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The Changing Workweek: Trends in Weekly Hours of Work in Canada, 1976-1995

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The Changing Workweek

Trends in Weekly Hours of Work in Canada, 1976–1995

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There is a perception that the hours worked in the Canadian labor market have shifted away from a standard workweek. This perceived shift has been characterized as a polarization, a situation in which workers get pushed into short or long hours as the middle shrinks.

The demand for information on work hours is now greater than ever before. Economists and policymakers are interested in the relationship between the distribution of work and unemployment, particularly in light of employer reactions to legislated payroll taxes and training costs. In an economy that seems pressed to create new jobs, some observers have proposed that hours of existing jobs be redistributed to combat unemployment. Others, concerned with workplace and family stress, would like information on the joint and individual work hours and schedules of family members, who are working more weekly hours than ever before simply to maintain their standard of living. The data presented in this chapter underline the complexities involved in the development, implementation, and monitoring of policy solutions for the hours inequality and polarization phenomena.

We examine and attempt to quantify the movements away from the standard workweek by providing an analysis of Canadian trends in weekly hours of work for 1976 through 1995. Attention is devoted to 1976, 1980, 1985, 1989, and 1995 in order to eliminate, to the degree possible, discontinuities of recessions and expansions. Specifically, the analysis assesses movements in weekly hours as they relate to a number of key labor market indicators, including class of worker, age, sex, education, occupation and industry. The actual labor market factors and conditions leading to such changes are complex and remain the subject of much hypothesis, speculation, and debate.

The data presented in this chapter support the concept that, while hours worked are in flux, the distribution of hours has polarized over time. Underlying the overall trend, however, are complex and primarily unidirectional shifts in the distribution of hours, evident when workers are grouped by various characteristics. “Hours polarization” is defined here as a decline in the proportion of people working standard hours (a 35- to 40-hour week) and an increase in both the proportion working long hours (41 or more) and those working short hours (34 or less). Likewise, “hours inequality” is defined as a unidirectional shift in the distribution of hours, characterized by a decline in the proportion of people working standard hours and a corresponding increase in the proportion working *either* long or short hours (but not both).

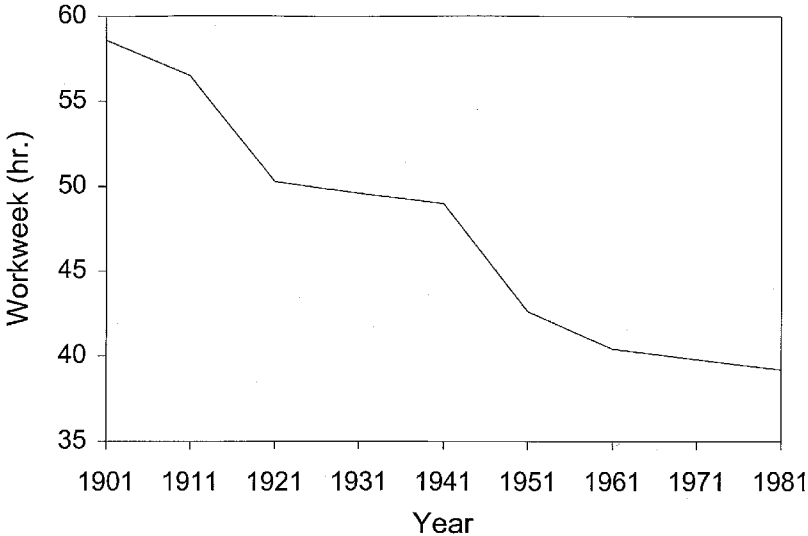
BACKGROUND—HISTORY OF HOURS WORKED IN CANADA

At the turn of the century, workers typically put in near 60-hour weeks spread over six days (Figure 1). By the 1960s, the workweek had been reduced to 37–40 hours over five days—a standard that has changed little since (Reid 1985). Increased productivity and growth in real wages spurred the trend to the shorter workweek. Workers and their employers could afford a shorter week.

The average workweek has remained fairly stable since the mid 1960s, partly because some workers have opted for nonwage benefits instead of shorter weeks. However, averages mask recent changes in the distribution of hours, especially since the 1981–1982 recession. By 1995, only 54 percent of workers in all jobs put in standard hours (35–40 hours per week), down from 65 percent in 1976. This decline occurred despite the fact that average weekly hours fell only 3 percent, from 39.0 to 37.9 hours, over the same period.

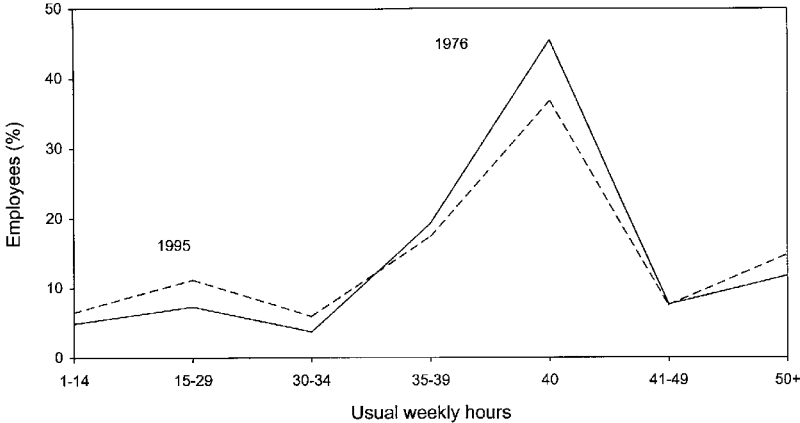
The decline in the proportion of people working standard hours was coincident with increases in the proportion of people working both long and short hours (Figure 2). As the proportion of standard hours fell (by 10.7 percentage points from 1976 to 1995), the share of workers whose usual weekly hours were less than 35 grew from 16 percent to nearly 24 percent, and that of those with 41 or more, from 19 percent

Figure 1 Standard Weekly Hours in Canada, 1901–1981



SOURCE: Reid (1985).

Figure 2 Overall Employment Hours 1976 and 1995



to 22 percent. The overall distribution of usual weekly hours polarized between 1976 and 1995. The full effect of this is not evident, however, until these movements are disaggregated by specific groups of workers. Furthermore, regardless of the changes taking place, for most industries standard hours are still the norm. What is being discussed here is changes in the poles of the hours distribution.

