

# Overworking husbands drive working wives back into the home, study finds

August 4 2008, By Susan Lang

---

Americans work longer hours than ever. That not only hurts women's careers but also widens the gender gap and threatens to trigger a resurgence of the traditional homemaker/breadwinner family structure in dual-earner households, says a new Cornell study.

Presented Aug. 1 at the American Sociological Association's annual meeting in Boston, the study found that "Women whose husbands work long hours are more likely to quit their jobs," said Youngjoo Cha, a Cornell doctoral candidate in sociology who expects her Ph.D. in 2010. "Yet men's careers are not impacted when their wives put in long hours."

Cha found the phenomenon occurs among women across occupations, but the link is strongest among women with children and professional women.

Working long hours has increasingly become expected in the work culture, she noted, and her research shows how "seemingly gender-neutral workplace norms can result in discriminatory outcomes and perpetuate gender inequality."

To determine the impact of longer work hours on dual-earner households, Cha analyzed data from the 1996 Survey of Income and Program Participation, a longitudinal survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Cha found that women whose husbands worked more than 60 hours per

week were 44 percent more likely to quit their jobs, compared with similar women whose husbands did not overwork. Professional wives with overworking husbands were 52 percent more likely to quit than similar women whose husbands did not overwork. Professional women with children were 90 percent more likely to quit their jobs than childless women whose husbands did not overwork.

In 2002 more than 12 percent -- up from less than 9 percent in 1983 -- of employees in the United States worked more than 50 hours a week. Cha found that 30 percent of professional husbands in dual-income households worked more than 50 hours per week, compared with only 12 percent of their professional wives. This suggests, said Cha, women in professional jobs are less likely to expect spousal support than men.

"Many workplaces use 'face time' as an important proxy/signal for workers' commitment or professional competence," said Cha. "However, it should be noted that increased work hours do not assure increased productivity, and more importantly, it can seriously disadvantage many female workers who put in fewer hours at work than men."

The research was supported by a grant from the Bronfenbrenner Life Course Center and the Center for the Study of Inequality at Cornell.

Provided by Cornell University

Citation: Overworking husbands drive working wives back into the home, study finds (2008, August 4) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2008-08-overworking-husbands-wives-home.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.