

Long work hours widen the gender gap

August 1 2008

Working overtime has a disproportionate impact on women in dual-earner households, exacerbating gender inequality and supporting the "separate sphere" phenomenon in which men are the breadwinners while women tend to the home, according to research to be presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association.

"Women whose husbands work long hours are more likely to quit their jobs, yet men's careers are not impacted when their wives put in long hours," said Youngjoo Cha, author of the study and a doctoral candidate in sociology at Cornell University. "This suggests a potential return to the 'separate spheres' arrangement—breadwinning men and homemaking women—as long hours become increasingly common."

To determine the impact of longer work hours on dual-earner households, Cha analyzed data from the 1996 panel of the Survey of Income and Program Participation, a longitudinal household survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau that covers calendar years 1995 through 2000. The sample was limited to dual-earner married couples in professional and non-professional employment.

Cha found that women whose husbands worked more than 60 hours per week were 44 percent more likely to quit their own jobs. However, there was no impact on husbands' odds of quitting when wives worked long hours.

Results were even more pronounced when Cha isolated professional workers. Professional women were 52 percent more likely to quit their

jobs when their husbands worked more than 60 hours per week. As in the case of all workers, overworking wives did not affect the employment status of professional men.

Among professionals, husbands were more than twice as likely as wives to work more than 50 hours per week (30 percent of husbands compared to 12 percent of wives). According to Cha, this suggests that in professional occupations, women are less likely to expect spousal support than men are.

Dual-earner households with children were the most likely candidates for the "separate spheres" arrangement Cha discusses. Professional mothers whose husbands worked more than 60 hours per week were 90 percent more likely to quit their jobs than childless women whose husbands did not work long hours.

The effect of overwork was less in the case of non-professionals, yet still had a negative impact on the employment status of women.

Source: American Sociological Association

Citation: Long work hours widen the gender gap (2008, August 1) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2008-08-hours-widen-gender-gap.html>

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