Men and women tend to have very different work schedules, and this is borne out in their respective hours distributions. While a roughly similar proportion of men and women worked standard hours in 1995 (55.7 percent and 52.3 percent, respectively), 2.6 times as many women than men worked short hours (35.4 percent versus 13.7 percent), while nearly 2.5 times as many men worked long hours (30.6 percent versus 12.3 percent). Despite differences in their overall distributions of hours in the poles, the two groups have faced similarly sized changes over time; that is, both groups are experiencing polarization of hours.

What has caused this apparent shift of weekly hours to the poles of the distribution? Three labor market phenomena of the 1980s and 1990s may have contributed to these changes, and to the decline in the importance of the standard workweek.

THE EFFECT OF MOONLIGHTERS, SELF-EMPLOYMENT, AND YOUTH EMPLOYMENT ON HOURS

Growth in multiple jobholding may have led to increases in the upper tail of the hours distribution, growth in self-employment could have contributed to polarization into both the upper and lower tails, and soaring school attendance rates for youths coupled with growth in part-time jobs during school could have increased the share of below-standard hours. Since these are important aspects of Canada's changing labor market, each warrants examination in any discussion of trends in work hours.

Moonlighters

Not surprisingly, moonlighting contributes to the incidence of long workweeks when hours per person are measured rather than hours per job. Since moonlighters accounted for a larger share of employment in 1995 (5 percent) than they did two decades earlier (2 percent), their tendencies to work long hours have contributed to the growth in the upper tail of the hours distribution over the period. But this influence may be on the wane. In 1995, only 64 percent of all moonlighters had above-standard workweeks, down from 70 percent in 1985 and 80 percent in 1976. The drop is explained by the fact that moonlighters in 1995 were more likely to be young persons holding down two part-time jobs that may not have added to even a standard workweek. In contrast, moonlighters 20 years ago were much more likely to work standard hours at their main jobs, so the second job was bound to push them into the long-hours category.

The Self-Employed

The second trend that may have contributed to overall hours polarization, especially to the growing share of long workweeks, is the growing prominence of self-employment, up from 12 percent of employment in 1976 to 16 percent in 1995. Moreover, its growth in the proportion of employment shows the same ratchet-like movement as overall hours polarization, with spikes during the last two recessions followed by plateaus.

The self-employed were more than twice as likely as paid employees to work long hours in 1995 (44 percent versus 15 percent). Only 3 out of 10 (compared with 6 out of 10 paid employees) worked standard hours, so their added numbers increased the upper tail of the hours distribution. On the other hand, they were also somewhat more likely to work short hours (29 percent compared with 24 percent), a tendency that has increased in the last few years. This has contributed to the lower tail of the hours distribution.

However, as with moonlighters, the self-employed have been moving away from long hours; their share of standard hours has remained stable, while that of short hours has grown considerably. The downward shift is particularly evident for those in agriculture and trade, with

movement toward both standard and short hours, and for those in construction and business services, mostly into short hours.

The long-term effect of growth in self-employment on the overall distribution of hours is difficult to assess. Since much of the increase in the short-hours pole coincided with the recession of the early 1990s, that phenomenon may not persist. Furthermore, women, whose relatively small share of self-employed positions is growing, are shifting up into standard and long hours. (The overall downward trend for self-employed hours is influenced predominantly by men.)

Youths

How have youths (ages 15 to 24) affected the overall hours distribution? All movement for this group has been into the short-hours tail of the distribution. This may be largely a function of increased school attendance, since full-time students tend to work part time in order to balance work and school demands. School attendance has increased sharply since the early 1980s, rising from about 43 percent in 1984 to 57 percent in 1995.

However, short workweeks have become more common within both the student and nonstudent groups, at the expense of standard hours. In fact, 3 out of 10 employed youths who had left school worked short workweeks in 1995, triple the proportion of 1976. The change in the hours distribution for nonstudents has followed a somewhat disturbing pattern, with sharp drops triggered by the recessions and little or no gain during the recovery and expansion periods (Table 1).

The trends for these “special” workers—multiple jobholders, the self-employed, and youths—affect the overall distribution of hours and contribute to the observed polarization. However, while these groups do influence the overall trend away from standard hours, they are far from the whole story: when they are removed from the analysis, hours polarization persists. The remainder are paid employees who are at least 25 years of age and working only one job, defined here as “adult employees.” This group, making up 70 percent of the total workforce in Canada in 1995, is important not only because of its size but also because of the limited scope many of its members have for controlling the hours they work.

Table 1 Distribution of Usual Weekly Hours^a for Youths Aged 15–24 (%)

Group/weekly hours	1976	1980	1985	1989	1995	Percentage point change 1976–95
Student						
1–34	81.4	86.6	88.2	90.3	92.2	+10.8
35–40	16.4	11.6	10.3	8.6	6.7	–9.7
41+	2.2	1.8	1.5	1.1	1.1	–1.1
Nonstudent						
1–34	9.8	12.3	19.7	16.7	28.6	+18.8
35–40	76.4	74.1	66.6	68.8	57.6	–18.8
41+	13.8	13.6	13.6	14.5	13.8	0.0

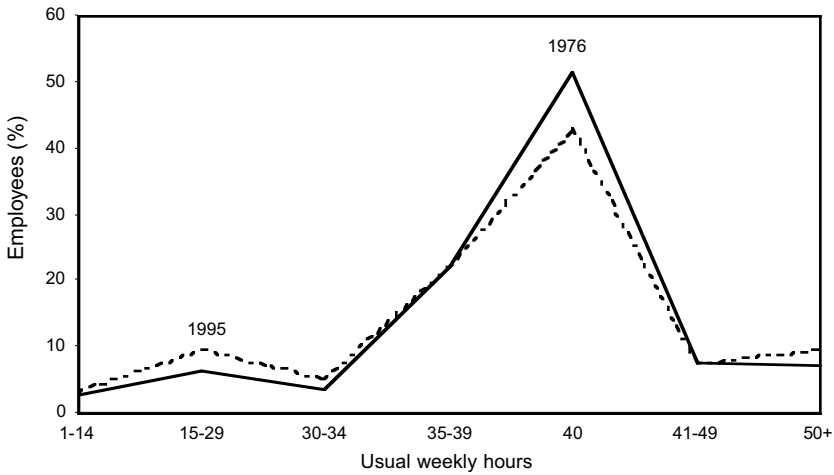
^a September to April averages.

