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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent years, interest in how much and how hard Americans work has escalated. Studies explore work pressures and work hours and how these factors affect employees' behavior, their views about their jobs, their health, and their personal and family lives. Yet almost no one has come right out and asked employees to what extent they feel overworked or systematically explored how these feelings are linked to work experiences, job performance, and personal and family life. This critical gap in our knowledge was the impetus for our study.

Although our definition of feeling overworked draws on the research literature and the counsel of experts, it has been most influenced by talking with and listening to employees. Ultimately, we selected three related questions to define the degree to which employees feel overworked: How often do you feel overworked? How often do you feel overwhelmed by how much work has to be done? How often do you feel there is not enough time to step back and process or reflect on your work?

In this study, we address the following general issues:

- How prevalent is feeling overworked?
- What aspects of jobs contribute to feeling overworked?
- Who is most likely to feel overworked?
- How is feeling overworked related to job performance? Personal and family relations? Employee stress and health?

The findings of the study are relevant to employers, employees, policy makers, and work-life researchers. We make a special effort to draw out the implications for employers in the final section of the report.

THE STUDY

Data for the study were obtained from telephone interviews with a representative national sample of 1,003 adults (18 or older) who work for pay and are employed by someone other than themselves in their main (or only) job for any number of hours per week. Researchers at Families and Work Institute developed the interview questionnaire based on a literature review, consultation with experts in the field and business leaders, and focus groups with employees. Harris Interactive drew the national sample and conducted the interviews by telephone. All differences and associations reported here are statistically significant.
HOW PERVERSIVE IS FEELING OVERWORKED?

Feeling overworked is a psychological state that has the potential to affect attitudes, behavior, social relationships, and health both on and off the job. Information from our focus groups suggested that feeling overworked is often an acute condition, which may largely subside once work demands decrease, rather than a chronic condition—though for some employees it is clearly an ever-present feeling. Three closely related questions were used to measure how often employees felt overworked (very often, often, sometimes, rarely, or never) in the past three months. For the sample as a whole we found that:

- 28% of employees "felt overworked" often or very often in the past three months;
- 28% felt "overwhelmed by how much work they had to do" often or very often in the past three months; and
- 29% felt that they "didn't have the time to step back and process or reflect on the work they're doing" often or very often during the past three months.

Moreover, we found that nearly half (46%) of U.S. employees responded often or very often to at least one of these questions, while only 24% said they rarely or never experienced any of these three feelings.

If we broaden our perspective to include employees who felt overworked at least sometimes during the preceding three months, the proportions who feel overworked increase substantially:

- 54% felt overworked at least sometimes in the past three months;
- 55% felt overwhelmed by how much work they had to do at least sometimes in the past three months; and
- 59% felt they did not have time to step back and process or reflect on the work they were doing at least sometimes in the past three months.

We also created an overall index of feeling overworked by averaging answers to the three questions above. On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1=never and 5=very often), U.S. employees have an average score of 2.7, suggesting that the average employee sometimes feels overworked. Employees with average scores above sometimes, might be viewed as feeling chronically overworked. Employees in this group are classified as experiencing high levels of feeling overworked in subsequent analyses.

WHAT ASPECTS OF JOBS CONTRIBUTE TO FEELING OVERWORKED?

Feeling overworked is associated with many different aspects of employees’ jobs and workplaces. We briefly summarize the main findings in the following section.
Amount of work, preferences, control, and reasons for working more

- Employees who work more paid and unpaid *hours* per week at their main/only jobs feel more overworked: On average, employees work 41.2 hours per week; 45% of employees working 50 or more hours per week experience high levels of feeling overworked versus only 6% of those working fewer than 20 hours per week.

- Employees who work more hours than they would *prefer*—however many hours they actually work—also feel more overworked: On average, employees would prefer to work 34.5 hours per week; 44% of those who work more hours than they would like to work experience high levels of feeling overworked versus 26% of those who do not want to work fewer hours.

- Employees who work more *days* per week at their main/only jobs feel more overworked: 44% of employees working 6 or 7 days per week experience high levels of feeling overworked versus 33% of those working 5 days per week, and 27% of those working 1–4 days per week.

- Employees who work more days than they would *prefer*—however many days they actually work—also feel more overworked: 43% of those who work more days per week than they would like to work experience high levels of feeling overworked versus 24% of those who do not want to work fewer days.

- Employees who work longer hours or more days than they prefer for *external reasons* (i.e., factors other than personal motivation) feel more overworked. For example, 53% of employees who agree somewhat or *strongly* that they work more than desired because their "employer expects them to work long hours" have high levels of feeling overworked, while only 28% of those who somewhat or *strongly disagree* that they work more because of employer expectations experience high levels of feeling overworked. However, *personal or financial reasons* for working more—such as "to advance at my job" or "to buy things I need"—are not associated with feeling overworked.

- Employees who believe they cannot change their work schedule so that they can work the hours or days they prefer feel more overworked: 45% of those who say they cannot change their work schedules to be able to work their preferred hours experience high levels of feeling overworked versus 33% of those who can change their work schedules.

Pressures and distractions on the job

- Nine out of ten (90%) of employees agree somewhat or *strongly* that they experience one or more of these pressures at work:
  - My job requires that I work very fast;
  - My job requires that I work very hard; or
  - I never have enough time to get everything done on my job.

Those who experience greater pressure on the job feel much more overworked. For example: 56% of employees who agree somewhat or *strongly* that they "never seem to have enough time to get everything done" experience high levels of feeling overworked
versus only 13% of those who somewhat or strongly disagree that they have never have enough time to get everything done.

- Three out of five (60%) of employees say they often or very often experience one or more of these problems when trying to focus on their jobs:
  - Have difficulty focusing on the work they have to do;
  - Experience work interruptions; or
  - Have to work on too many tasks at the same time.

Employees who have more difficulty focusing at work feel much more overworked. For example, 45% of employees feel that they have to multi-task too much (often or very often). And 56% of those who often or very often "work on too many tasks at the same time" experience high levels of feeling overworked versus only 16% who report that they sometimes, rarely or never work on too many tasks.

**Technology and accessibility**

- Four in ten employees (41%) often or very often use technology (cellular/mobile phones, beepers, pagers, computers, email, fax) for their jobs during typical nonwork hours or days, and those who use technology more frequently feel more overworked: 38% of employees who say they often or very often use technology for their jobs during nonwork time experience high levels of feeling overworked versus 29% of employees who rarely or never use technology for their jobs during nonwork time.

- About one-fifth (22%) of employees say they often or very often have to be accessible to their employers during typical nonwork hours and nonwork days, while 30% say they never have to be accessible. Employees who are more accessible (by whatever means) to their employers during nonwork hours and days feel more overworked: 41% of those who say they have to be accessible to their employers often or very often during nonwork time report high levels of feeling overworked versus 31% of those who rarely or never have to be accessible.

- Employees who feel they are more accessible than necessary to their employers (23% of those who have to be accessible at least occasionally) feel much more overworked: 51% of those who feel they are unnecessarily accessible experience high levels of feeling overworked versus 32% of those who do not feel unnecessarily accessible.

**Time off**

- One-quarter of employees (25%) do not take all of the vacation to which they are entitled because of the demands of their jobs, and those who do not take all their vacation feel more overworked: 55% of employees who do not take all their vacation experience high levels of feeling overworked versus 27% who do use all of their vacation entitlement.
Internal labor market problems

- More than one in four employees (27%) reported that their organizations had eliminated jobs during the preceding year, and 37% said that their organizations had difficulty hiring. Those who work for companies that have downsized or have had difficulty hiring new employees feel more overworked. For example, 42% of those whose employers had difficulty hiring in the past year experienced high levels of feeling overworked versus 31% of those whose employers did not have difficulty hiring.

Job quality

- Employees who have poorer quality jobs—less job autonomy, more wasted time, fewer learning opportunities, less job security—feel more overworked. For example, 48% of employees who somewhat or strongly agree that they "spend a lot of time at work doing things that they think are a waste of time" experience high levels of feeling overworked versus 26% who somewhat or strongly disagree with this statement.

Workplace support

- Employees who have less supportive workplaces—inadequate materials and equipment to do a good job, inadequate support from people at work to do a good job, inadequate flexibility to manage work and family responsibilities, inadequate support from supervisors, and lack of respect—feel more overworked. For example, 51% of employees who somewhat or strongly disagree that they "have the flexibility in their work time to manage their personal and family responsibilities" report high levels of feeling overworked versus 29% of those who somewhat or strongly agree with the statement. In addition, 51% of employees who somewhat or strongly disagree that their "supervisor really cares about the effect that work demands have on their personal and family life" report high levels of feeling overworked versus 28% of those who somewhat or strongly agree with the statement.

Do different demographic groups feel more or less overworked?

To address this question we compared men with women, older with younger employees, managers and professionals with employees in other occupations, and employees who have more family responsibilities with those who have fewer responsibilities.

Gender

Women feel more overworked than men. At first, this finding seems counterintuitive since men tend to work longer hours, are more accessible to their employers during non-
work time, are less likely to use all their vacation, and are more likely to have jobs with other characteristics that appear to contribute to feeling overworked than do women. In two important respects, however, women do report having more demanding jobs: On average, they report being interrupted more frequently while working and having too many tasks to do at the same time. When we compared men and women who experience these problems with the same frequency, the gender difference in feeling overworked disappeared.

This finding raises important questions: Do women experience more frequent interruptions and too much multi-tasking because of the specific types of jobs they have? Do the socialization experiences of women make them more vulnerable to interruptions and more likely to take on additional tasks?

Age

Baby Boomers (36–54) feel more overworked than Gen Xers/Millennials (18–35) and Mature Workers (55 and older). The fact that Baby Boomers work significantly longer hours and are more likely to prefer to work fewer hours than either younger or older employees helps to explain why they feel more overworked.

Occupational status

Although the study does not provide detailed information about occupations, it does distinguish between managerial or professional employees and employees in other occupations. Not surprisingly, managers and professionals feel more overworked than others. They work significantly longer hours than other employees and are more likely to prefer shorter hours.

