

The impact of long working hours on employed fathers and their families

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Abstract

In Australia and other western countries, two countervailing trends relating to workforce participation have affected family life. On the one hand, there has been a surge in the workforce participation of women – including women with partners and dependent children and associated calls on fathers to play a more active role in the non-financial aspects of home making. On the other hand, the proportion of men working long hours is considerably greater today than it was 20 years ago.

This paper uses data from the first wave of the *Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey* to examine links between aspects of work hours (most particularly, the number of hours usually worked and the satisfaction with this regime), other employment circumstances, family characteristics, perceptions of work-family balance, and wellbeing across various other domains of personal and family life. The HILDA survey is the first household panel survey in Australia. It has been designed to improve our understanding of the dynamics of and interconnections between various aspects of life, including labour force participation, financial circumstances and housing, family formation, relationships and parenting, and personal attitudes, health and subjective wellbeing (for further information, see the HILDA website, <http://www.melbourneinstitute.com/hilda/>).

The present paper represents a preliminary analysis that is designed to stimulate discussion, in preparation for a more detailed analysis of links between working hours and wellbeing.

Acknowledgements

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1. Introduction

One of the most significant social and economic developments of the last few decades has been a dramatic increase in the participation of mothers in the workforce (Gray, Qu, Renda and de Vaus 2003). While there have been some decreases in male employment over this period, overall there has been an increase in the proportion of couple families in which both parents are employed. Between 1983 and 2002, the proportion of families with dependent children who have two parents employed increased from 39.7 to 56.9 per cent (ABS various years).

The increased workforce participation of mothers with dependent children has had a profound effect on family life. Some of the domestic work traditionally undertaken by mothers has been contracted out (for example child care and house cleaning), or lessened by the use of labour saving devices and purchasing prepared food. There has been relatively little research in Australia into how men's and women's involvement in domestic tasks over time has changed over time. In relation to housework, it appears that the time that men spend in housework has decreased or not changed, although with women spending less time on these activities, men's share in these activities seems to have increased (see Baxter 2002; Bittman and Matheson 1996). Turning to men's involvement in childrearing, the limited number of studies provide inconsistent results, with some studies suggesting that men are playing an increasingly active role in their children's lives (Dempsey 2000; Bittman & Matheson 1996), and others suggesting no change (Baxter 2002; Russell, Barclay, Edgecombe et al. 1999).

There have also been changes in the workplace. Some of these changes appear to assist employees to negotiate work and family responsibilities whereas others make it more difficult. On the positive side, increasingly employers are offering flexible work hours and leave for caring for family members than in the past, although access to these work arrangements is quite uneven (ABS 2003, Gray & Tudball 2002). Furthermore, it appears that women are more inclined than men to agree with the proposition that employees should have a right to these benefits (Baxter 2000). There is evidence that mothers are much more likely than fathers to make use of family friendly work arrangements (ABS 2003). However, working in a family-friendly environment is becoming increasingly important for fathers as their partners are increasingly likely to be employed.

Trends in working hours

While part-time employment is becoming increasingly common in the Australian labour market, amongst full-time employees, the average full time employee in Australia works longer hours than full time workers in most other OECD countries (Campbell 2002).¹ One difficulty in interpreting the literature on long working hours is that there is no consistently used definition of what are "long hours". The "standard" full-time working week has often been considered to be 35-40 hours (for example Wooden & Warne 2003) or 35-44 hours (for example Dawson et al. 2001;

1. Wooden (2001) cautions against such cross-country comparisons, citing the OECD's warning that different sources and methods are used in different countries to estimate hours worked.

Healy 2000). On the other hand, there is much less consistency in how hours in excess of this are categorised. For example, Dawson McCulloch and Baker (2001) label 45 or more hours per week as “extended hours” or “very long hours” (p.11); Wooden and Loundes (2001), treat 49 hours or more as “long hours; Healy (2000) sees such hours as “very long”, and 45–48 hours as “long”; and Kelley (2001), classifies 49–59 hours as “long” and 60 or more hours as “very long”.

While, at the aggregate level there has been some polarization in men’s working hours, Healey (2000) shows that the shift towards longer than standard hours (35–44 hours) is greater than that towards shorter hours. Furthermore, his analysis indicates that this aggregate picture hides the fact that the trends for different age groups are very different. For example, between 1986-87 and 1998-99, the trend towards working fewer than 30 hours was considerably greater than the trend towards working 45 or more hours for men under 25 years, while the opposite applied for men aged 45-59 years.²

Healy (2000) further shows that the shift towards “long hours” for men almost entirely represents an increase in the proportion working in excess of 48 hours. Similarly, Campbell (2002) shows that, while the proportion of all male employees working 50 or more hours has increased from 15 per cent in 1985 to 25 per cent in 2000, the proportions working 45 to 49 hours has changed little (it was 10 and 11 per cent in 1985 2000 respectively).³ Indeed, of male full-time workers, 35 per cent were working 50 or more hours per week in 2002, up from 23 per cent in 1982 (ABS 2003). However, the increase in the proportions of all employed persons working in excess of 48 hours is restricted to the period 1983 to 1994. Since this period, the proportion of the workforce working long hours has fluctuated (Wooden and Loundes 2001).

In addition to increases in recorded working hours, there is some evidence that technological advancements have increasingly enabled employees to work from home. While these changes can be positive, they can also lead to increased demands on employees to remain in touch with their place of employment and make it more difficult to disengage from work. Lehmkohl (1999) describes this process as one in which the office has crept into the home.

Finally, there is some evidence that employees believe that they are working harder than they did in previous years (Allan, O’Donnell & Peetz 1999; Beder 2001; Morehead, Steele, Stephen, & Duffin 1997). However, as Wooden (1999) notes, the extent to which this perception reflect an actual increase in work intensity has yet to be tested Secondly, Wooden argues that increasing work intensity is not necessarily harmful per se; the implications for health would depend on the base line level and the rate of illness-related absence from work changed little in the 1990s.

The aim of this paper is to explore some of the implications of fathers’ working long hours for both their own wellbeing and that of their families. The impact of working

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2. During this period, Healy’s analysis (2000) suggests that there was a fall in the proportions of men in all five- year age groups (covering 15 to 59 years) who worked 30-34 hours per week.
 3. These figures and those provided by Healy (2000) refer to the *actual* (rather than usual) hours worked as reported by respondents in the ABS Labour Force Survey.

hours on personal health and life satisfaction, their relationships with their partner and children, and perceptions of work and family balance are explored. We also examine the moderating effect of fathers' satisfaction with the hours they work. A strength of the analysis presented in this paper is that wellbeing of fathers' relationships with other family members is measured not only from the father's perspective but also from their partner's perspective.

The following section provides a brief summary of the literature concerning the impact of long work hours on wellbeing and mechanisms that may underlie potential negative effects of long work hours. In the third section the data and methods used are outlined. The results are presented in the fourth section. The key findings are summarised in the final section and some concluding comments made.

2. The impact of long working hours on wellbeing

There is an extensive literature that looks at the impact of long working hours on wellbeing. Not surprisingly, most discussions suggest that, on balance, long working hours have serious adverse outcomes. These include increased risk of workers experiencing a range of physical and mental health disorders, difficulty in balancing work and family life, and poor relationships with family members, with possible negative effects on children's emotional and intellectual development (see Cooper 2000; Charlesworth et al. 2002; Dawson, *et al.* 2001; Lehmkoehl 1999; Pocock 2001, 2003; Glezer and Wolcott 1999). Using data from the *Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia* (HILDA) survey, Wooden and Warren (2003) also found that job satisfaction declines as work hours increase, although this result seemed to be more a function of the positive impact of part-time work hours than the negative impact of long hours.

It has also been argued that long work hours have adverse consequences for the broader community (see for example Charlesworth et al. 2002; Pocock 2001, 2003). According to this perspective, long working hours can prevent or heavily restrict workers' engagement in voluntary community activities and provision of support for extended family members, can undermine women's opportunities for full-time employment, and can prevent partners from jointly participating in paid work. Pocock (2003) also maintains that work arrangements have led to a decline in social networks in the neighbourhood. She thus sees the community as moving from the neighbourhood to the workplace.