ADULT EMPLOYEES

Even after the groups who commonly work nonstandard hours are removed, polarization exists (Figure 3). In fact, these special groups account for only a small part of the decline in the number of people working standard hours. (Note that the difference between Figure 3 and Figure 2 is very small.)

A growing number of adult employees (that is, age 25 and over, not self-employed, and without a second job) are working short and long hours, with emphasis on the short hours. Of the 8.1-percentage-point decline in the proportion of adult employees working standard hours between 1976 and 1995, 5.6 points were picked up in short hours and just 2.5 points went to long. Growth in the short-hours group was steady over the period, while most of the growth in the long-hours group occurred after 1985.

Polarization has been somewhat stronger for men than for women (Table 2). The share of workers with standard hours dropped 8.5 percentage points between 1976 and 1995 (compared to 5.1 points for women), with 5.3 points moving into long hours and 3.2 points into short hours. The shift is also more skewed toward long hours for men

Figure 3 Employees Aged 25 (1976 and 1995)

than for women, whose shares of short and long hours increased in similar proportions (up 2.4 and 2.7 points, respectively). The largest part of the shift for men occurred after 1989, indicating that polarization has occurred more recently and more quickly for them than for women.

Age

Do changing demographics make a difference to the distribution of hours among adult employees? The workforce has aged over the last two decades, as “baby boomers” have moved into their forties. Theoretically, this results in a larger share of the workforce that is well-established and highly experienced than when boomers were taking their first jobs in the 1970s.

While the age pyramid may indeed be influencing the degree of overall polarization, analysis suggests that polarization is occurring for male adult workers of all age groups, while the trends are somewhat different for adult women.

Table 2 Distribution of Usual Weekly Hours,^a by Sex (%)

Group	1976	1980	1985	1989	1995	Percentage point change 1976–95
Men						
1–34	3.9	4.4	5.2	5.2	7.1	+3.2
35–40	77.1	77.5	75.0	73.4	68.6	–8.5
41+	19.0	18.0	19.7	21.4	24.3	+5.3
Women						
1–34	27.7	29.9	30.9	29.3	30.1	+2.4
35–40	66.4	64.5	62.6	63.4	61.3	–5.1
41+	5.8	5.6	6.5	7.3	8.6	+2.7

^a For employees 25+ years of age.

Results show that hours polarization has occurred for men in all selected age groups (Table 3). Between 1976 and 1980, the hours distributions changed very little; however, after 1980, standard hours declined steadily in each age group. The shift out of standard hours was distributed into both long and short hours, although in all cases the shift into long hours was slightly larger.

The largest shift out of standard hours was in the 55 and over group—10.9 percentage points between 1976 and 1995—although each group saw at least a 5.8-point decline in standard-hour workers. Employees in the 45–54 and the 55-and-over groups experienced the largest shifts into long hours over the period. This finding is consistent with the fact that members of these groups are most likely to be managers and/or to have seniority, both of which are increasingly associated with long hours. Growth in the proportion working short hours was largest in the 25–34 and the 55-and-over groups, where workers with short hours are more commonly found.

Unlike men, whose proportion of workers in standard hours between 1976 and 1980 changed little, women experienced significant changes during this period (Table 4). The proportion of women working a standard workweek declined for all age groups from 1976 to 1995, but the drop was greatest for those in the 25–34 and 55-and-over groups (7.1 and 11.0 percentage points, respectively). Hours for the

Table 3 Distribution of Men's Usual Weekly Hours,^a by Age (%)

Group/weekly hours	1976	1980	1985	1989	1995	Percentage point change 1976–95
25–34 years						
1–34	3.7	4.3	5.5	5.3	8.3	+4.6
35–40	76.8	77.1	74.3	72.4	66.8	–10.1
41+	19.5	18.6	20.3	22.3	24.9	+5.4
35–44 years						
1–34	2.7	3.0	3.8	3.5	5.0	+2.4
35–40	76.4	77.3	75.8	74.7	70.6	–5.8
41+	20.9	19.6	20.4	21.8	24.4	+3.4
45–54 years						
1–34	2.0	2.9	3.8	3.3	5.2	+3.2
35–40	79.4	78.9	76.0	74.6	70.2	–9.2
41+	18.5	18.2	20.2	22.0	24.6	+6.0
55+ years						
1–34	9.1	9.2	9.7	12.1	14.2	+5.2
35–40	75.4	77.1	74.1	71.0	64.5	–10.9
41+	15.5	13.7	16.3	16.9	21.2	+5.7

^a For employees 25+ years of age.

25–34 group have become more polarized, while for the older group short hours have become more common.

For the 35–44 and 45–54 groups, considerably less polarization has occurred, with an initial shift toward short hours between 1976 and 1980, and a movement into long hours since then. The absence of a substantial movement out of standard hours for these two groups is likely due to the large number of women moving from marginal to career jobs over this period.

Table 4 Distribution of Women's Usual Weekly Hours,^a by Age (%)

Group/weekly hours	1976	1980	1980	1989	1995	Percentage point change 1976-95
25-34 years	23.8	25.8	26.8	25.2	27.8	+4.0
35-40	70.5	68.7	67.1	67.6	63.4	-7.1
41+	5.8	5.5	6.1	7.2	8.8	+3.0
35-44 years						
1-34	30.4	31.0	31.8	29.7	30.2	-0.2
35-40	63.8	63.3	61.1	62.7	61.6	-2.2
41+	5.8	5.7	7.2	7.6	8.1	+2.3
45-54 years						
1-34	28.8	33.0	33.8	31.0	29.3	+0.5
35-40	65.3	61.3	59.8	61.7	61.4	-3.9
41+	5.8	5.7	6.4	7.3	9.2	+3.4
55+ years						
1-34	32.1	36.1	39.0	41.4	41.8	+9.7
35-40	62.0	58.3	55.1	51.9	51.0	-11.0
41+	5.9	5.6	5.9	6.8	7.2	+1.3

^a For employees 25+ years of age.