Family responsibilities

Perhaps surprisingly, having children under 18, having children under 6, having elder care responsibilities, and having child care and elder care responsibilities at the same time are not—in themselves—associated with feeling more overworked. That is, the mere presence of more family responsibilities is not associated with feeling more overworked. What we do not know from this study is whether the actual amount of time employees spend on and their time preferences for family work—child care, elder care, and housework—are related to feeling overworked. However, we strongly suspect that they are. Moreover, we also suspect that differences between men and women with respect to primary responsibilities for family work might also help to explain why women feel more overworked than men.
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN EMPLOYEES FEEL OVERWORKED?

This is the question of ultimate importance in this study. Does the fact that as many as three in ten employees feel chronically overworked matter? Does it create problems for employers or employees?

Work-related outcomes

The more overworked employees feel:

• The more likely they are to report making mistakes at work: 17% of employees reporting high levels of feeling overworked say they make mistakes at work often or very often versus only 1% of those who experience low levels of feeling overworked.

• The more likely they are to feel angry toward their employers for expecting them to do so much: 43% of employees experiencing high levels of feeling overworked say they feel angry toward their employers often or very often versus only 3% who experience low levels.

• The more likely they are to resent coworkers who do not work as hard as they do.

• The more likely they are to look for a new job with another employer: Almost half (49%) of employees experiencing high levels of feeling overworked say it is somewhat or very likely that they will seek employment elsewhere in the coming year versus only 30% who report low levels of feeling overworked.

Personal outcomes

The more overworked employees feel:

• The more work-life conflict they experience—conflict that may have negative effects on both family and work.

• The less successful they feel in relationships with their spouse or partner, children and friends.

• The more likely they are to be neglecting themselves: Only 41% of employees who experience high levels of feeling overworked say they are very or extremely successful in taking good care of themselves versus 66% of those reporting low levels of feeling overworked.

• The more likely they are to lose sleep because of their work.

• The less likely they are to report that their health is very good or excellent: 50% of employees experiencing high levels of feeling overworked describe their health as very good or excellent versus 64% of those reporting low levels of feeling overworked.

• The higher their levels of stress and the poorer their abilities to cope with everyday life events.
IMPLICATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS

These findings—both work-related and personal—have implications in four major areas of immediate concern to employers: safety in the workplace, job performance, employee retention, and health care costs.

Safety in the workplace

Making mistakes at work may mainly affect job performance among white-collar employees, but among blue-collar employees mistakes can result in serious injuries, workers' compensation claims, and other liabilities. Loss of sleep due to work that results in significant sleep deprivation also increases the likelihood of mistakes and serious accidents, as shown by other research.¹

Although feeling angry toward one's employer for being expected to work so hard and feeling resentful toward one's coworkers who appear to be working less may mainly affect employees' morale and levels of stress (which is bad enough), there is also the possibility that employees will "act out" their anger and resentment in the workplace.

Job performance

All the consequences of feeling overworked listed above can affect job performance—the most obvious consequences being more frequent mistakes, greater work-life conflict, and poorer health. Employers should not assume that by getting the most work they can out of their employees, they will necessarily maximize productivity. Every employee appears to have a breaking point, a point at which work becomes too much.

Retention

Despite the recent flurry of layoffs, retaining valued employees remains a top priority of employers. When employees feel overworked, they are more likely to consider other job options with other employers. Employees who feel chronically overworked are, of course, the most likely to imagine a very different future—a less pressured job with another employer, scaling back the time they devote to paid work, or a more meaningful career.

Health care costs

Employees who feel more overworked tend to feel less successful in their relationships with spouses or partners, children, and friends; to neglect themselves; to lose sleep because of work; to feel less healthy; and to feel more stressed and less able to cope with everyday life. These symptoms are strongly associated with greater utilization of the health care system and with impaired performance on the job (or departure from the labor force entirely). Mental health problems and associated physical health problems appear to be increasing dramatically. According to the World Health
Organization, mental health problems are expected to become the second most common cause of disability and death by 2020. This implies higher health care costs for employers who subsidize health care insurance for their employees, as well as higher costs to families and society.

**What Might Be Done to Reduce the Frequency with Which Employees Feel Overworked?**

If one accepts the proposition that the psychological state of feeling overworked can have serious negative consequences for both employees and employers, it is obviously worth considering what might be done to prevent or reduce these feelings among workers.

Many of the job and workplace characteristics we examined that are associated with feeling more overworked are within the power of employers to change. More difficult, however, is finding a workable balance between organizational needs and employee needs, as well as rethinking long-held assumptions about how work gets done. Employers will likely draw different conclusions from our findings according to differences among their organizations and their personal views. In our work at the Families and Work Institute, we have observed that companies are already responding in different ways.

Some employers believe that pushing employees to do more and do it faster is the only way to remain competitive in the global economy. Of these, some will dismiss our findings and simply continue to push their employees to work harder and longer. Others may read the findings of this study and conclude that they can get the same or greater effort out of employees, for example, by providing more work schedule flexibility; after all, employees with greater flexibility to manage their personal and family lives do tend to feel less overworked. But if employers then expect even higher productivity, will greater flexibility really offset the negative effects of longer hours and more pressured jobs over the long run?

Still others may view our findings as an invitation to experiment with redesigning work to reduce wasted or low-value time at work, interruptions during the work day, or unnecessary demands. We have witnessed how some employers have addressed these issues so that employees can work more efficiently and get more done on the job. Yet, do such gains in efficiency mean that employees, if they so wish, will be able to spend less time on their jobs and more time on their personal and family lives? Potentially, but not necessarily.

Our findings strongly suggest that every employee reaches a point when increasing work demands simply become too much—a point at which personal and family relations, personal health, and the quality of work itself are seriously threatened. Today’s 24/7 economy appears to be pushing many employees to and beyond that point.
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

A poster on a bus asks, "Feeling stressed?" "Have a stress headache?" asks a television ad. ABC television recently featured an hour-long special on women and stress, reporting that stress can lead to a greater risk of heart disease, depression, sleep deprivation, weight gain, and loss of sexual feelings in women. The Wall Street Journal noted that the deluge of information from new technology has become so intense that employees feel swamped and don't have time to step back and process what is coming at them fast and furiously.

Stress is not only a topic in the media; increasingly, it surfaces in the academic and employer conferences and forums we attend, the journals we read, in offices and on factory floors, and around dining room tables. People describe themselves as overwhelmed, feeling that they are on a treadmill. The term "overwork" has entered common usage, along with other new phrases entering everyday conversation, such as "24/7" and "time famine."

Yet, some people wear their feelings of being overworked almost like a red badge of courage. It is not uncommon for people to "one-up" each other about how busy they are. A typical conversation on the elevator in the building where we work goes like this:

A: How was your weekend?
B: I didn't really have one. I was here at the office all Sunday.
A: Well, I had to work hard at home, too. I didn't even get to go to my son's game.

What is the evidence behind these claims? There is little question from the Families and Work Institute's 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce that people appear to be working longer and harder than they did 20 years earlier. Men's total weekly time at all jobs increased from 47.1 hours per week in 1977 to 49.9 hours in 1997—an increase of 2.8 hours per week. Women's time climbed from 39 to 44 hours—an increase of 5 hours per week. Furthermore, employees in 1997 were more likely to bring work home from the job than employees had done 20 years earlier. Job pressure rose, too. The biggest change concerned time. In 1997, 60 percent of employees agreed with the statement, "I never seem to have enough time to get everything done on my job"—a steep increase from 40 percent in 1977.

Jerry Jacobs from the University of Pennsylvania and Kathleen Gerson from New York University have found that those at the top and bottom of the labor market have experienced the greatest increases in working hours, while those in the middle have seen little change. The bigger issue, they conclude, is due to the large increase of dual-earner families. Families are experiencing a “family time deficit.”

The result: More than one in four employees (26%) reported being burned out or stressed by their work often or very often, according to The 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce.
In commenting on this and similar findings, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) writes that:

The nature of work is changing at whirlwind speed. Perhaps now more than ever before, job stress poses a threat to the health of workers and, in turn, to the health of organizations.\(^9\)

Workplace studies, like those conducted by Daniel J. Conti from Bank One and DePaul University, and his colleague, Wayne N. Burton from First Chicago Corporation and Northwestern University Medical School, have found a higher than expected prevalence of depression.\(^10\) Furthermore, they found that depressive disorders were associated with the highest medical plan costs of all behavioral health diagnoses. The World Health Organization reports that mental health problems burden both rich and poor nations alike and predicts their impact will increase in the twenty-first century. By 2020 clinical depression is expected to outrank cancer and follow only heart disease to become the number two cause of death and disability worldwide.\(^11\) Children reveal that stress has an impact on family life as well. According to a nationally representative group of children aged 8 through 18, if they were granted one wish to change the way their mother’s or father’s work affects their life, the largest proportion would wish that their mothers and fathers would be less stressed, less tired.\(^12\)

Many of these studies were conducted and the predictions made during the 1990s, when the economy was expanding. During the late 1990s, unemployment was down, company downsizing had declined, and job shortages were so prevalent that employers talked about a "war for talent."\(^13\) Today, reports indicate the economy is shakier. In March 2001, the nation’s employers cut 86,000 jobs—the largest loss for any month in more than nine years—and the unemployment rate rose to 4.3 percent from 3.9 percent in October 2000.\(^14\)

Current economic turbulence inspires several questions about how employees are faring. Is the widespread talk about stress and feeling overworked today a coincidence, or is something new happening that needs to be addressed? Specifically, we wondered:

- How prevalent is feeling overworked?
- What aspects of the job contribute to feeling overworked?
  - **Amount of work**, that is, how much employees work, how much they would prefer to work, and reasons why employees work more than they prefer
  - **High-pressured jobs**, those which require employees to work hard and/or fast, or which do not allow enough time to get all the work done
  - **Difficulty focusing**, along with working on too many simultaneous tasks and being interrupted
  - **Being accessible to employers during nonwork time**, including using technology for jobs during nonwork time
  - **Organizational instability**, such as downsizing, mergers, acquisitions, difficulty in hiring
  - **Poor-quality jobs**, which lack autonomy, meaning, or learning opportunities
• **Work environments that are not supportive**, such as not having the materials or equipment, support from people, respect from others, a supportive supervisor, or flexibility to manage family and personal responsibilities.