However, not all of the research finds that long working hours have uniformly negative impacts. Wooden and Loundes (2001) show that the majority of workers in Australia working long hours (defined as 49 or more hours per week) report either being happy with their working hours and say that they do not want to change their hours. However, this analysis does not distinguish between those with dependent children and those without, or between males and females. The family circumstances of an employee is likely to be an important determinant of the impact of working hours on wellbeing.

One Australian study focusing on men with a partner suggested that working 45 or more hours had mixed blessings for men with higher levels of income, most of whom

were in professional and managerial positions (Weston, Qu and Soriano 2002). This study finds that the time spent working was associated with a higher satisfaction with life, but was associated with negative impacts on quality of relationship with partner, through the increased sense of time pressure linked with this working regime. Poor relationships with partner, in turn, eroded enjoyment with life (Weston, Qu and Soriano 2002).

In contrast, Kelley (2001), using data from the International Social Sciences Survey Australia (ISSA), concludes that long working hours do not adversely affect men's satisfaction with their marriage or with their children (net of the effects of age, education and occupational status). Indeed, compared with men who worked 35–48 hours, those working 49–59 hours per week and those working 60 or more hours per week expressed higher satisfaction with their jobs and income. As Kelley (2001) points out, men's enjoyment of their jobs may be one reason that they spend so much time at work. In addition, those working 60 or more hours appeared to be marginally more satisfied with life than those working 35–48 hours.

The research cited above is generally based on the correlation between working hours and wellbeing. However, correlations do not necessarily mean that there is a causal connection. It is by no means easy to identify the effects of long work hours on the wellbeing of workers, their family and place of employment. As Spurgeon, Harrington and Cooper (1997) point out, much of the research fails to differentiate between long hours and shift work, which can be very disruptive, and between long hours and work overload, which may be both highly stressful and a central reason for long working hours. They note that most studies of the impact of long working hours have restricted their focus to either mental health or cardiovascular disorders. They conclude: "What emerges most strongly is how little information is currently available" (p.374), while also noting that the available evidence is sufficient to raise concerns, particularly about the impact of work exceeding 50 hours per week.

Spurgeon and colleagues suggest that long working hours may impair health and jeopardise safety both directly and indirectly. They may operate as a direct stressor in that workers need to continue performing adequately despite any accumulating fatigue. In addition, long work hours may increase stress indirectly by prolonging workers' exposure to other sources of job stress. Examples would include prolonged exposure to such stressors as work hazards, management practices perceived as unfair, interpersonal difficulties, and work overload (which might be responsible for the long work hours in the first place).

However, it cannot be concluded on the basis of the existing literature that long working hours are necessarily stressful or harmful for family life. The additional hours worked may provide some workers with "quality time" when interruptions are at a minimum, intrinsically satisfying work is completed, and leaving work in the "rush hour" is avoided.

On the whole, work hours are likely to have several implications for wellbeing and for some workers, long working hours may thus be viewed as mixed blessings. For example, such hours may enable the achievement of some key personal goals (e.g., increased income, sense of personal achievement) while at the same time generating difficulties in other areas of their life (e.g., increased conflict with partner, missing out

on important family activities), and in the long run, posing a risk to health if insufficient time is allotted to physical exercise, “unwinding” at night, and sleep.

We expect that, in part, the impact of long work hours on some aspects of wellbeing will be determined by the reasons a father is working those hours. Possible reasons including financial necessity, fear of job loss if they do not work the long hours, or personal commitment to an entrenched corporate culture. At the other end of the spectrum, intrinsic enjoyment of their job leads some workers to put in long hours, but it appears that this is largely a preserve of those in professional or managerial roles (Hochschild 1997; La Valle, Arthur, Millward, Scott, Clayden 2002). Hochschild (1997) argues that the appeal of long hours experienced by managers who enjoy their work may be bolstered by a desire to avoid the hassles of home life, including complaints by spouses about these excessive work hours. Nevertheless, long hours will not necessarily be a source of conflict between spouses. Some spouses may feel that the benefits of this practice well outweigh any negative repercussions. In summary, the reasons individuals work long hours appear to be complex and may be reinforced by their own outcomes, both positive and negative.

3. Data and methods

The analysis in this paper is based on data from the first wave of the HILDA Survey (undertaken in 2001).⁴ This survey involved face-to-face interviews with nearly 14,000 respondents aged 15 or more years from 7,682 households across Australia (see Watson and Wooden (2002) for a detailed discussion of the design of the survey).

The data collection unit is the household. This is defined as a group of people who usually reside and eat together. The survey involves the use of several data collection instruments. After establishing contact with a member of the household, an interview was conducted with at least one member of the household to obtain household level information. Further interviews were then pursued with each household member aged 15 years and over.⁵ Once individuals completed this interview they were then provided with a Self-Completion Questionnaire to complete in private.

There are several features of the HILDA Survey which makes it suited for an analysis of the relationship between working hours and wellbeing. The survey contains:

- detailed information on labour force status, hours of work and work conditions;
- detailed information on family composition;

4. As noted above, the HILDA Survey is funded by the Australian Government through the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services. The survey is being designed and managed by a consortium led by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research (University of Melbourne). Other partners are the Australian Council for Educational Research and the Australian Institute of Family Studies. The broad objective of the HILDA Survey is to select a nationally representative sample of private households and to trace over time all of the household members, including children. The sample will be extended over time by “following rules”. That is, any new children of members of the selected households as well as any new household members resulting from changes in the composition of the original households are added to the panel. The web site is as follows: <http://www.melbourneinstitute.com/hilda/>.

5. In most cases, those who had limited English skills were assisted by another member of the household. In 30 cases, professional interpreters were used.

- measures of working hours preferences and satisfaction with working hours; and
- measures of personal mental and physical health, satisfaction with life and various domains, perceptions of work-family balance and parenting stress.

The household nature of the HILDA survey, with information collected from all members of the household aged 15 years and over, allows us to compare the views of respondents and their partners on such issues as satisfaction with relationships between partners and between each parent and their children. Furthermore, the relatively large sample size provided by the HILDA survey allows us to conduct quite a disaggregated analysis.

The analysis in this paper is restricted to fathers who lived with a partner and at least one child under the age of 15 years. Given our focus on the impact of longer working hours on wellbeing, we restrict the analysis to fathers whose usual working hours are full-time (that is 35 hours or more per week).

Several socio-demographic characteristics of fathers were examined most of which are self-explanatory (presented in Table 1). Those requiring some explanation are:

- *Language spoken at home and English proficiency:* The household questionnaire included questions on whether or not English was the only language spoken at home and if not, how well each member of the household spoke English (“very well”, “well”, “not well”, or “not at all”). In the present analysis, fathers were classified into three groups: those who spoke English only at home; others with sound English skills (i.e., they spoke English “well” or “very well”) and fathers with limited or no English skills (i.e., they spoke English “not well” or “not at all”).
- *Occupational status:* Fathers were classified into three groups: upper white collar (i.e., professional and managerial occupations; lower white collar (clerical, services) and blue collar (trades, labourers and related workers); and
- *Type of employment:*
 - *Self-employed* are those with their own business with or without employees. They include those defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) as self-employed or as employees of their own business (where those with businesses that are incorporated are treated as “employees” and the others are defined as self-employed).⁶
 - *Permanent, casual or fixed-term employees* are self-identified. Thus, permanent and casual employees are not identified on the basis of their reports concerning access to paid holiday or paid sick leave (as is conventionally identified by the ABS), but rather according to whether or not they saw themselves as being employed on a casual basis or on a permanent or ongoing basis.⁷

6. The ABS further subdivides the self-employed into “employers and “own account workers” according to whether or not employees are hired.