Education

As with most labor market outcomes, level of education plays an important role in success and, by association, exerts a very heavy influence on hours worked. Education has a strong influence on hours distribution. The higher the educational qualifications, the greater the degree of polarization; the lower the education, the higher the incidence of low hours.

It should come as little or no surprise, then, that men and women with no completed postsecondary school qualifications have experienced the greatest increase in the short-hours tail of the distribution. The incidence of short workweeks has traditionally been relatively

high for women without a completed formal postsecondary education, and that relationship has intensified (Table 5). The 5.2-percentage-point decline in the proportion of women working standard hours moved almost entirely to short hours, pushing the share of the latter up from 28 percent in 1976 to 32 percent in 1995. Men in the same educational group saw even greater losses in the 35–40 hour category over the period, with a decline of 9 percentage points in these standard hours (Table 6). However unlike those of their female counterparts, men's losses have been distributed equally between long and short hours (both up 4.6 percentage points).

At the other end of the formal education spectrum, university graduates have experienced a unidirectional shift toward long hours since 1976. Women with degrees have seen virtually no change in short hours, and men have seen only a very slight increase. Between 1976 and 1995, women in this group added about 5 percentage points to the number of long hours they worked, while men increased theirs by more than 6 full points, from 25.3 percent to 31.8 percent. It seems that long hours are part of the baggage of a higher education, especially for men.

INDUSTRY

Looking at the hours distribution across industries is another way to help shed some light on both the extent and complexity of polarization and inequality in the workplace. It may be that changes in the distribution of hours reflect structural change, with disproportional growth in industries that tend to use part-timers and in those that require long hours. Alternatively, some industries may be making increased use of short-hours workers only, while others are becoming more reliant on long workweeks. Finally, changes in the hours distribution may be spread fairly evenly within all or most industries, suggesting pervasive and systemic factors that are economy-wide.

For men working in the goods-producing sector, the shift is toward long hours (Table 7; for detailed industry data, see Appendix Table A1). Of the 10.1-percentage-point shift out of standard hours over the 1976–1995 period, 8.3 points moved to long hours while only 1.8 moved to short hours. The proportion of standard-hours workers fell in

**Table 5 Distribution of Women's Usual Weekly Hours,^a
by Education (%)**

Highest level of education	1976	1980	1985	1989	1995	Percentage point change 1976-95
Less than postsecondary certificate, diploma, or degree						
1-34	28.0	30.4	31.6	30.9	32.0	4.0
35-40	66.8	64.8	63.6	63.7	61.6	-5.2
41+	5.1	4.8	4.9	5.5	6.3	1.2
Postsecondary certificate/diploma						
1-34	28.7	31.5	33.5	29.8	31.2	2.5
35-40	66.3	64.1	61.1	64.2	62.6	-3.7%
41+	5.0	4.4	5.5	6.0	6.1	1.1
University degree						
1-34	23.7	24.8	24.9	22.6	23.9	0.2
35-40	63.7	62.9	60.3	61.6	58.3%	-5.4
41+	12.7	12.3	14.8	15.8	17.9	5.2

^a For employees 25+ years of age.

Table 6 Distribution of Men's Usual Weekly Hours,^a by Education (%)

Highest level of education	1976	1980	1985	1989	1995	Percentage point change 1976–95
Less than postsecondary certificate, diploma, or degree						
1–34	3.4	3.8	5.2	5.2	8.0	4.6
35–40	78.2	79.0	76.5	75.1	69.0	–9.2
41+	18.4	17.2	18.3	19.8	23.0	4.6
Postsecondary certificate/diploma						
1–34	3.8	4.3	4.7	4.1	5.9	2.1
35–40	80.7	80.3	78.2	76.6	72.8	–7.9
41+	15.5	15.4	17.0	19.3	21.4	5.8
University degree						
1–34	6.8	7.4	5.8	6.2	7.2	0.4
35–40	67.9	68.8	66.7	64.8	61.0	–6.9
41+	25.3	23.8	27.4	28.9	31.8	6.5

^a For employees 25+ years of age.

Table 7 Distribution of Men's Usual Weekly Hours,^a by Industry (%)

Industry	1976	1980	1985	1989	1995	Percentage point change 1976–95
Goods-producing						
1–34	1.5	1.9	2.4	2.3	3.3	+1.8
35–40	82.2	82.2	79.9	78.3	72.1	–10.1
41+	16.3	15.8	17.7	19.4	24.6	+8.3
Service-producing						
1–34	5.8	6.3	7.2	7.2	9.5	+3.7
35–40	73.1	74.0	71.7	69.9	66.4	–6.7
41+	21.1	19.7	21.1	22.9	24.1	+3.0

^a For employees 25+ years of age.

every goods-producing industry over the period, with the exception of agriculture. Primary industries (mining, forestry, and fishing) in particular have seen a dramatic increase in the proportion of long-hours workers (up 19.5 percentage points between 1985 and 1995). Manufacturing and utilities have also been using proportionately more long-hours workers. Hours have been polarizing in construction and have been shifting from long to standard in agriculture.

Within the service-producing industries, the shift for men has been into both short and long hours. Polarization has been greater here than in the goods-producing sector. The 6.7-percentage point decrease in the proportion of standard-hours workers since 1976 has been evenly divided between short and long hours. Hours in transportation, storage, and communication; trade; and business services have been polarizing. The share of short hours in health and social services; accommodation, food, and beverage services; and other services has grown as has that of long hours in finance, insurance, and real estate (FIRE); educational services; and government services.

As with men, the hours distribution for women working in goods-producing industries has shifted toward long-hours workers (Table 8; for detailed industry data, see Appendix Table A2). Overall, the proportion of women working standard hours declined 4.9 percentage points between 1976 and 1995, 4.0 points of which went to long hours. The increase in the proportion of long-hours workers occurred in all goods-producing industries with the exception of agriculture.

Table 8 Distribution of Women's Usual Weekly Hours,^a by Industry (%)

Industry	1976	1980	1985	1989	1995	Percentage point change 1976-95
Goods-producing						
1-34	13.7	15.0	16.1	15.8	14.5	+0.9
35-40	80.5	78.8	77.5	77.1	75.6	-4.9
41+	5.8	6.2	6.4	7.0	9.9	+4.0
Service-producing						
1-34	31.1	33.4	33.8	31.9	32.8	+1.7
35-40	63.1	61.2	59.7	60.7	58.8	-4.3
41+	5.8	5.5	6.5	7.4	8.3	+2.5

^a For employees 25+ years of age.