• Who is likely to feel overworked?

• What is the impact of feeling overworked on job performance? On personal and family relations? On employees' health and stress?

**STUDY BACKGROUND**

We used several approaches to address these questions. First, we looked at the literature on job-related stress, working time, and health. We also wanted to look beneath the surface, to delve into what people really mean when they talk about feeling overworked. Therefore, we talked to numerous leaders in the work-life field, including members of the Program Committee of The Conference Board’s Work-Life Leadership Council, individuals who listen to employees every day, in order to learn what they were hearing. Following these inquiries, we went directly to employees by conducting several focus groups with employees from this study's sponsor, PricewaterhouseCoopers. To pursue the antecedents and consequences of job-related stress and feeling overworked, we also organized a two-and-a-half-day seminar with experts on this subject for the Work-Life Leadership Council of The Conference Board.

Drawing on what we learned, we designed a 15-minute telephone interview and surveyed a nationally representative sample of 1,003 employees, 18 or older. Harris Interactive administered the computer-assisted telephone interviews to adults who work for pay, for any number of hours per week, and are employed by someone else in their job, or in their main job (if they have more than one paid job). These interviews were conducted in March 2001.15

In the following sections of this report, we present findings from the nationwide interviews by answering the questions outlined above. All differences and associations reported here are statistically significant unless otherwise noted.16 To further illustrate these findings, when appropriate, we also present what we heard from the focus groups in employees' own words.

**VALIDITY AND UTILITY OF INDIVIDUAL PERCEPTIONS**

Questions are frequently raised about the validity of individuals' perceptions of their jobs, the workplace, and even their own health. Since this study and other survey research rely entirely upon individual perceptions, or self-reported information, it is important to address the issue, even if briefly.

It is well established that different individuals are "calibrated" somewhat differently; that is, their individual perceptions of the same external situations and events vary. One might argue that we are all biased in our perceptions. However, research demonstrates that the perceptions that different people have of the same situations and events are
generally related—as indicated by typically moderate or sometimes even high correlations. This is true whether one compares perceptions among coworkers\(^\text{17}\) or the perceptions of individual employees with those of managers.\(^\text{18}\) Significantly, when information for a group of individuals is analyzed, both the individuals' self-perceptions of their situation and the perceptions that others have of their situation have been found to be similarly predictive of, for example, mental health (e.g., anxiety or depression) and physical health (e.g., coronary heart disease) for given individuals.\(^\text{19}\) Thus, although every individual's perception is biased to some extent, such biases do not generally invalidate findings about group differences and relationships among the factors measured in survey research, especially when sample sizes are large and representative. A consistent pattern of findings across many measures that ask about both more objective (e.g., number of hours worked) and less objective (e.g., level of stress) information lends additional support to the conclusions reached.

In the end, individual perceptions are the only way to assess how individuals "feel." Psychological phenomena, such as "feeling" overworked, cannot be observed by someone from the outside. Rather, researchers must rely on individuals to describe what goes on within themselves, use various and multiple questions to measure the same attitude or feeling, and study responses across large groups of individuals in order to understand the psychological construct and its relationship to external conditions and outcomes.
DO EMPLOYEES FEEL OVERWORKED?

One of the most challenging tasks we faced in conducting this study was to define what it means to feel overworked. While many researchers have skirted around this issue—investigating increased work hours, increased job pressure, and job-related stress—few have directly studied the psychological state of “feeling overworked.” Since there are no established measures, we had to develop our own.

Guided by findings from the focus groups conducted for this study, we developed a series of questions that appeared to be related to feeling overworked. Ultimately, we selected three of these questions to serve as primary indicators of feeling overworked:20

"In the last three months, how often have you ... "

- Felt overworked?
- Felt overwhelmed by how much work you had to do?
- Felt that you haven't had the time to step back and process or reflect on the work you're doing?

Employees could answer very often, often, sometimes, rarely, or never.

The focus groups also revealed that "feeling overworked" is often an acute condition that may subside when work demands decrease—though there may be residual effects. For some employees, however, feeling overworked is a chronic, ever-present feeling.

The findings presented in Table 1 for the sample as a whole reveal that:

- 28 percent of employees felt overworked often or very often in the past three months;
- 28 percent felt overwhelmed by how much work they had to do often or very often in the past three months; and
- 29 percent felt that they often or very often didn’t have the time to step back and process or reflect on the work they were doing during the past three months.

Moreover, we found that nearly half (46%) of U.S. employees felt overworked often or very often according to at least one of these measures in the past three months, while only 24 percent said they rarely or never experienced all of these three feelings in the past three months.

If we broaden our perspective to include employees who felt overworked at least sometimes during the preceding three months, the proportions of people feeling overworked increase substantially:

- 55 percent felt overworked at least sometimes in the past three months;
- 60 percent felt overwhelmed by how much work they had to do at least sometimes in the past three months; and
- 59 percent felt they did not have time to step back and process or reflect on the work they were doing at least sometimes in the past three months.
We also created an overall index of feeling overworked by averaging the individual answers to the three questions above. On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1=never and 5=very often), U.S. employees have an average score of 2.7, which suggests that the average employee sometimes feels overworked. Employees with average scores above sometimes—one-third of employees—might be viewed as feeling chronically overworked, as exemplified in Table 1:

### Table 1. Feeling overworked

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>U.S. Employees</th>
<th>(n=1003)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*In the last three months, how often have you...*

**Felt overworked?**
- Very often: 12%
- Often: 16%
- Sometimes: 27%
- Rarely: 23%
- Never: 23%

**Felt overwhelmed by how much work you had to do?**
- Very often: 13%
- Often: 15%
- Sometimes: 27%
- Rarely: 21%
- Never: 24%

**Felt that you don’t have the time to step back and process or reflect on the work you’re doing?**
- Very often: 11%
- Often: 18%
- Sometimes: 31%
- Rarely: 22%
- Never: 19%

Average score for feeling overworked: 2.7
WHAT ASPECTS OF JOBS CONTRIBUTE TO FEELING OVERWORKED?

Our previous research has revealed that the characteristics of jobs and the supportiveness of the workplace environment are critical in how well employees fare. To understand what job and workplace characteristics might contribute to employees feeling overworked, we investigated each of the following:

- **Amount of work**, that is, how much employees work, how much they would prefer to work, and reasons why employees work more than they prefer
- **High-pressured jobs**, those which require employees to work hard and/or fast, or which do not allow enough time to get all the work done
- **Difficulty focusing**, along with working on too many simultaneous tasks and being interrupted
- **Being accessible to employers during nonwork time**, including using technology for jobs during nonwork time
- **Organizational instability**, such as downsizing, mergers, acquisitions, difficulty in hiring
- **Poor-quality jobs**, which lack autonomy, meaning, or learning opportunities
- **Work environments that are not supportive**, such as not having the materials or equipment, support from people, respect from others, a supportive supervisor, or flexibility to manage family and personal responsibilities.

For purposes of analysis, we grouped employees into three categories: those who experience low levels of feeling overworked, those who experience mid levels, and those who experience high levels. Based on the total score of the variables we created from the three questions on feeling overworked (where 1=never and 5=very often), employees with average scores above sometimes might be viewed as chronically overworked; employees in these groups are classified as experiencing high levels of feeling overworked. Employees whose average scores were between rarely and never are classified as experiencing low levels of feeling overworked. All others with averages between the high and low ranges were classified as experiencing mid levels of feeling overworked. Employees in the high-level category might be viewed as feeling chronically overworked, since they feel overworked more than sometimes.

DOES AMOUNT OF WORK CONTRIBUTE TO EMPLOYEES' FEELING OVERWORKED?

Perhaps the most obvious potential contributor to feeling overworked is the amount of time employees work. Although most of the debate about "overwork" simply focuses on long working hours—with the concomitant assumption that shortening working hours
would solve the problem—we see the issue as more complex. Employees' preferences can also make a difference. Thus, we consider not only the amount of time employees work, but also the amount of time they would prefer to work. Moreover, when employees are working more than they prefer, we consider the reasons for working more and whether or not employees could change their work schedule or situation so that they could work the amount they prefer. Feelings about the amount of time worked are complex. According to employees:

Would I prefer to work [the] 60 to 70 hours [I work now]? No, I would prefer to work between 55 to 60. They really push it.

I have heard other people say, “I really want to get promoted to the next level, so this year, I am going to work my tush off to get it done.” I don't think you should work any harder in order to get promoted. Hopefully, if you're doing a good job, along the way, you'll get promoted.

You know, I enjoy what I do, and I don't know how to do what I do in fewer hours a week.

It’s a fine line, for me, as to being overworked and having a full plate. Because part of why I like my job is that I am very, very busy.

First, we asked employees how many hours, both paid and unpaid, they work each week at their main/only jobs and how many days per week they do any work related to their main/only jobs. In addition, we asked how many hours per week and how many days per week they would work "ideally" if they could do what they wanted to do.

To what extent do employees work longer hours than they prefer?

We found that 44 percent of U.S. employees are working more paid and unpaid hours per week at their main/only job than they would prefer to work. On average, they work 41.2 hours per week at their main/only jobs:

- 3 percent of employees work fewer than 20 hours per week;
- 14 percent work 20–34 hours per week;
- 58 percent work 35–49 hours per week; and
- 24 percent work 50 or more hours per week.

Ideally, if they could do what they wanted to, the average amount they would like to work is 34.5 hours per week:

- 7 percent of employees would prefer not to work any hours per week;
- 5 percent would prefer to work 1–19 hours per week;
- 23 percent would prefer to work 20–34 hours per week;
- 52 percent would prefer to work 35–49 hours per week; and
- 14 percent would prefer to work over 50 hours per week.
Of those employees who would prefer to work fewer hours per week, we found that on average they would prefer to work 18.5 hours less than they are currently working. In other words, 42 percent of employees who would like to work fewer hours say they would like to work 10 or fewer hours less; while almost a third (32%) would prefer to work 11 to 20 hours less; and over a fourth (26%) would prefer to work over 20 hours less.

To what extent do employees work more days than they prefer?