7. See Wooden and Warren (2003) for a description and evaluation of these two approaches.

Respondents in paid employment were asked to indicate the number of hours per week they *usually* work in all their jobs (including paid or unpaid overtime), the number of hours per week they would prefer to work, taking into account the effect of any change in working on their earnings, and their satisfaction with their work hours. Satisfaction with work hours was measured using a rating scale from 0 for “totally dissatisfied” to 10 for “totally satisfied”. Preferences and satisfaction regarding work hours may be taken as indicators of job-related personal wellbeing. In addition, overall job satisfaction was assessed through a single item rating. (The same 0–10 rating scale was used for all measures of satisfaction.)

We also examined measures of work-family balance, parenting stress, and fathers’ relationships with family members and fathers’ general health or wellbeing. The HILDA survey included 13 items from Marshall & Barnett’s (1992) “Work-Family Strains and Gains Scale”. For the fathers, three separate sub-scales were derived, based on principal components analysis of the fathers’ reports. The three scales are:

- the positive impact of having both work and family life on personal wellbeing (e.g. “Having both work and family responsibilities make me a more well-rounded person”). This scale is constructed from three items and has an alpha reliability of 0.82, indicating that it has a high degree of internal consistency;
- the positive impact of their work on their family – here called *positive work-to-family spillover* (e.g. “My work has a positive effect on my children”). This scale is constructed from three items and has an alpha reliability of 0.59; and
- the negative impact of their work on family – here called *negative work-to-family spillover* (e.g. “Because of the requirements of my job, my family time is less enjoyable and more pressured”). This scale is constructed from four items and has an alpha reliability of 0.83.

The Parenting Stress scale consisted of four items, tapping such issues as unexpected difficulties in parenting and feeling trapped by parenting responsibilities (e.g., “Being a parent is harder than I thought it would be”) (The alpha reliability for the present sample is 0.72). This measure has previously been used in the *University of Michigan’s Panel Study of Income Dynamics* (PSID).

Of course, some respondents may be oblivious to some of the difficulties they are facing, while others may ignore or deny early signs of problems. An advantage of the HILDA survey is that both partners in couples indicated their satisfaction with their relationships with each other and with each partner’s relationship with the children. We thus examined the views of the fathers and their partners on these issues.

Finally, four measures of health or general wellbeing were included in the analysis. One was a single-item measure of overall life satisfaction, while the others were derived from the SF-36 Scale (Ware, Snow, Kosinski, & Gandek, B 2000). These consisted of a five-item scale measuring general health (where high scores indicate better health), a four-item *Vitality* scale (where low scores indicate feeling tired and “worn out”, and high scores indicate feeling “full of life” and “having lots of energy”), and a five-item *Mental Health* scale (where low scores tap feeling nervous and unhappy and high scores tap a sense of peace and happiness).

4. Results

Fathers were divided into four groups according to the number of hours they usually worked: 35–40 hours per week (termed in this paper “standard” full-time hours), 41–48 hours, 49–59, and 60 or more. In order to provide some context, we first compare the socio-demographic profiles of fathers with different working hours. We then outline the pattern of preferred working hours and satisfaction with current working hours. Next, the four hours groups are compared in terms of the key indicators of wellbeing outlined above, to assess the strength and direction of links between long work hours and wellbeing.

Finally, the four hours groups are further subdivided according to levels of satisfaction with work hours. One central question in this final stage of the analysis concerns the extent to which links between work hours and wellbeing varies according to satisfaction with the hours worked. If satisfaction with work hours is related to various aspects of wellbeing, is the pattern of relationships the same regardless of the hours worked? Alternatively, do fathers who work long hours and who are dissatisfied with these working conditions have much lower wellbeing than other fathers who are dissatisfied with their shorter working hours – or do fathers who are happy working long hours have higher wellbeing than other fathers who are happy with their shorter working hours?

4.1 Socio-demographic profile of the four basic groups

Table 1 provide s information about various socio-demographic characteristics of the sample of fathers by usual work hours. Only one third of fathers reported usually working 35–40 hours (33 per cent), while 21 to 24 per cent of fathers reported working either 41–48 hours), 49–59 hours, or 60 or more hours. Fathers’ working hours did not vary significantly with their age, number of children, the age of their youngest child or their partner’s employment status (employed full-time, part-time, or not employed). Most of the female partners were working – typically part-time (41–48 per cent), but 21–23 per cent were working full-time. Close to half in each group had a child under 5 years old in the household.

Table 1. Characteristics of employed fathers by work hours

	Usual number of hours worked per week			
	35-40	41-48	49-59	60+
Female partner's employment status				
Employed full-time (35+ hrs)	22.2%	22.3%	20.9%	23.2%
Employed part-time (<35 hrs)	40.8%	41.7%	47.5%	43.1%
Not employed	37.0%	36.1%	31.6%	33.8%
Educational attainment				
Degree or higher	21.5%	26.5%	33.6%	20.7%***
Other post-school qualifications	46.9%	53.6%	43.2%	49.2%
No post-school qualifications	31.6%	19.9%	23.2%	30.1%
Country of birth				
Australia	70.5%	74.3%	77.7%	80.1%***
Other: Eng. is main language	10.4%	13.0%	13.2%	8.9%
Other: Eng. is not main language	19.1%	12.7%	9.2%	11.1%
English only	83.5%	90.4%	92.6%	90.2%**
Other: sound English skills	13.9%	9.0%	6.9%	8.9%
Other: limited or no English	2.7%	0.6%	0.6%	1.0%
Mean age	38.4 (7.1)	38.5 (6.6)	39.2 (7.2)	39.5 (6.9)
Age of youngest child				
0-4	52.2	52.6	49.4	48.8%
5-9	30.2	30.6	31.5	32.7%
10-14	17.6	16.8	19.1	18.5%
Mean number of children under 15	1.9 (0.9)	1.9 (1.0)	2.0 (1.0)	2.1 (0.9)
Occupation				
Upper white collar	40.6%	51.1%	58.2%	57.9%***
Lower white collar	14.1%	11.8%	6.9%	6.0%
Blue collar	45.3%	37.2%	34.9%	36.1%
Mean gross income (all jobs) (\$000)	43.4 (27.3)	51.2 (27.9)	52.3 (39.0)	52.0 (48.8)**
Employment classification				
Self-employed	14.5%	11.8%	32.1%	47.9%***
Employed on a fixed-term contract	7.3%	6.8%	6.3%	6.0%
Employed on a casual basis	8.6%	2.8%	3.2%	4.8%
Employed on a permanent basis	69.7%	78.6%	58.5%	41.3%
Number of cases	491	323	349	316

Notes: Standard deviations shown in brackets. For continuous variables, an ANOVA test of whether the means are significantly different has been presented. For categorical variables, a chi-squared test of whether hours is significantly related to the wellbeing measure. * p<.05; ** p<.01; ***p<.001.

Source: HILDA Survey Wave 1 (2001).

One striking pattern concerns the differences in the proportions of fathers in the four work-hours groups who were self-employed. Nearly half the fathers who were working 60 or more hours were self-employed, compared with one third of those working 49–59 hours, and only 12 to 15 per cent of fathers working shorter hours. Fathers in the two groups working the longest hours were also the most likely to have upper white-collar occupations (nearly 60 per cent). Thus, as Wooden and Loundes (2002) point out, many of those working long hours probably have jobs that offer substantially different conditions from those working shorter hours, including enhanced task variety and control.

For most other comparisons, fathers who usually worked 35–40 hours tended to differ from the other groups. For example, although the majority of fathers who worked 35–40 hours were born in Australia, spoke English only at home and were permanent or ongoing employees, they were the most likely of all groups to have been born in a non-English speaking country (19 per cent, compared with 9–13 per cent) and thus to speak a language other than English at home (17 per cent compared with 8–10 per cent), and they were marginally more likely than other fathers to have been employed on a casual basis (9 per cent compared with 3–5 per cent). The fathers who usually worked 35–40 hours were also the most likely of all groups to have blue-collar occupations (47 per cent compared with 36–38 per cent), the least likely to have upper white-collar occupations (42 per cent compared with 53–59 per cent) and they had the lowest average wage. Nevertheless, they were very similar to those working 60 or more hours in terms of educational attainment (21–22 per cent in these two groups had degrees; 30–32 per cent had no post-school qualifications).