Service-producing industries have experienced polarization, with the 4.3-percentage-point decline in the proportion of standard-hours workers being picked up by short and long hours (1.7- and 2.5-point increases, respectively). Despite an apparent overall polarization, no single industry in this group has increased its proportion of both short and long hours. Polarization is the net effect of women tending toward long hours in transportation, storage, and communication; trade; FIRE; business services; educational services; and government and other services, plus a shift toward short hours in health and social services and accommodation, food and beverage services.

The decline in standard weekly hours holds generally across all industries for both sexes, but increases in short and long hours are not always of a similar magnitude: polarization is not widespread within industries. Thus, the overall observed polarization masks underlying unidirectional changes in the hours distribution within industries, with some tending exclusively toward long hours, and others exclusively toward short hours. One clear trend for both men and women is a shift toward more long hours in goods-producing industries and a polarization in service-producing industries.

OCCUPATIONS

The number of hours worked is heavily dependent on the type of work performed. Variation in hours worked across occupations may be caused by many factors: the level of responsibility of the position, the skill level required, the cost of training new employees, the opportunity for paid overtime, and the prospects of promotion.

For men, the proportion of employees working standard hours has been shrinking in all 10 occupational groups (Table 9). Instead of widespread polarization, however, a shift in one direction is more likely, depending on occupation. White-collar¹ and blue-collar² occupations, for example, have experienced growth mainly in the proportion of workers with long hours. The largest shift out of standard hours between 1985 and 1995 occurred in the managerial category, an 8.2-percentage-point decline in standard-hours workers and a corresponding 8.1-percentage-point increase in the proportion of long-hours

Table 9 Distribution of Men's Usual Weekly Hours,^a by Occupation (%)

Occupation/ weekly hours	1976	1980	1985	1989	1995	Percentage point change ^b 1985-95
Managerial						
1-34	3.2	3.1	2.6	2.4	2.7	0.1
35-40	77.0	75.2	68.3	64.9	60.0	-8.3
41+	19.7	21.7	29.1	32.7	37.3	+8.2
Professional						
1-34	7.5	8.1	7.0	8.0	9.6	+2.6
35-40	73.5	74.0	73.0	70.8	67.2	-5.8
41+	19.0	17.9	20.0	21.2	23.2	+3.2
Clerical						
1-34	4.7	5.2	5.9	6.3	9.9	+4.1
35-40	88.2	87.7	86.9	85.6	80.7	-6.1
41+	7.0	7.1	7.2	8.1	9.3	+2.1
Sales						
1-34	3.6	5.3	7.7	5.7	9.7	+2.0
35-40	63.9	65.8	63.5	64.2	62.2	-1.3
41+	32.5	28.9	28.9	30.2	28.1	-0.8
Service						
1-34	7.3	8.3	12.0	11.7	17.2	+5.1
35-40	72.1	73.1	71.5	70.8	66.3	-5.2
41+	20.7	18.7	16.5	17.5	16.5	0.0
Primary occupations						
1-34	4.4	4.0	5.5	4.9	6.9	+1.4
35-40	60.9	64.5	60.3	60.7	53.9	-6.4
41+	34.7	31.6	34.3	34.4	39.3	+5.0

(continued)

Table 9 (continued)

Occupation/ weekly hours	1976	1980	1985	1989	1995	Percentage point change ^b 1985–95
Processing, machining & fabricating						
1–34	1.0	1.4	1.8	1.9	2.3	+0.5
35–40	84.8	85.5	84.9	83.6	79.2	–5.7
41+	14.2	13.1	13.3	14.5	18.5	+5.2
Construction trades						
1–34	2.0	2.0	3.6	3.0	5.4	+1.8
35–40	83.6	85.2	82.9	78.9	74.9	–8.0
41+	14.4	12.7	13.6	18.1	19.7	+6.1
Transport operator						
1–34	5.8	6.2	8.2	8.4	9.6	+1.5
35–40	63.6	64.4	59.5	58.4	52.4	–7.1
41+	30.6	29.5	32.4	33.2	38.0	+5.7
Material handling & other crafts						
1–34	2.3	3.0	5.4	6.0	7.7	+2.3
35–40	86.1	86.1	83.5	80.8	78.0	–5.5
41+	11.6	11.0	11.1	13.2	14.4	+3.2

^a For employees 25+ years of age.

^b The 1984 reclassification of SOC codes included a new definition of managers, which meant that more people were classified as such. As a consequence, meaningful comparisons can be made only as far back as 1985.

workers. Clerical, sales, and service jobs, on the other hand, experienced growth in the proportion of short-hours workers, with little or no growth in the long-hours tail.

Those occupations in which long hours have become more common for men have either a high level of responsibility (white-collar jobs), or regular opportunities to work paid overtime (blue-collar). In the case of blue-collar occupations, given administrative and overhead considerations, it may be more cost-efficient for employers to pay overtime wages than to hire and train new employees. White-collar workers, especially managers, may be working longer hours because of increased responsibilities in the wake of corporate downsizing, or simply to keep their jobs in an increasingly competitive employment market. By contrast, those occupations in which short hours have become more common (clerical, sales, and service) are often low-paying and/or part-time.

Unidirectional shifts, as opposed to polarization, have also taken place in women's distribution of hours (Table 10). These shifts are generally not as strong as those for men. The proportion of standard-hours workers has declined, however, in six out of eight occupational groups.³ Similar to the situation for men, female white-collar managers and professionals have seen growth in the long-hours tail of the distribution, while blue-collar, clerical, sales, and service occupations have exhibited no distinct pattern.

Of all occupational groups considered here, both male and female managers experienced the largest growth in the long-hours tail. It is not surprising to find that managers work long hours, nor that weekly hours increase with the level of management. Indeed, according to recent data from the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID), nonmanagerial employees averaged 36 hours per week, while lower managers averaged 39, middle managers 40, and senior managers 42. This pattern has become more marked over time. Managers' expanding work hours, and their growing numbers in the labor market—16.7 percent of adult employees identified themselves as managers in 1995, up from 14.1 percent 10 years earlier—may be a driving force behind the overall movement into long workweeks. To determine to what extent this is the case, the hours distribution of nonmanagerial adult employees is examined here.