Over half of U.S. employees (52%) report they work more days per week at their main/only job than would prefer. On average, U.S. employees work five (5.0) days per week at their main/only jobs:
  - 16 percent of employees work 1–4 days per week;
  - 62 percent work 5 days per week; and
  - 22 percent work 6–7 days per week.

Ideally, if they could do what they wanted to employees would prefer to work 4.1 days per week on average:
  - 5 percent of employees would prefer not to work any days;
  - 48 percent would prefer to work 1–4 days per week;
  - 40 percent would prefer to work 5 days per week; and
  - 7 percent would prefer to work 6–7 days per week.

Of those employees who would prefer to work fewer days per week, we found that on average they would prefer to work 1.9 days less than they are currently working. Over half (54%) of employees who would like to work fewer days say they would like to work 1 less day per week; while 28 percent would prefer to work 2 less days per week; and 18 percent would prefer their number of working days to be reduced by 3 or more days per week.

Overall, nearly five of every eight U.S. employees (62%) are either working more days or more hours each week at their main/only job than they would prefer.

Do employees who work longer hours feel more overworked?

Not surprisingly, employees who work more hours per week feel more overworked. In addition, we found that those who work more hours than they would prefer also tend to feel more overworked, as shown in Table 2.
Table 2. Levels of feeling overworked by work hours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Of those who work...</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Part-time (n=172)</th>
<th>Full-time (n=830)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% who have <em>high</em> levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have <em>mid</em> levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have <em>low</em> levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of those who work...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Of those who work...</th>
<th>1–19 hrs/wk (n=32)</th>
<th>20–34 hrs/wk (n=142)</th>
<th>35–49 hrs/wk (n=581)</th>
<th>50+ hrs/wk (n=242)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% who have <em>high</em> levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have <em>mid</em> levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have <em>low</em> levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of those who work...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Of those who work...</th>
<th>Same/fewer hours than they prefer (n=561)</th>
<th>More hours than they prefer (n=441)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% who have <em>high</em> levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have <em>mid</em> levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have <em>low</em> levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.
The Mantel-Haenszel (linear by linear) chi-square test was used to test associations.

**p<.01

Do employees who work more days feel more overworked?

Employees who work more days per week and more days than they would prefer tend to feel more overworked, as illustrated in Table 3.
Table 3. Levels of feeling overworked by work days

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Of those who work…</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>1–4 days/week (n=159)</th>
<th>5 days/week (n=603)</th>
<th>6–7 days/week (n=219)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have high levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have mid levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have low levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Of those who work…</th>
<th>Same/fewer days than they prefer (n=479)</th>
<th>More days than they prefer (n=524)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>** p&lt;.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have high levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have mid levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have low levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.
The Mantel-Haenszel (linear by linear) chi-square test was used to test associations.

Why do employees work more than they prefer?
Do certain reasons for working more contribute to feeling overworked?

For employees who report that they are working more hours or more days than they would prefer, we asked, "How much do you agree or disagree with the following as a reason why you work more than you would like to?" Employees could answer strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. We grouped the reasons into three categories: external reasons, internal reasons, and financial reasons:

**External reasons:**

- To do a better job in meeting my organization’s customers’ or clients’ needs
- It takes that long to do all the work I need to get done.
- My employer expects me to work long hours in my position.
- To improve the company’s bottom line.
- Everybody else at my organization works that much.
**Internal reasons:**

- To meet my own standards for doing good work.
- To advance at my job.

**Financial reasons:**

- To be able to buy the things I need.
- To be able to buy special things.

Among the external reasons, we found that many employees are working more to contribute to their company’s success. Indeed, 87 percent of those who work more hours or more days per week than they prefer to somewhat or strongly agree they are doing so to meet the needs of their organization’s clients and customers. Moreover, over three-quarters (78%) are working more than they prefer to improve their company’s bottom line. (See Table 4.)

We also found that employees are working more for external reasons that have to do with work demands. We found that 74 percent say that they are working more because it takes that long to do all the work they need to get done.

Other external motivations for working more originate from other people within the organization. Nearly two-thirds (61%) agree they are working more because everyone in their organization works that much; and over half (53%) agree that their employer expects them to work long hours in their positions.

Although many employees are motivated to work more for external reasons, we found many are also working more than they prefer for internal or personal reasons. A large majority (88%) agree somewhat or strongly, that they work more to meet their own standards for doing good work, and 59 percent agree they are working more to advance at their jobs.

Financial reasons also play an important part in motivation for working more: 83 percent of employees agree that they are working more to buy the things they need and 76 percent agree that they are working more to buy "special things." These findings are detailed in Table 4.
Table 4. Reasons for working more

Percentage who somewhat or strongly agree that they work more than they prefer…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To do a better job in meeting my organization’s customers’ or clients’ needs</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To improve the company’s bottom line</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It takes that long to do all the work I need to get done</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everybody else at my organization works that much</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My employer expects me to work long hours in my position</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Internal reasons:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To meet my own standards for doing good work</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To advance at my job</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Financial reasons:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To be able to buy the things I need</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be able to buy special things</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is important to note that when employees are motivated to work longer and harder than they would prefer for certain external reasons, they feel more overworked. That is, employees who agree with the following statements feel more overworked:

- It takes that long to do all the work I need to get done; and
- My employer expects me to work long hours in my position.

Employers’ expectations are most important. Of those who are working more than they would prefer in order to their meet employer expectations, 53 percent experience high levels of feeling overworked versus 28 percent of those who disagree that they work more to meet employer expectations. (See Table 5.) Working for their own personal or financial reasons is not associated with the level to which employees feel overworked.
Table 5. Levels of feeling overworked by reasons for working more

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Of those who say…</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Somewhat/strongly disagree (n=290)</th>
<th>Somewhat/strongly agree (n=326)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>…they work more because &quot;my employer expects me to work long hours in my position&quot;:</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have high levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td></td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have mid levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td></td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have low levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td></td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of those who say…</td>
<td></td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…they work more because &quot;it takes that long to do all the work I need to get done&quot;:</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Only those who reported working more hours and/or days than they would prefer to work, were asked for reasons why they were working more. Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding. The Mantel-Haenszel (linear by linear) chi-square test was used to test associations. **p<.01

We conducted additional analyses to further investigate the extent to which differences in how overworked employees feel can be explained by their reasons for working more. Figure 1 shows that external reasons are highly predictive. They explain 11 percent of the variation in individual ratings of how overworked employees feel. In contrast, less than 1 percent is explained by either internal reasons or financial reasons.
These findings suggest that employees are more likely to feel overworked when they believe or feel they are pushed into working more than they want to by outside forces, than when they are working more because of personal or financial reasons.

**Do employees who feel that they cannot change the amount of hours or days they work feel more overworked?**

In exploring why employees feel overworked, we wondered to what extent employees feel they have choices about how much they work. Thus, for those employees who report that they work more hours or days than they prefer, we asked, "Can you change your work situation so that you can work the amount of hours or days that you would like to or not?" Employees could answer yes or no.

A very high proportion—nearly three-fourths (74%) of those who would prefer to work less—say they cannot change their work situation to work the amount of hours or days they would like to. Of course, employees may have more leeway than they think they do. Nonetheless, simply the belief that one has no choice, whether or not this belief is grounded in reality, affects employees.

Employees who think that they cannot change their work situation feel more overworked. Among employees who say they would prefer to work either fewer hours or fewer days, 45 percent of those who say that they cannot make changes in their working hours or days report high levels of feeling overworked, while 33 percent of those who could change their work schedules report high levels of feeling overworked.
DO JOB PRESSURES CONTRIBUTE TO FEELING OVERWORKED?

A potential contributor to feeling overworked is feeling pressured on the job. Investigating job pressure has been a mainstay in the work-life field for many years. Greater pressure at work, in combination with less job control and less supportive work relationships, has consistently been found to predict poorer health and well-being, as well as higher rates of absenteeism. To measure job pressure, we asked how strongly employees agree or disagree with the following three statements:

- My job requires that I work very fast.
- My job requires that I work very hard.
- I never seem to have enough time to get everything done on my job.

Employees could answer strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree. Nine out of ten employees (90%) somewhat or strongly agree with at least one of the above statements. We also found that large proportions of employees agree with individual statements about job pressures:

- 62 percent of U.S. employees somewhat or strongly agree their job requires that they work very fast;
- 83 percent somewhat or strongly agree their job requires they work very hard; and
- 48 percent somewhat or strongly agree they never seem to have enough time to get everything done on their jobs.

The more pressured employees feel their jobs are, the more likely they are to feel overworked, as indicated in Table 6. In other words, higher proportions of employees who agree that their jobs require that they work fast and hard, or that they never seem to have enough time to get their work done, are more likely to report high levels of feeling overworked than those who experience less pressure.
### Table 6. Levels of feeling overworked by job pressures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Of those who say…</th>
<th>Somewhat/strongly disagree (n=379)</th>
<th>Somewhat/strongly agree (n=619)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>…my job requires that I work very fast:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have high levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have mid levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have low levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Of those who say…</th>
<th>Somewhat/strongly disagree (n=175)</th>
<th>Somewhat/strongly agree (n=822)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>…my job requires that I work very hard:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have high levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have mid levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have low levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Of those who say…</th>
<th>Somewhat/strongly disagree (n=514)</th>
<th>Somewhat/strongly agree (n=482)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>…I never seem to have enough time to get everything done on my job:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have high levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have mid levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have low levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.
The Mantel-Haenszel (linear by linear) chi-square test was used to test associations.
**p<.01
DOES DIFFICULTY FOCUSING AT WORK CONTRIBUTE TO FEELING OVERWORKED?

When asked about what makes them feel successful or unsuccessful at work, we have found that employees frequently use the word "focus." One says:

At the end of the day, if I'm feeling great, I've been able to focus on the work I needed to do. And if I'm feeling shot, the phone rang every time I turned to my work, or someone came into my office, or some crisis interrupted me. 28

Another says:

[You] want to get [your work] done on time and you're feeling like you're always playing catch-up. I think that's where a bit of the anxiety comes in, the frustration comes in.