4.2 Views about work hours according to number of hours worked

Table 2 presents information on fathers' preferred working hours and satisfaction with their working hours according to the usual hours they actually worked. Mean satisfaction ratings fell as hours increased (from 7.70 for those working 35–40 hours to 5.72 for those working 60 or more hours per week). Not surprisingly, fathers who worked 35–40 hours were the most likely to express high satisfaction (62 per cent provided ratings of 8–10). Less than half the fathers in all other groups indicated such positive views, with ratings of 8–10 provided by only 30 per cent of those working 49–59 hours and by only one quarter of those working 60 or more hours. Nevertheless, ratings above the mid-point of the scale (suggesting satisfaction rather than dissatisfaction) were provided by more than half of the men in these two groups who were working such long hours (62 per cent of those working 49–59 hours and 54 per cent of those working 60 or more hours). To some extent, this may reflect a tendency to adjust to life's circumstances and maintain a positive outlook regarding personal life (see Cummins & Nistico 2002).

Table 2 shows that most of those who usually worked 35–40 or 41–48 hours preferred to work these hours when taking into account increases or decreases in their pay should they change their hours (67 per cent and 59 per cent respectively). On the other hand, just over half the fathers who worked 49–59 hours, and 57 per cent of those who worked 60 or more hours indicated a preference for working fewer hours. Not surprisingly the proportions indicating a preference for working longer than their current hours fell as current work hours increased (from 17 per cent to 1 per cent).

Table 2. Satisfaction with work hours and preferences by usual hours worked per week

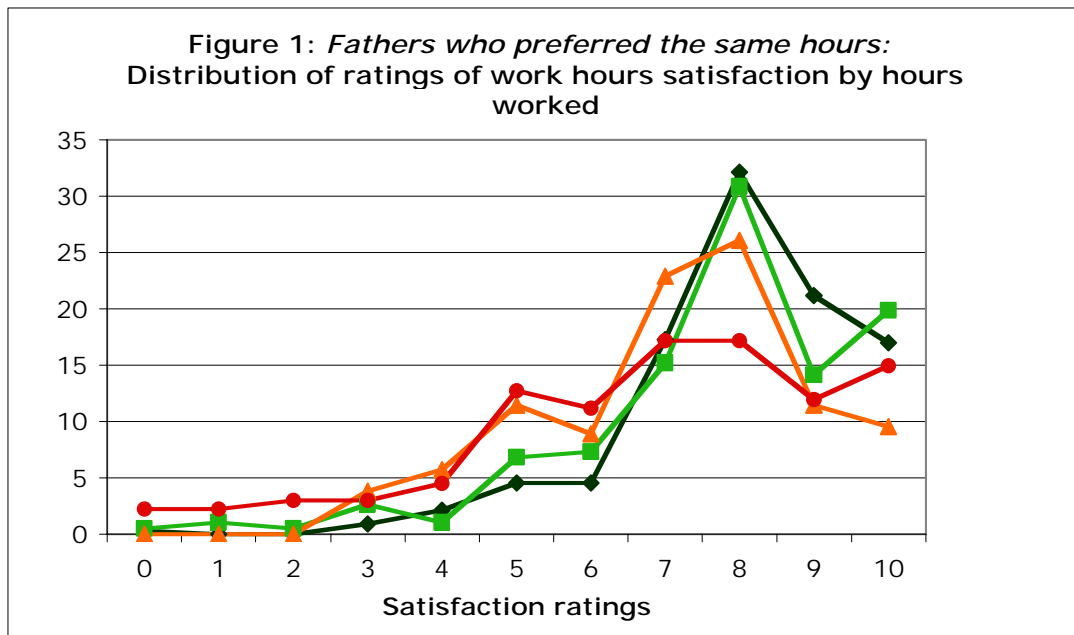
	Usual number of work hours per week			
	35-40	41-48	49-59	60+
Satisfaction with work hours				
Mean rating	7.7 (1.78)	7.0*** (2.21)	6.1*** (2.24)	5.7*** (2.57)
Rating categories				
0-3	2.9%	8.7%	14.9%	19.6%***
4-5	10.2%	14.2%	22.6%	26.0%
6-7	24.7%	28.2%	32.7%	28.5%
8-10	62.3%	48.9%	29.8%	26.0%
Work hours preferences				
Fewer hours than now	15.5%	32.5%	50.9%	56.6%***
About the same	67.4%	59.1%	45.1%	42.8%
More hours than now	17.1%	8.4%	4.0%	0.6%
Number of observations	491	323	349	316

Notes: The standard deviation for the mean rating is shown in brackets. For the mean rating of satisfaction with work hours, data for each group working more than 40 hours per week were compared with the data for those working 35-40 hours using a t-test. For the categorical variables (rating categories and work hours preferences) the statistical test reported is a chi-squared test of association. *** indicates a statistically significant difference at $p < 0.001$.

Source: HILDA Survey Wave 1 (2001).

Preferences and satisfaction regarding work hours may appear to be inconsistent. Some people may indicate a preference for working their current long hours for the pay alone. They may be dissatisfied with these work hours for a variety of other reasons. On the other hand, people may prefer to work fewer hours with a corresponding drop in salary, but decide against doing so if this strategy implies loss of other rewards (e.g., they want to “do their best”, help their clients, gain promotion, or save their jobs). Thus, *on balance*, they may be satisfied with the hours they work, even though they would like to spend more time engaging in other activities. Their age and family circumstances may well play a role in how they feel about such issues.

Figure 1 focuses on *those who indicated a preference for the hours they actually worked*, and shows the distribution of satisfaction ratings for the four work hours groups. The rating distributions for those working 35–40 hours or 41–48 hours are similar, with high satisfaction (ratings of 8–10) expressed by 70 per cent of fathers working 35–40 hours and 65 per cent working 41–48 hours. In other words, these fathers, who preferred to continue working the hours they worked, presented a fairly uniform and positive picture. By comparison, the two groups (most particularly those working 60 or more hours) were more divided in terms of satisfaction, despite their preferring the hours they worked. Just under half (44 to 47 per cent) indicated high satisfaction (ratings of 8–10), while roughly one quarter (21 to 28 per cent) indicated low satisfaction about their working hours (ratings of 0–5).



4.3 Other subjective indicators of wellbeing according to number of hours worked

The raw means and standard deviations for the other subjective indicators wellbeing were derived for each of the four work hours groups (Table 3). For most measures, the means for those working 35–40 hours did not differ significantly from those working longer hours (assessed via t-tests). However, those working 35–40 hours reported lower negative work-to-family spillover than all other groups, with mean scores on this measure increasing as working hours increased. In addition, fathers working 35-40 hours had significantly higher mean vitality scores than the two groups working in excess of 48 hours. On the other hand, fathers working 35-40 hours indicated greater parenting stress and marginally lower satisfaction with their relationship with their partner, compared with fathers working 60 or more hours.

