1995 and 1996, pp. 3, 9).

In recent years, both the number of child-care subsidies for low-income parents and operating or wage grants to child-care providers were reduced in many provinces. Some provincial governments have also lowered standards for child-care facilities and have cut back on monitoring and enforcement of regulations (CCSD, 1997, p. 30).

2.4

Distribution of children aged 0 to 11, by type of non-parental child-care arrangement, Canada, 1994–95

Primary care arrangement	% of children
Unrelated family home day care, unregulated	34.2
Care by relative, in child's or someone else's home	21.4
Child-care centre, regulated	15.7
In child's home by non-relative, unregulated	14.2
Unrelated family home day care, regulated	7.2
Before and/or after school program regulated	4.0
Sibling or self-care	2.5
Other	0.7 ^a

a. Estimate less reliable due to high sampling variability.

Source: Adapted from D.P. Ross, K. Scott and M.A. Kelly (1996). "Overview: Children in Canada in the 1990s." In *Growing Up in Canada: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth*. Catalogue No. 89-550-MPE, No. 1. Ottawa: Human Resources Development Canada and Statistics Canada, p. 25.

Siblings play an important role.

In 1988, 23% (340,000) of children in Canada aged 6 to 12 years who required care spent at least some time alone or with a sibling under age 13 while parents worked at a job or business. Self-care or care by a sibling was the primary care arrangement for 7% of children aged 6 to 9, and 21% of children aged 10 to 12 (Lero and Johnson, 1994, p. 33).

First Nations communities have limited access to child-care services.

Very little national data exist concerning child-care services in First Nations communities. It is understood that Aboriginal peoples' conceptions of child care tend to be more holistic and involve extended family than is the case for the general Canadian population. The most recent data indicate that there are only 68 child-care centres in more than 1,000 First Nations communities in Canada (National Inquiry into First Nations Child Care, 1989).



Changing needs require changing services.

Supply of regulated day-care spaces has not kept pace with demand. Demand for licensed child care is not being met. A 1994 national study drew attention to the fact that less than half (45%) of children for whom licensed care was preferred by their parents received such care. Parents surveyed cited several reasons why alternatives were used:

- licensed care was unavailable or in short supply (70%),
- licensed care arrangements were too expensive (22%), and
- hours when care was available did not match parents' work schedules (8%) (Lero and Johnson, 1994, pp. 34-35).

There are other indications that child-care services are not meeting the needs of a changing workplace. Because most child-care centres are open during "standard" hours only, parents who work evenings or weekends may have considerable difficulty finding non-parental child care (Lero et al., 1992, p. 63).

Youth Employment

Youth unemployment is higher than in the general population, even though young people are more highly educated than in the past. The outlook for young people with post-secondary education is good, while females who drop out of high school may have more difficulty finding a job than do male drop-outs.

Youth unemployment is increasing.

Between 1989 and 1995, the number of working 15- to 24-year-olds fell about 500,000, while adult employment numbers rose 1 million. This difference has been largely attributed to the lack of experience or seniority of youth (HRDC, 1996, p. 3). With increased computerization and demand for highly educated employees, youth are often the ones to be turned away from prospective jobs (CCSD, 1997, p. 51).

Leaving high school may have more serious consequences for females than for males. According to the *1995 School Leavers Follow-up Survey*, 30% of young women high school drop-outs are unemployed, compared with 17% of young men (HRDC and Statistics Canada, 1996, p. 5). Interestingly, two thirds of high school drop-outs are male.



In 1995, approximately four out of five people who graduated from university or college in 1990 were employed full time, with less than 10% working in jobs unrelated to their education.



Young people are working in part-time, low-paying jobs.

More young people are working part time. In 1994, 40% of teenagers (including students and non-students) were employed — 80% on a part-time basis (CCSD, 1996, p. 54). In 1996, 20% of all non-student employment was part time, up from 6% in 1976 (Statistics Canada, 1997, p. 30).

Youth are likely to find work in low-paying, service sector jobs. Of 15- to 18-year-old secondary school students who worked in 1995, most (89%) were employed in service jobs. Two thirds worked in accommodation, food and beverage services, or in a retail trade (Greenon, 1998, p. 86).

In 1995, secondary students earned an average of \$6.66 an hour, while their post-secondary counterparts averaged \$8.13 per hour (Greenon, 1998, p. 87).

Post-secondary education contributes to employability.

In 1995, approximately four out of five people who graduated from university or college in 1990 were employed full time, with less than 10% working in jobs unrelated to their education. More than two thirds of trade/vocational graduates had full-time jobs (HRDC, 1998, p. 1). See **Exhibit 2.5**.

Both employment and earnings for post-secondary graduates have remained stable since 1982. Three HRDC/Statistics Canada studies of 1982, 1986 and 1990 graduates, five years after graduation, show that the proportion of college and university graduates with full-time jobs remained fairly constant (HRDC, 1998, p. 2).

2.5 Unemployment rates for youth aged 15 to 24, by educational attainment, Canada, selected years, 1980 to 1995

Year	Primary education (0-8 years)	Some or completed high school	Some post-secondary	Post-secondary certificate or diploma	University degree
1980	22.2	14.0	9.3	8.7	7.0
1985	27.4	18.9	11.7	10.3	9.7
1990	25.0	14.6	9.3	8.7	6.6
1995	27.0	18.7	12.4	11.0	8.6

Source: Prepared by the Canadian Council on Social Development using data from Statistics Canada *Labour Force Annual Averages, Selected Years*. In Canadian Council on Social Development (1997). *The Progress of Canada's Children — 1997*. Ottawa: CCSD, p. 52.



Employment and Other Determinants

Education

Employment interacts with education to affect health outcomes. For instance, the more education people have, the less likely they are to be unemployed at any time in their lives. Furthermore, people with fewer than nine years of education are more likely than those with higher education levels to have unrewarding, low-paying jobs. They are also more likely to have jobs that are characterized by a high rate of occupational injuries, to experience periods of unemployment, and to rely on social assistance (Chevalier et al., 1995, as cited in Working Group on Community Health Information Systems, 1995, p. 72).

Parents' education has been linked to work status and household income — those with higher educational qualifications are more likely to hold higher-paying jobs (Ross, Scott and Kelly, 1996, p. 36).

Education greatly affects young people's chances of being employed. Nearly 19% of youth aged 15 to 24 with high school education or less were unemployed in 1995, compared with less than 9% of those with a university degree. These rates are similar to those in 1985, but higher than those in 1990 (CCSD, 1997, p. 10). See **Exhibit 2.5**.

Working teens are less likely to drop out of school. However, teenagers who work more than 20 hours a week are at risk for leaving school early (CCSD, 1996, p. 54). In 1993, teens 14 to 17 years old made a significant contribution to their family incomes, earning more than \$2 billion dollars collectively (CCSD, 1996, p. 54).

Genetic and Biological Factors

As more and more children with genetic, developmental and psychiatric disorders enter adulthood, there will be an increased requirement for suitable jobs — those that provide dignity and remuneration, and are geared to their special abilities.

Culture

It has been established that culture has an impact on the education and occupation of an individual, as well as the education and occupation of the person's spouse. This affects income, knowledge of support structures, access to informal support and personal coping skills (Erickson, 1991, p. 4).



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