When employees describe feeling overworked, they often talk about not being able to focus on what they consider "real" work during their normal work hours, having to leave it to the edges of the day or to weekends. Others refer to being interrupted frequently, trying to do too many things at the same time, and feeling that they are in a perpetual game of catch-up. Thus, we have looked at difficulty in focusing as a potential contributor to feeling overworked. Employees were asked how often during a typical workweek at their main jobs:

- Is it very difficult to focus on the work you have to do?
- Do you work on too many tasks at the same time?
- Are you interrupted during the work day, making it difficult to get your work done?

They could answer: very often, often, sometimes, rarely, or never. We found that 60 percent of employees in the U.S. report that they often or very often experience at least one type of difficulty in focusing.

- One-fifth (22%) of U.S. employees say they often or very often find it difficult to focus on the work they have to do;
- 45 percent report they often or very often work on too many tasks at the same time; and
- 45 percent report they often or very often are interrupted during the work day, making it difficult to get their work done.

We found that the more difficult it is for employees to focus on their jobs, the more likely they are to feel overworked. (See Table 7.) That is, much higher proportions of employees who often find that it is difficult to focus on their work, that they are working on too many tasks at the same time, or that there are too many interruptions, report high levels of feeling overworked than employees who have less difficulty focusing.
Table 7. Levels of feeling overworked by difficulty focusing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Sometimes/ rarely/never (n=787)</th>
<th>Very often/ often (n=215)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>...my job requires that I work very fast:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have high levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have mid levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td></td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have low levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td></td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...work on too many tasks at the same time:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have high levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have mid levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td></td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have low levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td></td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...interrupted during the work day, making it difficult to get their work done:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have high levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have mid levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td></td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have low levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td></td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.
The Mantel-Haenszel (linear by linear) chi-square test was used to test associations.
**p<.01
DOES BEING ACCESSIBLE TO EMPLOYERS DURING NONWORK TIME CONTRIBUTE TO FEELING OVERWORKED?

Do employees who use more technology for their jobs during nonwork hours or nonwork days feel more overworked?

The debate about how technology affects employees has two sides. Some say that technology allows employees to work more flexibly. They can use technology to manage personal and family commitments. They can come home from the workplace, spend time with their families or friends, and go back to work at their own convenience. Others say that technology makes employees prisoners of their jobs; that work has become "everytime, everyplace"; that email is addictive and is only piling on more, often unnecessary work; and that technology is eroding the psychologically necessary boundaries between work-life and home life.

Very likely, there are substantial elements of truth in both perspectives. New technologies are simply a tool: their impact depends on how they are used. However, in today's world they have to be considered possible contributors to feeling overworked.29

[It used to be] when I had to fly somewhere, nobody could get at me. Now, of course that's not true. You can call from the airplane, and call into your voice mail ... But, then, like when I had my surgery, it was great because I could be home for those five weeks and be connected.

Employees were asked how often they use technology—such as a cellular or mobile phone, beeper or pager, email, computer, or fax—for their main job during typical nonwork hours or nonwork days. They could answer very often, often, sometimes, rarely, or never.

We found that a high proportion of U.S. employees—four in ten (41%)—use technology often or very often for their jobs during typical nonwork hours or nonwork days.

The more often employees report using technological tools for their jobs during nonwork hours or nonwork days, the more likely they are to feel overworked. Of employees who say they use technology for their jobs often or very often when they are not scheduled to work, 38 percent report high levels of feeling overworked, 37 percent report mid levels, and only 25 percent experience low levels of feeling overworked. In contrast, only 29 percent of employees who rarely or never use technology for their jobs during nonwork time report high levels of feeling overworked.

Do employees who feel that they are more accessible to their employers than is necessary feel more overworked?

Another potential contributor to feeling overworked is having to be accessible (by whatever means) to one's employer during nonwork hours and days, and having to be more accessible than seems necessary.
• About one-fifth (22%) of U.S. employees report that they have to be accessible to their employers during nonwork hours or nonwork days *often or very often*. Only 30 percent say that they *never* have to be accessible when not at work.

• Over three-quarters (77%) of employees who have to be accessible to their employers at least occasionally during nonwork hours and days feel that this level of accessibility is necessary, while just over one-fifth (23%) say it is more than necessary.

The more accessible employees feel they have to be to their employers during nonwork hours and nonwork days, the more likely they are to feel overworked. Specifically, 41 percent of employees who say they need to be accessible to their employer *often or very often* report high levels of feeling overworked compared with 32 percent who experience mid levels and 26 percent who experience low levels of feeling overworked. In contrast, 31 percent of those who *rarely or never* have to be accessible report high levels of feeling overworked.

Furthermore, when employees feel that they are more accessible than necessary, they are more likely to feel overworked. Half (51%) of employees who think they are more accessible than necessary to do their jobs experience high levels of feeling overworked, while significantly fewer (32%) of those who do not feel unnecessarily accessible report high levels of feeling overworked.

**Do employees who don't take their full vacation feel more overworked?**

When we asked employees in focus groups to define feeling overworked, we heard:

> It's giving up your vacation. You can't take time off.

> If I don't take four days off this month, I will lose it. So, I'm going to take a vacation day tomorrow, but first I have to meet with a client and then I will end up working four hours by the end of the day. So, it's going to end up being half a vacation day.

As another potential contributor to feeling overworked, we looked at the extent to which employees sacrifice vacation time for work. We asked employees how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the statement: "Because of the demands of my job, I am not able to use all of the vacation that I am entitled to." Employees could respond *strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree*.

One-fourth (26%) of U.S. employees agree either *somewhat or strongly* that they do not take all of the vacation they are entitled to because of the demands of their jobs.

Employees who don't take their full vacation because of the demands of their jobs are more likely to feel overworked. We found that of those do not use all the vacation they are entitled to, 55 percent report high levels of feeling overworked, double the proportion (27%) of employees who do take their vacation and also report high levels of feeling overworked.
DOES ORGANIZATIONAL INSTABILITY CONTRIBUTE TO FEELING OVERWORKED?

We asked employees whether, during the past year, their organization eliminated jobs; had difficulty hiring people to fill positions; or had merged with, acquired, or been acquired by another company. Employees could answer yes or no.

Overall, 59 percent of U.S. employees say their employer experienced at least one type of organizational instability in the past year:

- 27 percent of U.S. employees report that their employer eliminated jobs in the last year;
- 37 percent report that their employer had difficulty hiring in the last year; and
- 21 percent say their employer had merged with, had acquired or had been acquired, by another company in the last year.

Employees working for less stable organizations—organizations that have eliminated jobs or had difficulty hiring people to fill positions—experience higher levels of feeling overworked than others, as detailed here:

Table 8. Levels of feeling overworked by organizational instability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>During the past year, has your organization eliminated jobs?</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>No (n=712)</th>
<th>Yes (n=269)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% who have high levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have mid levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td></td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have low levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td></td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>During the past year, has your organization had difficulty hiring people to fill positions?</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>No (n=607)</th>
<th>Yes (n=356)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% who have high levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have mid levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td></td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have low levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td></td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>During the past year, has your organization merged with, acquired, or been acquired by another company?</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>No (n=780)</th>
<th>Yes (n=201)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% who have high levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have mid levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td></td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have low levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td></td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.
The Mantel-Haenszel (linear by linear) chi-square test was used to test associations.
**p<.01; ns=not significant
DO POORER QUALITY JOBS CONTRIBUTE TO FEELING OVERWORKED?

In the National Study of the Changing Workforce, we found that job quality is a strong predictor of key employee outcomes. Having a high-quality job is associated with greater job satisfaction, stronger commitment to helping one's company succeed, greater loyalty to one's employer, and reduced likelihood of changing employers. 30

To find out how the quality of employees' jobs relates to feeling overworked, we asked employees how much they agreed with the following questions that assess whether or not employees' jobs are of high quality:

- I have the freedom to decide what I do on my job;
- The work I do on my job is meaningful to me;
- I spend a lot of time at work doing things that I think are a waste of time; and
- My job allows me to keep learning new things.

Employees could respond that they strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree.

Job quality also encompasses job security. Thus, we asked, "How likely is it that during the next couple of years you will lose your main job and have to look for a job with another employer?" Employees could respond very likely, somewhat likely, not too likely, or not at all likely.

Overall, we found that:

- 70 percent of U.S. employees somewhat or strongly agree they have autonomy in their jobs;
- 88 percent somewhat or strongly agree their work is meaningful;
- 33 percent somewhat or strongly agree that they spend a lot of time doing low-value work;
- 80 percent somewhat or strongly agree their jobs allow for learning opportunities; and
- Only 17 percent say they are somewhat or very likely to lose their job in the next two years.

Employees with lower-quality jobs are more likely to feel overworked. (See Table 9.)

- Employees with less freedom or control to decide what they can do on their jobs are more likely to feel overworked;
- Employees who feel they are doing low-value work (work that is a "waste of time") are more likely to feel overworked;
- Employees with fewer learning opportunities are more likely to feel overworked; and
- Employees with less secure jobs are more likely to feel overworked.
### Table 9. Levels of feeling overworked by job quality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Of those who say…</th>
<th>Somewhat/strongly disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat/strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>…I have the freedom to decide what I do on my job:</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have high levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have mid levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have low levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of those who say…</td>
<td>Somewhat/strongly disagree</td>
<td>Somewhat/strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…the work I do on my job is meaningful to me:</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have high levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have mid levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have low levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of those who say…</td>
<td>Somewhat/strongly disagree</td>
<td>Somewhat/strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…I spend a lot of time at work doing things that I think are a waste of time:</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have high levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have mid levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have low levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of those who say…</td>
<td>Somewhat/strongly disagree</td>
<td>Somewhat/strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…my job allows me to keep learning new things:</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have high levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have mid levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have low levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9. Levels of feeling overworked by job quality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Of those who say …</th>
<th>Not too/not at all likely (n=808)</th>
<th>Somewhat/very likely (n=169)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am likely to lose your main job and have to look for a job with another employer:</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have high levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have mid levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have low levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

The Mantel-Haenszel (linear by linear) chi-square test was used to test associations.