Table 3. Wellbeing and working hours (raw means)

	Number of work hours			
	35-40	41-48	49-59	60+
Satisfaction with job overall	7.6 (0.08)	7.4 (0.12)	7.5 (0.10)	7.6 (0.12)
Satisfaction with relationship with partner				
Self-reported	8.4 (0.09)	8.5 (0.09)	8.5 (0.10)	8.7* (0.09)
Partner's report	8.2 (0.10)	8.4 (0.10)	8.4 (0.11)	8.3 (0.12)
Satisfaction with relationship with children				
Self-reported	8.7 (0.07)	8.8 (0.08)	8.6 (0.09)	8.8 (0.09)
Partner's report	8.5 (0.08)	8.6 (0.09)	8.5 (0.10)	8.6 (0.10)
Satisfaction with life as a whole	7.9 (0.06)	8 (0.08)	8 (0.07)	7.8 (0.09)
Parenting stress	14.3 (0.24)	13.6 (0.29)	13.7 (0.28)	13.4* (0.28)
Work and family balance				
Negative effect of work on family	15.2 (0.27)	16.6*** (0.34)	17.5*** (0.33)	18.8*** (0.36)
Positive effect of work on family	13.5 (0.18)	13.1 (0.23)	13.6 (0.21)	13.5 (0.22)
Positive effect of work on self	15.7 (0.16)	16.1 (0.20)	15.8 (0.20)	15.8 (0.21)
Health				
General health	73.4 (0.83)	75.2 (0.92)	74.1 (0.96)	72.7 (1.11)
Vitality	65.6 (0.77)	64.7 (1.01)	63.1* (0.93)	61.3** (1.19)
Mental health	76.7 (0.68)	77.6 (0.82)	76.9 (0.77)	76.7 (0.89)

Notes: Standard deviations are shown in brackets. The data for each group working more than 40 hours per week were compared with the data for those working 35-40 hours using t-tests. Significance levels are * <0.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001. All fathers lived with a partner and children under 15 years old.

Source: HILDA Survey Wave 1 (2001).

It is possible that the differences between the different working hours groups may be due to differences in the characteristics of those in the different groups. That is, the differences (or lack of difference) shown in Table 3 may be explained by some other factor which is related both to working hours and wellbeing.

The simplest way of controlling for differences in the characteristics between the working hours groups is to calculate adjusted means. We adjust for the following characteristics: educational attainment, country for birth, English use at home and proficiency, number of children and age of youngest child, occupational status, income from wages, and employment circumstances (self-employed,

permanent/ongoing employee, employed on fixed term basis, or employed on contract).⁸

Table 4. Work hours and wellbeing (adjusted means)

	Number of work hours			
	35-40	41-48	45-59	60+
Satisfaction with job overall	7.5 (0.23)	7.3 (0.25)	7.4 (0.25)	7.4 (0.25)
Satisfaction with relationship with partner				
Self-reported	8.5 (0.25)	8.6 (0.26)	8.6 (0.26)	8.7 (0.26)
Partner's report	8.4 (0.28)	8.6 (0.3)	8.6 (0.29)	8.4 (0.29)
Satisfaction with relationship with children				
Self-reported	8.8 (0.21)	8.9 (0.22)	8.8 (0.22)	8.9 (0.22)
Partner's report	8.7 (0.24)	8.8 (0.25)	8.9 (0.25)	8.8 (0.25)
Satisfaction with life as a whole	8 (0.17)	8 (0.18)	8 (0.18)	7.7 (0.18)*
Parenting stress	15.4 (0.74)	14.5 (0.78)*	14.9 (0.77)	14.8 (0.77)
Work and family balance				
Negative effect of work on family	15.2 (1.02)	16.5 (1.05)**	17.7 (1.05)***	19.3 (1.05)***
Positive effect of work on family	14 (0.67)	13.6 (0.69)	13.9 (0.69)	13.8 (0.69)
Positive effect of work on self	17.4 (0.6)	17.6 (0.62)	17.3 (0.62)	17.4 (0.62)
Health				
General health	71 (2.71)	71.5 (2.83)	70.3 (2.83)	68.9 (2.83)
Vitality	71.8 (2.56)	70.6 (2.7)	69.2 (2.69)	66.3 (2.67)***
Mental health	77.1 (2.08)	77.3 (2.18)	76.8 (2.18)	75.3 (2.16)

Notes: The means presented in this table are adjusted for partner's work hours, education level, English use and proficiency, age of youngest child, number of children under 15, occupation, income, and employment classification. Standard errors are shown in brackets. The data for each group working more than 40 hours per week were compared with the data for those working 35-40 hours t-statistics. Significance levels are * <0.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001.

Source: HILDA Survey Wave 1 (2001).

8. The raw means can be adjusted for differences in the underlying characteristics of those working different hours. This adjustment is done by estimating a linear regression model including the characteristics which are to be controlled for as explanatory variables and then calculating predicted values of each of these measures of wellbeing.

Once again, fathers who worked 35–40 hours reported lower average negative work-to-family spillover than all other groups and had a higher mean vitality score than fathers working more than 60 hours (but the difference between the former group and those working 49–59 hours was no longer significant for this measure). There were only two other comparisons that yielded significant differences: fathers who worked 35–40 hours indicated higher parenting stress than those working 41–48 hours and higher general life satisfaction than those working 60 or more hours.⁹

In short, as work hours increased, fathers tended to report stronger negative work-family spillover, and the “vitality” of those working 60 or more hours appeared to be lower than those working 35–40 hours. However, most of the indicators of wellbeing did not vary according to working hours. These results are not surprising, given that the meaning of long hours would vary for different people according to such factors as personal goals and the context in which long work hours occur (e.g., whether or not the workers enjoy their work and their circumstances at home). The importance of appraisal of circumstances in the light of personal goals and beliefs in determining whether circumstances are viewed as benign, threatening or challenging has long been recognised in psychological models of stress and wellbeing (e.g., Lazarus & Folkman 1985).

The next step, then, assessed the links between satisfaction with work hours and other indicators of wellbeing for those working different hours. Do different levels of satisfaction significantly discriminate between other indicators of wellbeing for fathers working long hours?

4.4 Indicators of wellbeing by satisfaction with work hours according to number of hours worked

In order to assess the contribution that satisfaction with hours worked may make to the relationship between work hours and wellbeing, each of the four “work hours” groups were subdivided into a further three groups: those indicating “high satisfaction” (ratings of 8–10), “moderate satisfaction” (ratings of 6–7) and “low satisfaction” (ratings of 0–5). For simplicity, the three groups are also respectively described as being “very happy”, “moderately happy” or “not happy” with their work hours.

The first analysis focuses on fathers who worked 60 or more hours.

Fathers who worked 60 or more hours

Table 5 presents the mean wellbeing scores of fathers who worked 60 or more hours according to their level of satisfaction with such very long work hours. These means have been adjusted the effects of the same socio-demographic variables that formed the basis of adjustments in the means presented in Table 4.

9. The non-significant findings regarding father-partner relationships are consistent with those reported by Wooden’s (2001), but unlike the present study, men working 49–59 hours or 60 or more hours in Wooden’s study expressed significantly higher job satisfaction than those working 35–40 hours.

Table 5. Men working 60+ hours: wellbeing by satisfaction with work hours (adjusted mean)

	Satisfaction with work hours		
	Low (0-5)	Medium (6-7)	High (8-10)
Satisfaction with job overall	5.6 (0.52)	7.2 (0.53)***	8.1 (0.54)***
Satisfaction with relationship with partner			
Self-reported	8.4 (0.48)	8.7 (0.5)	9.1 (0.5)*
Partner's report	8.1 (0.59)	8.5 (0.61)	8.9 (0.63)*
Satisfaction with relationship with children			
Self-reported	8.7 (0.43)	9.1 (0.45)	9.4 (0.45)**
Partner's report	8.7 (0.49)	8.9 (0.51)	9.2 (0.52)*
Satisfaction with life overall	7.2 (0.43)	7.9 (0.44)**	8.4 (0.45)***
Parenting stress	18 (1.72)	17.1 (1.71)	15.2 (1.76)***
Work and family balance			
Negative effect of work on family	23 (2.07)	20.8 (2.06)*	17.3 (2.12)***
Positive effect of work on family	14.3 (1.35)	14.4 (1.34)	16 (1.38)**
Positive effect of work on self	16.6 (1.33)	17.2 (1.32)	17.7 (1.36)*
Health			
General health	65.3 (7.73)	72 (7.69)*	71.4 (7.88)
Vitality	59.6 (5.9)	67.5 (6.1)*	73.6 (6.17)***
Mental health	69.8 (4.51)	73.8 (4.66)	79.7 (4.71)***

Notes: The means presented in this table are adjusted for partner's work hours, education level, English use and proficiency, age of youngest child, number of children under 15, occupation, income, and employment classification. Standard errors are shown in brackets. The data for the medium and high satisfaction with work hours is compared with the low satisfaction group using t-tests. Significance levels are * <0.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001.