**Table 10 Distribution of Women's Usual Weekly Hours,^a
by Occupation (%)**

Occupation/ weekly hours	1976	1980	1985	1989	1995	Percentage point change ^b 1985-95
Managerial						
1-34	12.6	11.6	12.0	11.5	12.2	+0.2
35-40	81.4	80.9	76.1	75.2	72.8	-3.3
41+	6.1	7.5	11.8	13.3	15.0	+3.2
Professional						
1-34	28.2	31.8	32.8	32.8	33.2	+0.4
35-40	64.0	61.1	57.9	57.3	55.8	-2.1
41+	7.8	7.1	9.3	9.9	11.1	+1.7
Clerical						
1-34	25.2	27.8	28.3	28.2	30.0	+1.7
35-40	72.6	69.9	69.6	69.2	67.1	-2.5
41+	2.2	2.3	2.1	2.7	2.9	+0.7
Sales						
1-34	44.6	43.4	49.6	41.2	41.6	-8.0
35-40	47.3	48.7	42.2	49.0	50.7	+8.5
41+	8.1	7.9	8.2	9.8	7.6	-0.5
Service						
1-34	41.0	44.3	49.0	45.8	48.8	-0.2
35-40	50.5	48.5	44.7	47.4	43.9	-0.8
41+	8.5	7.2	6.3	6.8	7.4	+1.0
Primary occupations						
1-34	42.7	46.9	40.7	41.7	34.8	-5.9
35-40	32.3	31.8	35.8	36.5	44.1	+8.3
41+	25.0	21.3	23.5	21.8	21.1	-2.4

Occupation/ weekly hours	1976	1980	1985	1989	1995	Percentage point change ^b 1985–95
Processing, machining & fabricating						
1–34	7.4	8.3	9.6	9.6	9.2	–0.4
35–40	86.7	85.1	84.3	84.4	81.9	–2.4
41+	5.9	6.6	6.1	5.9	8.9	+2.8
Material handling & other crafts						
1–34	13.6	16.5	20.0	18.6	23.6	+3.6
35–40	82.8	79.5	76.0	76.2	69.5	–6.5
41+	3.6	4.0	4.0	5.2	6.9	+3.0

^a For employees 25+ years of age.

^b The 1984 reclassification of SOC codes included a new definition of managers, which meant that more people were classified as such. As a consequence, meaningful comparisons can be made only as far back as 1985.

Even after the managerial group has been removed from the analysis, a small amount of polarization remains (Figure 4).⁴ The decline in the proportion of standard-hours workers is 4.5 percentage points, with 2.1 points going to short and 2.3 to long. Remaining increases in the proportion of long-hours workers are for the most part in the goods-producing industries, especially nonagricultural primary. That the shift into long hours in these industries persists even after managers have been removed indicates that overtime work by blue-collar workers is a contributing factor. Conversely, since increases in the proportion of short-hours workers are generally in the service-producing industries, with no corresponding increase in long hours, it may be concluded that growth into long hours in these industries was exclusive to managers. Polarization still exists for men, while it is virtually non-existent for women (Table 11).

Figure 4 Work Hours for Nonmanagerial Employees Aged 25+ (1976 and 1995)

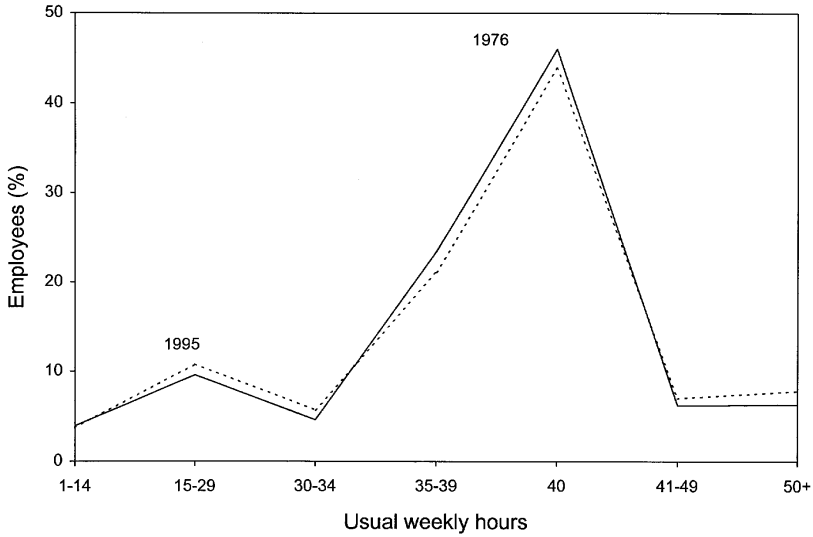


Table 11 Distribution of Usual Weekly Hours for Nonmanagerial Employees^a(%)

Group/weekly hours						Percentage point change ^b
	1976	1980	1985	1989	1995	1985-95
Men						
1-34	4.0	4.6	5.8	5.7	8.0	+2.2
35-40	77.1	77.9	76.4	75.0	70.4	-6.0
41+	18.9	17.5	17.9	19.3	21.6	+3.7
Women						
1-34	28.5	31.2	33.2	31.8	33.6	+0.4
35-40	65.7	63.4	61.0	61.7	59.1	-1.9
41+	5.8	5.5	5.8	6.4	7.3	+1.5

^a For employees 25+ years of age.

^b The 1984 reclassification of SOC codes included a new definition of managers, which meant that more people were classified as such. As a consequence, meaningful comparisons can be made only as far back as 1985.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Are there major changes in the work hours of Canadians? Specifically, is the work “pie” becoming more unevenly divided between those with short workweeks and those with long hours?

Evidence from the last 20 years suggests that hours have shifted from standard to both long and short workweeks, especially since the early 1980s. This phenomenon persists, though to a lesser extent, when special groups such as the self-employed, moonlighters, and young workers, as well as managers, are removed from the analysis. The picture is not an even one. Workweeks seem to have polarized for both sexes, though somewhat more so for men, as women increasingly opt for standard or long workweeks. Evidence by age group suggests that polarization is widespread, although the shift from standard to long hours is more marked for those aged 35 to 54 than for those in the younger or older age groups. This is especially so for women.