**p < .01; *p < .05; ns = not significant

Are levels of earnings related to feeling overworked?

In other research at Families and Work Institute, we have found that low-wage employees tend to work fewer hours and have less demanding jobs than their higher-wage counterparts. Thus, we suspected that those who earn less would be less likely to feel overworked. In this study, we asked employees to assume that they will hold their current (main) job for a year and to estimate how much they would earn for the entire year in total pay before taxes and other deductions. We found that:

- 28 percent say they would earn less than $20,000 in total annual pay;
- 51 percent would earn $20,000–$50,000; and
- 22 percent would earn more than $50,000.

Indeed, the less employees earn, the less overworked they feel.

Table 10. Levels of feeling overworked by estimated annual earnings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Of those who estimate they earn…</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Up to $20,000/year (n=261)</th>
<th>$20,000 – $50,000/year (n=483)</th>
<th>Over $50,000/year (n=206)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% who have high levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have mid levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td></td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have low levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td></td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

The Mantel-Haenszel (linear by linear) chi-square test was used to test associations.

**p < .01
DO LESS SUPPORTIVE WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENTS CONTRIBUTE TO FEELING OVERWORKED?

In the National Study of the Changing Workforce, we have found that employees with more supportive workplaces are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs, have a stronger commitment to helping their companies succeed, are more loyal to their employers, and are less likely to look for another job. To determine whether more supportive workplaces are associated with lower levels of feeling overworked, we asked employees how much they agreed with the following questions:

- I have the materials and equipment I need to do a good job;
- I have the support from people at work that I need to do a good job;
- I have the flexibility in my work time to manage my personal and family responsibilities;
- At the company or organization where I work, I am treated with respect; and
- My supervisor really cares about the effect that work demands have on my personal and family life.

Employees could answer that they strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. Overall, we found that:

- 84 percent of U.S. employees somewhat or strongly agree they have the materials and equipment they need to do a good job;
- 83 percent somewhat or strongly agree they have support from people at work to do a good job;
- 77 percent somewhat or strongly agree they have the flexibility at work to manage personal and family responsibilities;
- 88 percent somewhat or strongly agree they are treated with respect; and
- 73 percent somewhat or strongly agree their supervisors care about the effect that work demands have on personal and family life.

Employees in less supportive workplace environments feel more overworked. (See Table 11.)

- Employees who lack the materials and equipment they need to do a good job feel more overworked;
- Employees who do not feel they have the support from people at work that they need to do a good job feel more overworked;
- Employees who do not have the flexibility in their jobs to be able to manage their personal and family responsibilities feel more overworked;
- Employees who do not have supportive supervisors feel more overworked; and
- Employees who feel they are not treated with respect feel more overworked.
Table 11. Levels of feeling overworked by workplace support

Of those who say…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Somewhat/strongly disagree (n=160)</th>
<th>Somewhat/strongly agree (n=841)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...I have the materials and equipment I need to do a good job:</td>
<td>**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have high levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have mid levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have low levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of those who say…</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...I have the support from people at work that I need to do a good job:</td>
<td>**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have high levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have mid levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have low levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of those who say…</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...I have the flexibility in my work time to manage my personal and family responsibilities:</td>
<td>**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have high levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have mid levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have low levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 11. Levels of feeling overworked by workplace support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Of those who say…</th>
<th>Somewhat/strongly disagree (n=123)</th>
<th>Somewhat/strongly agree (n=876)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>…at the company or organization where I work, I am treated with respect</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have high levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have mid levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have low levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Of those who say…</th>
<th>Somewhat/strongly disagree (n=273)</th>
<th>Somewhat/strongly agree (n=722)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>…my supervisor really cares about the effect that work demands have on my personal and family life</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have high levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have mid levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have low levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding. The Mantel-Haenszel (linear by linear) chi-square test was used to test associations. **p<.01
WHO IS FEELING MOST OVERWORKED?

We wondered whether some demographic groups might feel more overworked than others. Thus, we compared men and women, employees of different ages, employees of different occupational statuses, and employees with different family responsibilities.

DO WOMEN FEEL MORE OVERWORKED THAN MEN?

We found that women feel more overworked than men do. Women are more likely (31%) than men (25%) to say that in the past three months they often or very often felt overworked or overwhelmed. Moreover, on our overall index of feeling overworked, we found that women tend to have higher average scores for feeling overworked. (See Table 12.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women (n=486)</th>
<th>Men (n=517)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Felt overworked</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt overwhelmed by how much work you had to do</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt that you don't have the time to step back and process or reflect on the work you're doing</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average score for feeling overworked:</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Highlighted double-lined box indicates the percentage or mean is statistically different from that of men at p < .01. Highlighted single-lined box indicates the percentage or mean is statistically different from that of men at p < .05.

Why might women feel more overworked than men?

To understand why women might feel more overworked than men, we conducted a number of additional analyses. Initially, the findings were puzzling because we found that men, not women, are more likely to have many of the job or workplace conditions that are associated with feeling overworked:
• Men, on average, work longer hours than women do (43.7 hours per week versus 38.5 hours per week at their main/only jobs) and work more days than women do (5.1 days per week versus 4.9 days per week at their main/only jobs).

• When working more hours than they prefer, men are more likely to work for external reasons than women do. They are more likely (82%) than women (73%) to somewhat or strongly agree they are doing so to improve their company’s bottom line. They are more likely (58%) than women (48%) to agree that they work more because their employer expects them to work long hours. They are more likely (78%) than women (71%) to agree that they work more because it takes that long to do all of the work they need to do.

• Men are more likely (45%) than women (36%) to use technology often or very often for their jobs during nonwork time.

• Men are more likely (27%) than women (16%) to report they often or very often have to be accessible to their employer during nonwork time. They are also somewhat more likely to say they are accessible to their employer more than necessary (27% of men versus 19% of women).

• Men are more likely (29%) than women (22%) to not use all of the vacation they are entitled to because of the demands of their jobs.

• Men are more likely to experience organizational instability compared with women. A higher proportion of men (64%) than women (54%) work for organizations that underwent at least one of the following changes within the last year: eliminated jobs, had difficulty hiring, or merged with, acquired, been acquired by another company.

• Men earn more than women do; they are more likely (31%) than women (11%) to earn more $50,000 per year.

However, on several factors that we have found to be associated with feeling overworked, we observed differences that might help to explain why women tend to feel more overworked than men:

• Women are more likely (48%) than men (40%) to work more hours per week than they prefer.

• Women are more likely (53%) than men (38%) to say they often or very often work on too many tasks at the same time; they also are more likely (50%) than men (40%) to say they often or very often are interrupted during the work day, making it difficult to get their work done.

When we take into account (hold constant or control) the extent to which employees have too many tasks and the frequency of their work interruptions, we find that gender differences in feeling overworked disappear. That is, men and women who report the same frequencies of interruptions and having too many tasks feel equally overworked, as illustrated in Figure 2.
It could be that women are more likely than men to take on more tasks, or possibly have difficulty saying "no" to additional work or to those who interrupt their work. Given that our study is based on self-reports, we do not know. Still, as noted earlier, perceptions are important and do make a difference in how people feel. Thus, it is an important finding in itself that women are more likely to say they are working on too many tasks and are often interrupted, therefore quite possibly feeling more overworked than men.

We suspect that factors outside of work also contribute to the finding that women feel more overworked than men—factors that are beyond the scope of this study. For example, considerable research, including research from the Families and Work Institute, has shown that many employed women also work a "second shift" at home. They tend to spend more time caring for their children and doing household chores than men, and to devote less time to themselves. It is also possible that women's more frequent interruptions at work are in part due to their greater family responsibilities.

**Do Different Generations of Employees Feel Equally Overworked?**

Whenever we talk with employers, we hear comments about today's young employees being different from previous generations. Some describe younger employees as...
"slackers." Others say that young employees have seen their parents’ generation make sacrifices in their personal and family lives for the sake of their jobs, only to face job loss in the wake of widespread downsizing. Perhaps today’s young employees do not want to fall into the traps their parents did. Some studies, in fact, have found that younger employees (male and female alike) place a very high priority on their home lives.35

We explored some of these issues in earlier research by the Families and Work Institute and discovered that employees in so-called "Generation X" are not slackers—indeed, they work longer hours and find their jobs more demanding than young employees did in 1977. Furthermore, we found that whether or not employees are married or have children is more predictive of their priorities about work and family life than their age.36

We have not previously investigated whether different generations of employees feel equally overworked, but this study provides the opportunity to do so. We find that "Baby Boomers" (ages 36–54) are more likely than "Gen Xers" (ages 18–35) or "Mature Workers" (ages 55 and older) to feel overworked.37 They are more likely to say they often or very often felt overworked, felt overwhelmed by how much work they have to do, or felt that they don't have the time to step back and process or reflect on the work they're doing. This finding also holds when we average three items together to create an overall score, as shown in Table 13:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 13. Generation differences in feeling overworked</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Generation X:</strong> Ages 18–35 (n=409)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who say often or very often, in the last three months…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt overworked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt overwhelmed by how much work you had to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt that you don’t have the time to step back and process or reflect on the work you’re doing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average score for feeling overworked:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Highlighted single-lined box indicates the percentage or mean is statistically different from all other age groups (significance: p < .05 or better).
Why might Baby Boomers feel more overworked than others?

It appears that Baby Boomers feel more overworked than Gen Xers and Mature Workers because they are more likely to have the kinds of jobs and workplaces that are associated with feeling overworked:

- Baby Boomers tend to work longer hours than others. On average, they work 43.2 hours per week at their main/only job, while Gen Xers work 39.7 hours per week and Mature Workers work 38.8 hours per week.
- Baby Boomers are more likely than others to work more hours and more days than they prefer. They are more likely (49%) than Gen Xers (40%) to work more hours than they prefer; neither group is significantly different from Mature Workers (41%). Baby Boomers are also more likely (59%) than Gen Xers (48%) and Mature Workers (45%) to work more days than they prefer.
- Baby Boomers are less likely to be able to change their work situation so they can work the hours or days they would like to. When preferring to work fewer hours or days than they are currently working, Baby Boomers are less likely (20%) than Gen Xers (33%) and Mature Workers (32%) to say they can change their work schedule.
- Baby Boomers, along with Gen Xers, are more likely than Mature Workers to work in high-pressure jobs. (See Table 14.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 14. Generation differences in feeling pressure on the job</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>% who somewhat or strongly agree…</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My job requires that I work very fast.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My job requires that I work very hard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I never seem to have enough time to get Everything done on my job.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Highlighted single-lined box indicates the percentage is statistically different from other age groups (Significance: p < .05 or better). <,> = Significantly different from adjacent percentage at p < .05 or better.
• Baby Boomers, along with Gen Xers, are also more likely than Mature Workers to have difficulty focusing in their jobs. (See Table 15.)