Source: HILDA Survey Wave 1 (2001).

The results suggest that fathers who were very happy with their work hours had higher wellbeing scores (or lower “ill-being” scores) than those who were not happy about these hours. There was only one exception to this trend: the difference in means scores for general health status did not reach the 5 per cent level of significance (p<.10).

Thus, compared with those who were not happy with their long work hours, the fathers who were very happy with such hours were also more satisfied with their jobs, with their relationships with their partner and children, and with life in general. In addition, their partners indicated significantly higher satisfaction with father-partner and father-children relationships. These fathers also indicated significantly lower parenting stress, and reported lower negative work-to-family spillover, higher positive work-to-family spillover, and viewed the joint effects of work and family life as more personally rewarding. They also indicated higher vitality and mental health, if not general health.

Fathers who were moderately happy with their work hours differed significantly from those who were not happy about these long hours on only 5 of the 13 measures (job and life satisfaction, negative work-family spillover effects and general health and vitality). In all cases, the moderately satisfied indicated higher wellbeing than those who were not happy with their work hours.

In summary, of fathers working 60 or more hours, those who were very happy with their work hours appeared to have higher wellbeing on virtually all measures compared with those who were not happy working these very long hours. Included here were the two measures provided by their partners – regarding fathers' relationships with family members. Those who were moderately happy with their work hours also appeared to have higher wellbeing on some dimensions, compared with those who were not happy with their very long work hours.

Does this polarization of wellbeing simply reflect predispositions of these men either to view life favourably or unfavourably regardless of work hours – and for such predispositions to influence partners' satisfaction with fathers' relationships with themselves and the children? That is, would we find much the same pattern of results for those who work 35–40 hours and who vary in satisfaction with these hours? The same analysis was undertaken for men working 35–40 hours (outlined below) and for those working 41–48 hours and 49–59 hours (presented in Appendix A).

Fathers who worked 35-40 hours

Table 6 provides the adjusted mean wellbeing scores of fathers who were very happy, moderately happy or not happy with the 35–40 hours they usually worked per week. For all except five comparisons, no significant difference emerged, but where differences were significant, fathers who expressed high satisfaction indicated higher wellbeing. These differences emerged for job satisfaction and life satisfaction, sense of vitality, positive family-to-work spillover, and rewarding experiences linked with having both work and family life.

Table 6. Men working 35-40 hours: wellbeing by satisfaction with work hours (adjusted means)

	Satisfaction with work hours		
	Low (0-5)	Medium (6-7)	High (8-10)
Satisfaction with job overall	7.0 (0.33)	7.3 (0.32)	8.1 (0.29)***
Satisfaction with relationship with partner			
Self-reported	8.1 (0.4)	8.2 (0.4)	8.4 (0.37)
Partner's report	8.2 (0.47)	8.2 (0.47)	8.1 (0.43)
Satisfaction with relationship with children			
Self-reported	8.7 (0.33)	8.5 (0.33)	8.7 (0.3)
Partner's report	8.8 (0.38)	8.9 (0.38)	8.7 (0.35)
Satisfaction with life as a whole	7.4 (0.25)	7.9 (0.23)	8.2 (0.21)***
Parenting stress	16.1 (1.11)	16 (1.1)	15.5 (1.02)
Work and family balance			
Negative effect of work on family	16.4 (1.49)	16.3 (1.57)	14.8 (1.48)
Positive effect of work on family	12.8 (1.)	13.8 (1.05)	14.3 (0.99)*
Positive effect of work on self	16.9 (0.86)	17.5 (0.9)	18 (0.85)*
Health			
General health	67.4 (3.87)	69.3 (3.87)	71.5 (3.57)
Vitality	66.2 (3.48)	67.3 (3.48)	70.9 (3.21)*
Mental health	73.9 (3.11)	73.8 (3.11)	76 (2.87)

Notes: As for Table 5.

Source: HILDA Survey Wave 1 (2001).

Appendix Tables A1 and A2 present the results for those who were working 41–48 and 49–59 hours respectively. Significant differences between fathers who were very happy or not happy with their work hours emerged for 6 to 7 of the 13 dimensions. In each of these cases, those who were very happy had the higher wellbeing score. However, the greatest disparity occurred for the groups who were working 60 or more hours (Table 5), where those who were very happy with their work hours were particularly likely to have better wellbeing than those who were not happy with these hours.

So far, we have seen that for virtually all dimensions of wellbeing, fathers working 60 or more hours had higher wellbeing scores than fathers who were not happy with

working such very long hours. Furthermore, this “polarization” of wellbeing was not apparent for those working 35–40 hours. In other words, the results for fathers working very long hours could not be explained in terms of a general tendency for high satisfaction with work hours to reflect a positive or negative approach to life and greater wellbeing across a range of dimensions, regardless of hours worked.

For fathers working 60 or more hours, does the difference in general wellbeing according to satisfaction with work hours emerge because those reluctantly working long hours experience pervasive ill-being not encountered amongst others who are not happy with working 35–40 hours? Alternatively, are those who are highly satisfied with their very long work hours doing particularly well in these other areas of life, compared with others who are highly satisfied with working 35–40 hours? To address this issue, we compare two groups of fathers who expressed low satisfaction with their work hours: those working 35–40 hours and those working 60 or more hours. We also compare the wellbeing of fathers who worked such different hours and who expressed high satisfaction with their work hours. Once again, the mean wellbeing scores were adjusted for the effects of socio-demographic factors outlined above in relation to Table 4.¹⁰

Fathers who are not happy working 35-40 or 60 or more hours

Table 7 shows that, of the fathers who were not happy with their work hours, those working 60 or more hours differed from those working 35–40 hours on only one dimension: the former group reported greater negative work-to-family spillover. On the other hand, enjoyment of very long working hours appeared to be linked with higher wellbeing than enjoyment with working 35–40 hours in the following areas: fathers working 60 or more hours indicated higher satisfaction with their jobs, their relationship with the children, and their life as a whole, while their partners expressed significantly higher satisfaction with their own relationship with these men.

10. The adjusted means in Table 7 differ from those presented in Tables 5 and 6 because they are based on different samples. For example, the adjusted means in Table 6 are based on all fathers who worked 35–40 hours, while the first two columns of means in Table 7 are based on the fathers who were working either 35–40 hours or 60 or more hours and who expressed low satisfaction with the hours they worked.

Table 7. Relationship between work hours and wellbeing according to satisfaction with hours (adjusted means)

	Low satisfaction		High satisfaction	
	35-40	60+	35-40	60+
Satisfaction with job overall	6.9	6.5	7.6	8.6***
Satisfaction with relationship with partner				
Self-reported	8.8	9.0	7.5	8.1*
Partner's report	8.8	8.7	7.6	8.1
Satisfaction with relationship with children				
Self-reported	9.0	8.8	8.7	9.3*
Partner's report	9.0	8.8	8.8	9.3*
Satisfaction with life as a whole	7.7	7.8	7.8	7.9
Parenting stress	15.4	15.0	17.8	16.0
Work and family balance				
Negative effect of work on family	15.2	19.9***	14.5	15.6
Positive effect of work on family	12.6	13.0	14.5	15.1
Positive effect of work on self	16.7	17.1	17.0	17.3
Health				
General health	71.0	69.0	71.1	70.7
Vitality	69.9	64.5	60.9	60.2
Mental health	74.6	72.8	66.1	68.3

Notes: The means presented in this table are adjusted for partner's work hours, education level, English use and proficiency, age of youngest child, number of children under 15, occupation, income, and employment classification. For low and high satisfaction groups separately, those working 35-40 are compared with those working 60 or more hours using t-tests. Significance levels are * <0.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001.

