

Work-life balance

Indicator overview

VicHealth Indicators Survey

VicHealth Indicators are used to measure community wellbeing with a focus on social determinants of health.

Survey topic areas include: wellbeing, healthy eating and sedentary behaviour, use of green space and safety, smoking policy, alcohol, using of social networking, participation in arts activities and the community, social attitudes, and work, life and time.

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November 2012
ISBN: 978-1-922133-91-5
Publication number: K-040-KN

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Promotion Foundation 2012

Introduction

Lack of time, or time pressure, has been identified as an important social determinant of health (Roxburgh 2004). Like income, time is a finite resource with a price attached to it. It is a limited commodity which has become more precious because of changes in the nature of work, where people live and how they spend their leisure time. Many people cite time pressure as a reason why they do not exercise, shop and prepare healthy meals, get enough sleep, and spend time with friends or family (Jabs and Devine 2006). Being harried may also contribute to increased levels of stress, anxiety and depression in some people (Roxburgh 2004). Pressure on a person's time can reduce connections and friendships within the local community, and may diminish people's ability to undertake voluntary work (Roxburgh 2004). Factors that affect how much 'free' time people have include public transport scheduling, work hours and conditions, parenting and caring responsibilities, and commute times (Strazdins et al. 2011).

Work

When work time dominates, it tends to shape all other time commitments. The single most significant influence on time pressure over the past 30 years has been the increased participation of women in the labour market (Maher 2009). In 2011, women's participation rate in the Australian labour market was 59.1% (ABS 2011). As women take larger roles in the workforce and people work longer hours, the amount of free time that can be devoted to healthy activities is reduced (Jabs and Devine 2006). The result is less available time for physical exercise and preparing healthy food (Strazdins et al. 2011), the latter leading in many instances to a greater reliance on fast food and convenience foods (Jabs and Devine 2006). Food and drink manufacturers have recognised these issues in our community and have developed products that are quick, easy and convenient to prepare (Jabs and Devine 2006). However, these foods are often processed, pre-packaged and high in salt, fat and sugar (Broom & Strazdins, 2007).

Time and stage of life

Time usage is often dictated by stages in the lifecycle, consumption habits, family types, income and geography (Williams et al. 2009). For example:

- The time demands on families with pre-school children and primary school children are quite different to those with teenagers (Pocock 2006), and the time pressures experienced by sole parents are quite different from those of two-parent families (Strazdins et al. 2011).
- Those who reside in the outer suburbs may have a different perception of time pressure than those who live in the inner city (Williams et al. 2009).

- The elderly, retired and disabled have different time demands and constraints than those of full-time workers (Strazdins et al. 2011).
- Caring responsibilities contribute significantly to the rushed home environment because they require juggling numerous individual schedules. This may mean that carers trade their own leisure time (which may include physical activity) for time spent meeting the requirements of their families (Maher 2009).
- People in low-income groups often have more rigid work hours as well as dispersed employment locations, making their schedules less flexible (Strazdins et al. 2011). In contrast, higher-income workers are more likely to live in areas serviced by good public transport and have shorter travel times between work and home. They also tend to have more flexible employment, meaning that they can travel outside peak periods, or find work schedules that accommodate their responsibilities as carers.

Find out more

Centre for work + life, Hawke Research Institute.
www.unisa.edu.au/hawkeinstitute/cwl/

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