Table 15. Generation differences in difficulty focusing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% who often or very often say…</th>
<th>Generation X Ages 18–35 (n=409)</th>
<th>Baby Boomers: Ages 36–54 (n=455)</th>
<th>Mature Workers: Ages 55+ (n=123)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is very difficult to focus on the work they have to do.</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>&gt; 12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They work on too many tasks at the same time.</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are interrupted during the work day, making it difficult to get their work done.</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Highlighted single-lined box indicates the percentage is statistically different from other age groups (Significance: p < .05 or better). <,> = Significantly different from adjacent percentage at p < .05 or better

• Baby Boomers (25%), along with Gen Xers (24%), are more likely than Mature Workers (11%) to feel they are accessible to their employers during nonwork time more than necessary.

• Baby Boomers are more likely (42%) than Gen Xers (33%) to say their employer had difficulty hiring last year. Neither group is significantly different from Mature Workers (36%).

• In terms of job quality, Baby Boomers (36%) and Gen Xers (34%) are more likely than Mature Workers (23%) to say they spend a lot of time working on things that they believe are a waste of time.

• Baby Boomers (30%) and Mature Workers (21%) are more likely than Gen Xers (13%) to earn more than $50,000.

• Finally, Baby Boomers appear to receive less support from their workplaces than other employees do. (See Table 16.)
Table 16. Generation differences in workplace support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% who somewhat or strongly agree…</th>
<th>Generation X: Ages 18–35 (n=409)</th>
<th>Baby Boomers: Ages 36–54 (n=455)</th>
<th>Mature Workers: Ages 55+ (n=123)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have the materials and equipment I need to do a good job</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have the support from people at work that I need to do a good job.</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>&lt; 91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have the flexibility in my work time to manage my personal and family responsibilities</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At the company or organization where I work, I am treated with respect</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>&gt; 84%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My supervisor really cares about the effect that work demands have on my personal and family life</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>&gt; 68%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Highlighted single-lined box indicates the percentage is statistically different from other age groups (Significance: p < .05 or better). <,> = Significantly different from adjacent percentage at p < .05 or better

Given their job and workplace conditions, it is not surprising that Baby Boomers feel more overworked than other employees do.

**DO MANAGERS AND PROFESSIONALS FEEL MORE OVERWORKED THAN OTHER EMPLOYEES?**

As one might expect, managerial and professional employees feel more overworked than other employees. Managerial and professional employees are more likely than other employees to say they *often* or *very often* felt overworked and/or overwhelmed in the last three months, as illustrated in Table 17. Consistent with what has recently been reported in the media, managerial and professional employees also more often feel they do not have the time to step back and process or reflect on what they were doing. We also found that managers and professional employees have higher average scores for feeling overworked.
Table 17. Occupational status differences in feeling overworked

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Managers and Professional Employees (n=691)</th>
<th>Other Employees (n=302)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% who say <strong>often</strong> or <strong>very often</strong>, in the last three months that they…</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt overworked</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt overwhelmed by how much work you had to do</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt that you don’t have the time to step back and process or reflect on the work you’re doing</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average score for feeling overworked:</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Highlighted box with double-line indicates the percentage or mean is statistically different at p < .01; Highlighted box with single line indicates the percentage or mean is statistically different at p < .05.

Why might managers feel more overworked than others?

It appears that managers and professionals feel more overworked than other employees because they are more likely to have the kinds of jobs and workplaces associated with feeling overworked:

- Managers and professional employees tend to work longer hours than other employees do (43.4 versus 36.5 hours per week). They also work more days than other employees do (5.0 versus 4.9 days per week).

- Not only are managers and professional employees working more, but they are also more likely than other employees to prefer to work less. A higher proportion of managers and professionals (49%) than other employees (33%) would prefer to work fewer hours.

- Likewise, a higher proportion of managers and professionals (56%) than other employees (43%) would prefer to work fewer days.

- In terms of job pressures, managers and professional employees are more likely (85%) than other employees (77%) to say they need to work very hard. They are also more likely (51%) than other employees (43%) to say they never have enough time to get everything done on their jobs.

- Managers and professional employees are also more likely than other employees to say they have difficulty focusing. (See Table 18.)
Table 18. Occupational status differences in difficulty focusing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% who often or very often say...</th>
<th>Managers and Professional Employees (n=691)</th>
<th>Other Employees (n=302)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is very difficult to focus on the work I have to do.</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have to work on too many tasks at the same time.</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am interrupted during the work day, making it difficult to get my work done.</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Highlighted double-lined box indicates the percentage is statistically different at \( p < .01 \).

- Managers and professional employees are more likely (46%) than other employees (29%) to use technology for their jobs during nonwork time. They are also more likely (24%) than other employees (17%) to be accessible to their employers during nonwork time.

- Managers and professional employees are more likely (63%) than other employees (52%) to report that their employer experienced at least one of the following during the past year: eliminated jobs; had difficulty hiring; and/or merged, acquired or been acquired by another company.

- Managers or other professionals are also more likely (29%) to earn over $50,000 per year than are other employees (7%).

Given their job and workplace conditions, it is not surprising that managers and professionals feel more overworked than other employees do.

**DO EMPLOYEES WHO HAVE FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES FEEL MORE OVERWORKED THAN OTHERS?**

While the study focused on job and workplace conditions as well as job-related and personal outcomes that are associated with feeling overworked, interviews did collect basic information about family composition. Here, we consider whether having children or elder care responsibilities are associated with feeling overworked.
Do employees with children feel more overworked than others?

Having children under 18, or even having a child under 6, is not associated with feeling more overworked, as shown in Table 19:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 19. Levels of feeling overworked by parental status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Of those …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have high levels of feeling overworked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have mid levels of feeling overworked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have low levels of feeling overworked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of those whose youngest child is …</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have high levels of feeling overworked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have mid levels of feeling overworked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% who have low levels of feeling overworked</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Children include biological, adopted and foster children, as well as others who live with the respondent at least half the year and for whom the respondent is responsible.

Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

The Mantel-Haenszel (linear by linear) chi-square test was used to test associations.

ns = not significant

It is very possible that factors we did not assess in this survey might be associated with feeling more overworked. These include time spent caring for children, the psychological responsibility for this care, and the way that providing care supports or conflicts with one’s sense of identity and life priorities. Nonetheless, it is important to note that merely having children is not related to feeling overworked.

Do employees with elder care responsibilities or with both child care and elder care responsibilities feel more overworked than others?

Neither having elder care responsibilities alone, nor having both child care and elder care responsibilities, is associated with feeling more overworked, as shown in Table 20.
Table 20. Levels of feeling overworked by elder care responsibilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Of those who …</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Provided elder care (n=297)</th>
<th>Did not provide elder care (n=702)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td> </td>
<td></td>
<td>High levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td> </td>
<td></td>
<td>Mid levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td> </td>
<td></td>
<td>Low levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of those who …

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Of those who …</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Provided elder care and have children (n=125)</th>
<th>All others (n=877)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td> </td>
<td></td>
<td>High levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td> </td>
<td></td>
<td>Mid levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td> </td>
<td></td>
<td>Low levels of feeling overworked</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Elder care includes providing special attention or care for someone 65 years old or older within the past year.

Children include biological, adopted and foster children, as well as others who live with the respondent at least half the year and for whom the respondent is responsible.

Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

The Mantel-Haenszel (linear by linear) chi-square test was used to test associations.

ns = not significant

Again, the amount of time, psychological responsibility for overseeing care of elderly family or friends, and perhaps the emotional strain that comes with caring for elders who are infirm, might be related to feeling overworked. Given the data available in this study, however, we can only conclude that merely having elder care responsibilities, as well as having both elder care and child care responsibilities, are not related to feeling overworked.
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN EMPLOYEES FEEL OVERWORKED?

In our focus groups, we asked employees what it means to them to feel overworked by asking them to complete the following sentence, "When I am overworked, I feel …" Here are some representative responses:

I'm always anxious.

I feel overworked when I have something that has to be done, a deadline has to be met and then something else comes up. So now I am juggling two things, and then something else comes up and then something else comes up. So now I am on the edge of acting out. I am on the edge of really getting angry. I am on the edge of making mistakes.

Aggravated.

Angry.

I can't sleep.

I have too much to do, and I am in too much of a hurry, and I am tired.

I want to find another job.

According to these statements from employees, feeling overworked can have serious consequences both for the employee (feeling tired, unable to sleep, anxious) and for the employer (employee aggression, increased mistakes, turnover). As the final part of this report, we investigate whether employees' feelings of being overworked are in fact statistically linked to the repercussions that employees cited in our focus groups and the findings from other research.

HOW DOES FEELING OVERWORKED RELATE TO JOB PERFORMANCE, INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS, AND RETENTION?

Do employees who feel more overworked make more mistakes on the job?

Employees who feel more overworked are, indeed, more likely to report making mistakes at work. It should be noted, however, that very few employees say they make mistakes; only 7 percent say they often or very often made mistakes at work because they had too much to do in the last three months. However, it is notable that employees who report high levels of feeling overworked are much more likely (17%) than those with
mid levels (4%) or low levels (less than 1%) to report making mistakes. An employee explains the connection between feeling overworked and slip-ups at work:

I think at some point, you are not being efficient. You are so tired and you are making mistakes.

Are employees who feel overworked more likely to feel anger or resentment?