Source: HILDA Survey Wave 1 (2001).

These results suggest that the multiple differences in the wellbeing of fathers who were very happy and those who were not happy with working 60 or more hours could not be explained by any markedly pervasive, low wellbeing experienced by fathers who were not happy with working such very long hours. Nor could it be entirely explained by any markedly pervasive and high wellbeing experienced by fathers who were very happy working such long hours. However, the latter group did seem to be better off. Contrary to some of the literature, there was no evidence that fathers who enjoyed working very long hours had poor family relationships. Indeed, their partners seemed particularly happy with spousal relationships.

Employees and self-employed fathers who worked in excess of 48 hours

The final analysis was spurred by our concerns that the favourable picture emerging for men who were happy with working very long hours might be related to the disproportionately high number of self-employed fathers who worked very long hours. Even though we controlled for the effects of such employment circumstances, this was undertaken in combination with the use of other (socio-demographic) controls. Because numbers in some categories were small, the analysis focused on those working in excess of 48 hours.¹¹

11. For example, of those working 60 or more hours, only 36 and 40 of the self-employed fathers expressed moderate and high satisfaction respectively, and only 42 employees expressed high satisfaction.

Of these fathers working in excess of 48 hours, satisfaction with work hours varied according to these employment circumstances ($p < .05$). In particular, self-employed fathers were more likely than employees to indicate low satisfaction with these work hours (49 per cent and 36 per cent respectively), and less likely to report moderate satisfaction (24 per cent and 35 per cent respectively).

The mean wellbeing scores for those indicating high, moderate or low satisfaction with their long (i.e., 49 or more) work hours are presented in Tables 6a (for the self-employed) and Table 9 (for employees).¹² The same pattern of results emerged for both groups. Compared with fathers who were not happy with their work hours, those who were very happy had significantly higher wellbeing on most measures (11 of the 13 measures for the self-employed fathers and 8 of the 13 for the employees). For the self-employed fathers only, the four measures pertaining to their relationships with other family members (personal and partners' satisfaction with father-partner and father-child relationships) varied according to how happy these fathers were with their work hours.

12. The wellbeing means were once again adjusted for the same socio-demographic characteristics as used earlier, except that "employment classification" (which defined whether the father was self-employed or a permanent/ongoing, fixed-term or casual employee) was no longer relevant for the self-employed and only the categories defining contract conditions were used for employees.

Table 8. Self employed men working 49+ hours: wellbeing by satisfaction with work hours (adjusted mean)

	Satisfaction with work hours		
	Low (0-5)	Medium (6-7)	High (8-10)
Satisfaction with job overall	5.9 (0.45)	7.3*** (0.45)	8.1*** (0.48)
Satisfaction with relationship with partner			
Self-reported	8.3 (0.42)	8.5 (0.41)	9** (0.45)
Partner's report	7.6 (0.5)	7.9 (0.5)	8.3 (0.55)
Satisfaction with relationship with children			
Self-reported	8.5 (0.34)	8.7 (0.33)	9.3*** (0.36)
Partner's report	7.6 (0.44)	7.9 (0.44)	8.2* (0.48)
Satisfaction with life as a whole	7.1 (0.35)	7.8** (0.35)	8.5*** (0.38)
Parenting stress	11.9 (1.28)	10.5 (1.25)	8.6*** (1.36)
Work and family balance			
Negative effect of work on family	16.9 (1.85)	14.7 (1.78)	11.4*** (1.95)
Positive effect of work on family	14.4 (1.07)	14.4 (1.03)	15.7 (1.13)
Positive effect of work on self	17.1 (1.09)	17.3 (1.06)	17.6 (1.16)
Health			
General health	72.2 (5.2)	83.2** (5.11)	81.3** (5.55)
Vitality	58.6 (5.25)	68.8** (5.16)	71.8*** (5.6)
Mental health	75.3 (3.88)	83.3** (3.82)	83.4** (4.14)

Notes: As for Table 5.

Source: HILDA Survey Wave 1 (2001).

Table 9. Men (employees) working 49+ hours: wellbeing by satisfaction with work hours (adjusted mean)

	Satisfaction with work hours		
	Low (0-5)	Medium (6-7)	High (8-10)
Satisfaction with job overall	5.8 (0.47)	7.2*** (0.46)	7.9*** (0.47)
Satisfaction with relationship with partner			
Self-reported	8.6 (0.5)	8.9 (0.5)	8.9 (0.5)
Partner's report	8.3 (0.55)	8.7 (0.55)	8.6 (0.55)
Satisfaction with relationship with children			
Self-reported	8.8 (0.46)	9.1 (0.46)	9 (0.47)
Partner's report	8.9 (0.48)	9.1 (0.48)	9.1 (0.49)
Satisfaction with life as a whole	7.7 (0.39)	8.2** (0.38)	8.3*** (0.39)
Parenting stress	18.5 (1.7)	17.5 (1.66)	17* (1.69)
Work and family balance			
Negative effect of work on family	22.7 (1.94)	20.2*** (1.89)	18.7*** (1.93)
Positive effect of work on family	14.5 (1.32)	15.5* (1.29)	15.8** (1.31)
Positive effect of work on self	16.8 (1.27)	18.1** (1.24)	17.8* (1.26)
Health			
General health	70.1 (6.87)	73.4 (6.7)	71.6 (6.81)
Vitality	62 (5.12)	68.7** (5.1)	72.8*** (5.12)
Mental health	71 (4.09)	74.1 (4.07)	77.8*** (4.09)

Notes: As for Table 5.

Source: HILDA Survey Wave 1 (2001).

In general then, the pattern of results outlined earlier (suggesting that men who happily worked long hours had higher wellbeing on a range of measures than those who reluctantly worked long hours) did not appear to be explained by the disproportionately large number of self-employed fathers working in excess of 48 hours. Although the variation in wellbeing was more apparent for self-employed fathers, the general pattern nonetheless emerged for employees working these hours.

5. Summary and concluding comments

The central aim of this analysis was to assess links between usual hours worked by fathers and subjective indicators of wellbeing pertaining to the fathers themselves,

their relationships with family members, and work-family balance issues. All fathers in this analysis were working full-time, and lived with a partner and at least one child under the age of 15 years. Only one third reported usually working 35–40 hours per week (the so-called “standard” work hours), while 21 to 24 per cent reported working either 41–48 hours, 49–59 hours or at least 60 hours. In addition to their financial responsibilities, these men had considerable potential non-financial family responsibilities: close to half had at least one child under five years old in the household and most had a partner in full-time or part-time work.

Most of the public policy discussion on long work hours suggests that the effects are negative although not all research is consistent with this argument. Effects are difficult to measure partly because they are often linked with shift work and work overload and partly because most studies (including the present one) are based on a single survey wave thereby preventing identification of causal links or long-run effects.

Fathers who usually worked 35–40 hours were the most content with their work hours and the least likely to prefer a change. As the number of actual hours worked increased, satisfaction with work hours fell, and a preference for shorter hours (with a commensurate drop in pay) increased. Nevertheless, there was some disparity between work hours preferences linked with pay and satisfaction. Indeed, of fathers who preferred no change in their hours, close to one quarter who worked 49–59 and 60 or more hours were not happy about doing so. This is not surprising given that some people might wish to continue working long hours for the pay alone, but be unhappy about such hours for a variety of other reasons, including the restrictions that long hours might have on their time and energy to enjoy family life and to play an active role in their children’s lives.

Our analysis of the impact of long work hours focused on several domains of subjective wellbeing: fathers’ mental health and general health, sense of vitality (ranging from fatigue to high energy), their satisfaction with their jobs, their relationships with their partner and children, and their life in general, their experience of parenting stress, their perceptions of positive and negative effects of work on family life, and the extent to which fathers found work and family life to be personally rewarding. In addition, their partners’ satisfaction with both father-partner and father-children relationships was examined. Average wellbeing scores were adjusted for the effects of various socio-demographic factors.

