

Work/life balance blurred for some employees

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Employees with high levels of job autonomy and control over their schedules are more likely to bring their work home with them, according to surprising new research out of the University of Toronto.

Using data from a 2002 nationally representative survey of more than 2,600 American workers, sociology professor Scott Schieman and Ph.D. student Paul Glavin examined the impacts of schedule control and job autonomy on work-family role blurring. Role blurring is measured by how often employees bring work home and how often they receive work-related contact outside of normal working hours.

The study found the following:

- Having great schedule control – that is, having greater control over the start and finish times of work – is associated with more frequent work-family role blurring; this pattern is stronger among men;

- Having greater job autonomy is associated with more frequent work-family role blurring among both women and men;

- Men in autonomous jobs are more likely than women in similarly autonomous jobs to receive work-related contact outside of normal work hours;

- Among both genders, receiving work-related contact outside of normal work hours increases work-to-family conflict, but only among individuals who have less autonomy at work

"These patterns are somewhat unexpected because they identify a potential downside of work-related resources like schedule control and job autonomy," says Schieman, lead author of the study. "While there is little doubt that these are highly valued resources in the workplace, we find they may cause trouble for people trying to navigate the boundaries between work and family

life. Part of the downside of schedule control and autonomy is that more work may come home as a result of having these apparently desirable resources. Employees wonder: When does work end and non-work life begin?"

Schieman adds the findings are important because researchers have established work-to-family conflict as a core stressor in peoples' lives.

"Conflict between work and family demands is strongly associated with unfavourable personal, health, social and organizational outcomes," he says.

The study has been published in *Social Problems*.

Source: University of Toronto

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