In terms of timing, the shift from standard to short workweeks appears to have been triggered by the economic downturns of both the early 1980s and 1990s, while most of the growth in the share of long workweeks appears to be primarily a recent phenomenon.

Not surprisingly, education is strongly related to the length of the workweek, with long hours a frequent occurrence among those with higher credentials. Trends in the distribution of hours have also differed by educational level. Both male and female university graduates are increasingly likely to work long hours at the expense of standard hours. Women without any postsecondary qualifications are increasingly likely to work below standard hours, while their male counterparts are experiencing a growth in both short and long hours.

Change in the distribution of work hours is not simply a structural phenomenon. There have been measurable shifts out of standard workweeks in most industries, although the result is not always polarization. As one might expect, almost all service-producing industries have tended toward a shorter workweek, while many goods-producing industries, particularly manufacturing and other primary, have tended to long workweeks. Only a few demonstrate a clear trend to polarization: construction; transportation, storage and communication; trade; and business services.

Occupation plays a strong role in determining a weekly work schedule. There has been a marked trend toward long hours for managers, especially during the 1990s. But they are not the only ones for whom the week has grown longer. Factory workers and those in primary occupations are also increasingly likely to work more than 40 hours a week. In contrast, hours for those in sales and services are increasingly likely to be below standard.

The link between managers and the trend toward long hours has warranted closer examination. One distinguishing feature of a manager's job is supervisory responsibility, which means that hours of work will likely be above standard. In fact, it appears that the work-week lengthens as the number of persons requiring supervision increases.

Since managers are a growth occupation within almost all industries, their removal from the analysis of industry trends helps illuminate how much influence they have on overall patterns. Interestingly, when managers are removed, the direction of shifts in the hours distribution holds for most industries, although the magnitude toward long hours tends to be somewhat less. In contrast, the shift to short hours tends to strengthen in their absence.

The shift from standard hours continues to have deep and lasting implications for employers, workers, and the unemployed. Why are weekly hours becoming more unevenly distributed? While this chapter has not revealed any one causal factor, the findings are at least consistent with a number of popular hypotheses. First, the data support the contention that many employers in a variety of industries are relying more on a core group of highly educated, experienced workers—primarily managers but also those skilled in trades. Expectations for performance may be increasing in the difficult labor market of the 1990s, and core workers may simply be putting in extra hours on a regular basis to stay afloat, or as an investment in future reward through the internal promotion ladder. Second, hours are heading down in a number of industries. Most are distinguished by a requirement for relatively unskilled workers for whom job-specific training can be minimal. In this situation, workers may be treated as roughly interchangeable.

Perhaps the most important issue to emerge from the hours polarization/inequality debate is the question of the potential to redistribute

hours in the labor market. One of the key questions in this debate has been, and will probably continue to be, how many of these long hours could be redistributed to those who are currently underemployed or unemployed? In the “tough labor market” conditions of the 1990s, do employees who work long hours get overtime compensation, or are they in fact doing more for the same paycheck in order to keep a job? If so, can unpaid hours be redistributed?

The other key question in this debate concerns workers at the other pole of the hours distribution. Do short-hours workers possess the skill mix and portability to assume jobs normally associated with longer hours, and should this transfer of work be achieved by squeezing the long-hours side of the pole? Without some sort of restructuring of hours, these workers may become stuck in low-end, poor-paying jobs. Further, these jobs may continue to move further in the direction of the short-hours pole.

DATA SOURCES AND DEFINITIONS

Data in this chapter are derived from two sources: the majority are annual averages derived from the monthly Labour Force Survey. Data on hours worked by supervisory and management responsibilities have been drawn from the 1993 Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics.

Usual hours: the number of hours usually worked by a respondent in a typical week, regardless of the nominal schedule and regardless of whether or not the hours are paid.

Polarization: a decline in the share of standard hours (35 to 40 per week) with roughly equal gains in the share of short (less than 35 hours) and long (41 and over) workweeks.

Standard hours: 35 to 40 hours per week. Coincides with a notion of adequate employment: lower than legislated thresholds for overtime pay, but high enough to assure eligibility for benefits.

Self-employed: includes all working owners, whether or not they are incorporated or have paid help. Also included are family members who work for a family business without pay.

Inequality: refers to a unidirectional shift in the distribution of hours from standard to long or short.

Notes

1. Managers and professionals.
2. Nonmanagerial employees in primary occupations, processing, machining, fabrication, construction trades, transport operation, and materials handling.
3. Occupational groups such as construction trades and transport operations were dropped due to small sample sizes.
4. The amount of polarization is likely to be understated somewhat because it is being measured from 1985 instead of 1976. As mentioned previously, a change in the definition of manager in 1984 has created a break in the data series by occupation.

Reference

- Reid, F. 1985. "Reductions in Work Time: An Assessment of Employment Sharing to Reduce Unemployment." In *Work and Pay: The Canadian Labour Market*, W.C. Riddell, ed. Collected Research Studies/Royal Commission on the Economic Union and Development Prospects for Canada, 17. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 141–169.

Table A1 Distribution of Men's Weekly Hours Worked,^a by Industry (%)

Industry/weekly hours	1976	1980	1985	1989	1995	Percentage point change 1976-95
Agriculture						
1-34	9.5	12.0	10.4	12.4	11.8	+2.2
35-40	28.6	29.4	33.1	32.1	40.3	+11.8
41+	61.9	58.6	56.5	55.5	47.9	-14.0
Other primary						
1-34	1.0	1.1	1.7	1.5	2.0	+1.1
35-40	79.6	77.9	73.4	71.7	58.9	-20.6
41+	19.5	21.0	24.9	26.9	39.0	+19.5
Manufacturing						
1-34	1.1	1.5	1.8	1.8	2.3	+1.2
35-40	85.5	84.9	83.4	81.9	76.1	-9.4
41+	13.4	13.5	14.8	16.3	21.5	+8.2
Construction						
1-34	1.9	2.8	4.6	3.9	6.6	+4.7
35-40	76.6	77.6	72.2	71.3	65.2	-11.4
41+	21.5	19.6	23.2	24.9	28.2	+6.7
Utilities						
1-34	1.0	1.5	1.0	1.6	1.8	+0.8
35-40	93.9	92.4	93.2	90.5	85.8	-8.1
41+	5.2	6.1	5.8	7.9	12.4	+7.3
Transportation, storage, and communication						
1-34	4.6	4.2	5.6	6.5	7.3	+2.8
35-40	78.1	78.0	75.2	71.7	66.4	-11.7
41+	17.3	17.8	19.2	21.9	26.2	+9.0
Trade						
1-34	3.1	3.5	5.5	4.5	7.4	+4.3