Contrary to the discussions in the literature about the negative impact of long working hours on health and wellbeing, very few significant differences emerged in the average wellbeing scores of fathers working 35–44 hours and those working longer hours. Nevertheless, as hours of work increased, fathers’ perceptions of negative work-to-family spillover increased, and those working 60 or more hours indicated lower vitality and marginally lower satisfaction with life. The work-to-family spillover effect represents an important problem that is likely to be exacerbated as increasing numbers of mothers remain in or return to work while the children are young.

However, for the most part, wellbeing indicators did not vary significantly with work hours. These results are hardly surprising, given that the analysis did not take into

account personal views about the hours worked. Despite the fact that fathers working very long hours (60 or more hours) were more likely than those working 35–40 hours to express dissatisfaction with their hours they worked, fathers working very long hours most commonly expressed high satisfaction with these hours.

Are these men simply avoiding an unhappy home or non-work life by “throwing themselves into work”? The next set of analysis suggested that this is not generally the case. When those working 60 or more hours were subdivided into three groups according to their level of satisfaction with work hours, a very consistent picture emerged: fathers who were very happy with their work hours had higher wellbeing on virtually all indicators (included those derived from their partners) compared with those who were not happy with their work hours. This “polarization” of wellbeing according to satisfaction with work hours was not apparent for fathers who worked 35–40 hours. For fathers with working hours between these extremes, some but not all dimensions of wellbeing varied with satisfaction.

We then attempted to explore whether the polarization in wellbeing for fathers working very long hours was due to pervasively low wellbeing amongst men who did not enjoy working these long hours or to pervasively high wellbeing amongst men who enjoyed such long hours. To assess this, we compared the wellbeing scores of fathers who were not happy with their work hours – be they 35–40 hours or 60 or more hours per week, and we also compared the wellbeing scores of fathers who were very happy with these shorter and longer hours of work.

We found neither pervasively lower wellbeing amongst those who were not happy with working very long hours, compared with those not happy with working 35–40 hours, nor pervasively higher wellbeing amongst those who were very happy with working 60 or more hours, compared with those very happy with working 35–40 hours. Nevertheless, those who expressed high satisfaction with very long work hours had significantly higher wellbeing on four indicators: they were more satisfied than those working 35–40 hours with their jobs, their relationship with their children and their life in general, while their partners were more satisfied with their personal relationship with these men.

Finally, we assessed whether the pervasive link we found between the domains of wellbeing examined and satisfaction with very long work hours was apparent for both employees and the self-employed. To obtain sufficient numbers of subgroups for this analysis, attention was directed to those working in excess of 48 hours. The self-employed working this number of hours were more likely than the employees to express dissatisfaction with their work hours. Nevertheless, the general pattern of results for each group suggested significantly higher wellbeing across various dimensions for those who were happy with their long work hours than for those not happy with such hours. But unlike employees, self-employed fathers who were happy working long hours appeared to have more satisfactory father-partner and father-child relationships (according to their own and their partner’s perspectives), compared self-employed fathers who were not happy with such long hours.

Overall then, it appears links between fathers’ work hours and several aspects of subjective wellbeing vary according to how fathers appraise these hours. Fathers who enjoy working very long hours appeared to be coping well with life, and in some areas

seemed to be better off than those enjoying their 35–40 hours of work. Furthermore, there was no evidence that fathers who did not enjoy working long hours were pervasively worse off in terms of these subjective wellbeing measures than fathers who did not enjoy working 35–40 hours.

In short, while long work hours appeared to be detrimental for some fathers and their families, this was not the case for all fathers. Our analysis suggests that workers' satisfaction with their work hours, regardless of their work hour preferences in the light of pay received, needs to be taken into account when examining the long work hours debate.

Clearly, there are “horses for courses”. Finding the right match between workers and their jobs is a central challenge for workers themselves and their places of employment – one that can have very powerful positive or negative effects on workers' productivity, job satisfaction, relationships at home, and enjoyment of life in general. The “right match” is changeable as workers' skills improve, and as their goals, family responsibilities and other interests change. Thus, maintaining the “right match” once it is achieved requires a great deal of vigilant monitoring.

This analysis was based on wave 1 of HILDA, which is designed to be an indefinite life panel survey. While this survey it has yielded very rich data already, its value will increase with every wave. By following up respondents, this survey will throw light on any (future) long-term health effects of long work hours that are linked with high and low satisfaction, that involve different levels of responsibility and social status, and that apply to individuals for varying lengths of time.

The survey will also enable us to identify the direction of some causal relationships. For instance, to what extent does a positive outlook on life and high energy predispose fathers to enjoy working long hours and feel limited parenting stress? To what extent does the satisfaction derived from working long hours in an enjoyable job contribute to a happy and energetic approach to life?

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Appendix A

Appendix Table A1. Men working 41-48 hours: wellbeing by satisfaction with work hours (adjusted mean)

	Satisfaction with work hours		
	Low (0-5)	Medium (6-7)	High (8-10)
Satisfaction with job overall	5.7 (0.55)	6.9*** (0.52)	8.2*** (0.51)
Satisfaction with relationship with partner			
Self-reported	9 (0.62)	8.8 (0.59)	9.4 (0.6)
Partner's report	9 (0.7)	8.9 (0.67)	9.3 (0.68)
Satisfaction with relationship with children			
Self-reported	8.9 (0.52)	8.8 (0.5)	9.4* (0.51)
Partner's report	9 (0.58)	8.7 (0.56)	9.2 (0.57)
Satisfaction with life as a whole	7.6 (0.42)	7.5 (0.4)	8.2** (0.39)
Parenting stress	13.7 (1.91)	12.6 (1.84)	12.3 (1.85)
Work and family balance			
Negative effect of work on family	18 (2.1)	16.1 (2.02)	13.2*** (2.03)
Positive effect of work on family	13.8 (1.56)	13.2 (1.49)	15 (1.5)
Positive effect of work on self	17.2 (1.28)	16.8 (1.22)	17.9 (1.23)
Health			
General health	68 (6.11)	70.7 (5.87)	73.7* (5.93)
Vitality	70.9 (6.84)	73.6 (6.58)	78.5** (6.65)
Mental health	81.4 (5.5)	82.5 (5.29)	84.9 (5.34)

Notes: As for Table 5.

Source: HILDA Survey Wave 1 (2001).

Appendix Table A2. Men working 49-59 hours: wellbeing by satisfaction with work hours (adjusted mean ^a)

	Satisfaction with work hours		
	Low (0-5)	Medium (6-7)	High (8-10)
Satisfaction with job overall	6.2 (0.31)	7.4*** (0.30)	8.1*** (0.31)
Satisfaction with relationship with partner			
Self-reported	8.7 (0.35)	8.9 (0.34)	9.0 (0.34)
Partner's report	8.3 (0.35)	8.6 (0.34)	8.4 (0.35)
Satisfaction with relationship with children			
Self-reported	8.5 (0.32)	8.7 (0.31)	8.7 (0.31)
Partner's report	8.3 (0.33)	8.4 (0.32)	8.5 (0.33)
Satisfaction with life as a whole	7.6 (0.24)	8.0* (0.24)	8.2** (0.24)
Parenting stress	14.2 (0.97)	13.1 (0.94)	12.5* (0.96)
Work and family balance			
Negative effect of work on family	18.4 (1.17)	15.9** (1.15)	15.3*** (1.15)
Positive effect of work on family	13.7 (0.75)	14.8* (0.73)	14.8* (0.73)
Positive effect of work on self	15.7 (0.72)	16.9* (0.71)	16.4 (0.71)
Health			
General health	72.9 (3.51)	78.7* (3.40)	75.3 (3.42)
Vitality	61.2 (3.42)	68.5** (3.33)	70.3*** (3.33)
Mental health	74.8 (2.69)	79.5* (2.61)	80.4*** (2.62)

Notes: As for Table 5.

Source: HILDA Survey Wave 1 (2001).