(continued)

Table A1 (continued)

Industry/weekly hours	1976	1980	1985	1989	1995	Percentage point change 1976–95
35–40	68.4	71.0	69.5	68.9	64.7	–3.7
41+	28.5	25.4	25.0	26.6	27.9	–0.6
Finance, insurance, and real estate						
1–34	6.2	7.2	6.8	5.9	6.7	+0.4
35–40	69.6	69.1	65.3	64.5	65.1	–4.5
41+	24.2	23.7	27.8	29.6	28.2	+4.0
Business services						
1–34	5.4	4.9	6.5	5.2	7.8	+2.5
35–40	74.7	74.5	70.0	69.3	66.2	–8.4
41+	20.0	20.6	23.5	25.5	25.9	+6.0
Educational services						
1–34	11.4	11.9	10.8	11.4	13.5	+2.1
35–40	66.9	67.8	65.1	63.2	59.4	–7.5
41+	21.7	20.4	24.1	25.4	27.2	+5.5
Health and social services						
1–34	7.0	8.4	10.3	12.1	14.5	+7.5
35–40	67.9	70.8	70.6	69.5	68.1	+0.3
41+	25.1	20.8	19.1	18.4	17.3	–7.8
Accommodation, food, and beverage services						
1–34	8.1	11.1	15.0	15.2	21.8	+13.7
35–40	55.1	58.2	56.7	55.9	54.6	–0.5
41+	36.8	30.7	28.3	28.9	23.6	–13.2

Industry/weekly hours	1976	1980	1985	1989	1995	Percentage point change 1976-95
Other services						
1-34	10.1	11.9	14.6	14.7	17.2	+7.1
35-40	64.6	66.0	60.4	56.9	59.5	-5.1
41+	25.4	22.0	25.0	28.4	23.3	-2.0
Government services						
1-34	5.0	5.4	4.3	4.3	4.9	-0.1
35-40	86.0	85.7	85.2	84.5	81.7	-4.3
41+	9.0	8.9	10.5	11.2	13.4	+4.4

^a For employees 25+ years of age.

**Table A2 Distribution of Women's Weekly Hours Worked,^a
by Industry (%)**

Industry/weekly hours	1976	1980	1985	1989	1995	Percentage point change 1976-95
Agriculture						
1-34	47.4	50.8	48.2	49.1	40.8	-6.7
35-40	30.3	26.9	31.9	34.2	41.7	+11.4
41+	22.3	22.3	19.8	16.8	17.6	-4.8
Other primary						
1-34	19.3	15.0	12.1	18.1	17.3	-2.0
35-40	75.4	79.8	80.9	70.1	67.7	-7.7
41+	5.2	5.2	7.0	11.7	15.0	+9.7
Manufacturing						
1-34	9.6	10.3	10.9	10.8	10.5	+0.9
35-40	85.6	84.3	83.7	82.8	80.1	-5.4
41+	4.9	5.4	5.4	6.4	9.4	+4.5
Construction						
1-34	34.6	45.1	45.4	38.9	35.2	+0.6
35-40	60.3	49.3	47.7	55.5	56.8	-3.5
41+	5.1	5.6	6.9	5.6	8.0	+3.0
Utilities						
1-34	11.3	5.0	8.9	7.5	9.2	-2.1
35-40	87.1	94.4	90.7	90.6	84.8	-2.3
41+	1.7	0.6	0.4	2.0	6.1	+4.4%
Transportation, storage, and communication						
1-34	28.0	28.8	25.5	23.9	25.0	-3.0
35-40	68.6	66.7	70.3	71.3	68.2	-0.4
41+	3.4	4.4	4.2	4.9	6.9	+3.5

Industry/weekly hours	1976	1980	1985	1989	1995	Percentage point change 1976-95
Trade						
1-34	40.7	43.5	43.6	39.0	40.3	-0.5
35-40	54.1	51.7	51.0	54.4	52.3	-1.9
41+	5.2	4.8	5.4	6.5	7.5	+2.3
Finance, insurance, and real estate						
1-34	21.6	19.7	18.8	19.7	20.6	-0.9
35-40	73.2	75.2	74.5	73.0	72.0	-1.2
41+	5.2	5.2	6.7	7.3	7.3	+2.1
Business services						
1-34	26.9	26.7	25.1	23.4	22.1	-4.8
35-40	70.8	68.7	68.5	69.0	68.5	-2.3
41+	2.2	4.6	6.4	7.6	9.4	+7.1
Educational services						
1-34	32.0	35.1	32.3	31.9	32.3	+0.2
35-40	56.8	54.8	54.0	53.4	50.1	-6.7
41+	11.1	10.1	13.7	14.7	17.6	+6.5
Health and social services						
1-34	26.2	33.1	38.3	38.6	39.4	+13.2
35-40	70.3	63.6	58.3	57.3	56.2	-14.1
41+	3.5	3.2	3.4	4.0	4.5	+0.9
Accommodation, food, and beverage services						
1-34	39.8	42.6	48.2	41.9	46.1	+6.2
35-40	49.6	48.8	43.2	48.1	44.7	-4.9
41+	10.6	8.6	8.6	10.0	9.2	-1.3
Other services						
1-34	46.8	44.1	41.6	37.5	38.2	-8.6
35-40	45.8	48.1	47.5	50.9	50.3	+4.5
41+	7.5	7.8	10.9	11.6	11.5	+4.1

(continued)

Table A2 (continued)

Industry/weekly hours	1976	1980	1985	1989	1995	Percentage point change 1976–95
Government services						
1–34	14.7	15.2	16.8	15.2	15.0	+0.3
35–40	83.5	82.7	80.6	81.0	80.7	–2.8
41+	1.8	2.1	2.7	3.8	4.3	+2.5

^a For employees 25+ years of age.

Working Time in Comparative Perspective

Volume I

Patterns, Trends, and the Policy Implications for Earnings Inequality and Unemployment

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