The issue of anger and resentment is of increasing concern to employers given a number of highly visible incidents of workplace violence over the past decade. In part because respondents in focus groups talked about anger and resentment, we investigated this issue. This is one telling comment from a focus group participant:

I feel cheated because I don’t get to go to the gym and work out … because I don’t get to do the things in life that bring pleasure to me. I feel cheated because I don’t feel that I am being compensated vis a vis the outputs that I am continuing to generate … It is always for someone else and not for me.

- Almost half (43%) of employees experiencing high levels of feeling overworked in the previous three months say they often or very often felt angry that they were expected to do so much at work. This percentage was dramatically higher than among those experiencing mid (11%) or low levels (3%) of feeling overworked. In general, 19 percent of U.S. employees reported feeling angry in connection with overwork.

- Over a third (39%) of employees experiencing high levels of feeling overworked say they often or very often in the last three months felt resentful that others at work do not work as hard as they do. In contrast, only 19 percent of those with mid levels and 12 percent of those with low levels said the same thing. In general, 24 percent of U.S. employees said they often felt resentment about others not working so hard.

We do not mean to imply that employees who feel overworked are likely to act out associated feelings of anger and resentment through violence in the workplace. However, anger and resentment can have quite negative effects on staff morale, attitudes toward employers and coworkers, job performance, and levels of stress and health.

Are employees who feel more overworked more likely to consider leaving their jobs or to dream of doing something else with their lives?

Given the findings already described, it is not at all surprising that employees who feel more overworked are more likely to be considering, or dreaming about, doing something other than their current jobs. Especially since we found that employees who feel overworked tend to have poorer quality jobs and less supportive work environments, it is no wonder many are contemplating changes, like the people quoted here:

If money were not an issue, [I'd go to] interior design school.
[I could be] finishing my novel.

[I’d like to do] refugee relief work.

If I had a million dollars, I would retire to an isolated farm in the far north.

[I dream about being] a concert pianist, or involved with music somehow or teaching music.

I would like to work in a situation where I am challenged and given responsibility, yet am truly "giving back," like running a homeless shelter.

- More employees who experience high levels of feeling overworked (49%) say they are somewhat or very likely to make a genuine effort to find a new job with another employer within the next year than those with mid levels (31%) or low levels (30%) of feeling overworked. Notably, over a third (36%) of all U.S. employees say they are likely to look for a new job.

- Also, more employees who experience high levels of feeling overworked (79%) say they somewhat or strongly agree that they often dream about doing something with their life other than their current job than those with mid levels (70%) or low levels (60%). It is interesting to note that seven of ten (70%) of all U.S. employees say they dream about making changes in their work lives.

These issues are of concern to employers because of the cost of turnover and the difficulty some employers are having filling both entry-level and skilled jobs.

**HOW DOES FEELING OVERWORKED RELATE TO FAMILY RELATIONS AND PERSONAL WELL-BEING?**

Do employees who feel more overworked report less successful relationships with their spouses, children, and friends?

Feeling overworked appears to affect employees’ relationships with their spouse/partner and their children. Overall, 72 percent of U.S. employees who are married or living with a partner say they feel extremely or very successful in their relationships with their spouses; 64 percent of those who report high levels of feeling overworked say they are successful in their relationships with their spouse or partner. This is significantly lower than those who report mid levels (75%) or low levels (78%) of feeling overworked. Further, 80 percent of employees who have children say they feel very or extremely successful in their relationships with their children; 64 percent of those who report high levels of feeling overworked say they are successful in their relationships with their children. This is significantly lower than those who experience mid levels (81%) or low levels (87%) of feeling overworked.

Friendships also appear to be affected by how overworked employees feel. Overall, two-thirds (67%) of U.S. employees say they feel very or extremely successful in their relationships with their friends. Fewer employees who experience high levels (63%) and even mid levels (63%) of feeling overworked say they feel very or extremely successful.
in their relationships with their friends than employees who report low levels of feeling overworked (76%).

I think the biggest impact is friends. Because the time you have you give to your family first. And it's tougher to spend time with friends unless you plan, literally, vacations with them.

My biggest fear is that my kids are going to grow up, leave home, and I'm going to look around and know no one.

Are employees who feel more overworked more likely to experience work-life conflict?

Given that employees who feel more overworked also feel less successful in their family and personal relationships, we wondered if employees who feel more overworked experience more work-life conflict. (Work-life conflict refers both to conflict caused by work and conflict stemming from personal or family life.) Employees were asked, “How much conflict do you face in balancing your work, personal life and family life?” They could answer quite a lot, a lot, some, not too much, or none at all.

Nearly one-third (32%) of employees with high levels of feeling overworked say they face quite a lot or a lot of conflict. In contrast, smaller proportions of employees with mid levels (21%) or low levels (11%) say the same. Notably, 22 percent of all employees say they face a lot of conflict balancing their work, personal, and family life. The following comment reflects the tension that can arise when work and life concerns conflict:

I can't turn off what's going on at home when I'm at work. And if I'm worrying about work all the time, things at home suffer.

**HOW DOES FEELING OVERWORKED RELATE TO PERSONAL WELL-BEING?**

Do employees who feel more overworked feel less successful in taking care of themselves?

As we have learned from other research, most employees make time to invest in their immediate families despite the heavy demands of their jobs, but they frequently sacrifice time for themselves to do so. Less than half (41%) of employees who experience high levels of feeling overworked say they are extremely or very successful in taking good care of themselves. This is significantly lower than the 53 percent of employees with mid levels and 66 percent of employees with low levels of feeling overworked who report they are doing a good job of taking care of themselves. Over half (53%) of all employees say they are successful in taking good care of themselves.

You're working all the time, you're not eating right, and you're not exercising, and you're not sleeping enough, and that starts to really affect you.
Are employees who feel more overworked more likely to lose sleep?

Employees who feel more overworked are much more likely to lose sleep because of their work. More than one-third (36%) of employees who report high levels of feeling overworked report losing sleep often or very often in the last three months because of work. This is substantially higher than the proportions of employees who experience mid levels (11%) or low levels (5%) of feeling overworked. It is notable that 18 percent of all employees say they often lost sleep in the last three months due to work.

I have a hard time leaving home things at home and work things at work, and it will keep me up at night. Even if I do manage not to be grouchy when I get home, maybe I won't sleep very well, or I will worry about it.

Are employees who feel more overworked in poorer health?

Employees who feel more overworked are also less likely to feel healthy. Only half (50%) of employees with high levels of feeling overworked describe their health as very good or excellent, compared with 56 percent who experience mid levels and 64 percent who experience low levels of feeling overworked. Overall, 57 percent of U.S. employees say they are in very good or excellent health.

Are employees who feel more overworked also more stressed?

We asked employees several standardized questions to assess their perceived stress levels. We asked, "How often in the past three months have you felt … "

- That you were unable to control the important things in your life?
- Confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?
- That things were going your way?
- That difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?
- Nervous and stressed?

Employees could answer very often, often, sometimes, rarely or never. We found that employees who feel more overworked also feel more stressed. (See Table 21.) Employees who report high levels of feeling overworked are more likely than other employees to report that often or very often:

- They were unable to control the important things in their lives;
- Difficulties were piling up so high that they could not overcome them;
- They were nervous or stressed; and
- They were less likely to report that often or very often things were going their way.
Table 21. Perceived stress by levels of feeling overworked

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% who often or very often in the last three months say …</th>
<th>Level of feeling overworked</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sig</td>
<td>Low n=320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That you were unable to control the important things in your life</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That you were confident about your ability to handle your personal problems</td>
<td>ns</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That things were going your way</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That you feel nervous and stressed</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.
The Mantel-Haenszel (linear by linear) chi-square test was used to test associations.
**p<.01; ns=not significant.
IMPLICATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS

This study is intended to further our understanding of the much discussed, but little researched, psychological state of feeling overworked: To what extent do employees feel overworked? Who is most likely to feel overworked? What aspects of jobs and workplaces are related to feeling overworked? What are the consequences of feeling overworked for employees, their families, and their employers?

Of particular importance in this study are the implications of our findings for employers, which we explore in this section. We do not make specific recommendations for employer action, but link the findings to employer concerns and let them speak for themselves.

FEELING OVERWORKED

Feelings of being overworked are pervasive in the U.S. workforce. At least sometimes during the past three months, 54 percent of employees said they felt overworked, 55 percent said they felt overwhelmed by how much work they had to do, and 59 percent said they did not have time to step back and process or reflect on the work they were doing. Nearly half of employees (46%) indicated that they experienced at least one of these feelings often or very often during the preceding three months.

Managers and professionals, Baby Boomers, and women tend to feel more overworked than other employees.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF FEELING OVERWORKED

So what? Does merely "feeling" overworked create any problems that employers should be concerned with? Yes, according to the findings of this study. The more overworked employees feel:

1. The more likely they are to report making mistakes at work;
2. The more likely they are to feel angry toward their employers for expecting them to do so much;
3. The more likely they are to resent coworkers who do not work as hard as they do;
4. The more likely they are to look for a new job with another employer;
5. The more work-life conflict they experience (conflict that may have negative effects on both family and work);
6. The less successful they feel in relationships with their spouses or partners, children and friends;
7. The more likely they are to be neglecting themselves;
8. The more likely they are to lose sleep because of their work;
9. The less likely they are to report that their health is *very good or excellent*;
10. The higher their levels of stress and the poorer their abilities to cope with everyday life events.

These findings have implications in four major areas of immediate concern to employers: safety in the workplace, job performance, employee retention, and health care costs.

**Safety in the workplace**

Making mistakes at work (point 1 above) may mainly affect job performance among white-collar employees, but among blue-collar employees mistakes can result in serious injuries, workers' compensation claims, and other liabilities that generate enormous costs. Serious loss of sleep due to work (point 8) that results in significant sleep deprivation can also increase the likelihood of mistakes and serious accidents, as shown by other research.42

Although feeling angry toward one's employer for being expected to work so hard (point 2) and feeling resentful toward one's coworkers who appear to be working less hard (point 3) may mainly affect employee morale and levels of stress (which is bad enough), there is also the possibility that employees may "act out" their anger and resentment in the workplace.

**Job performance**

All the consequences of feeling overworked listed above can affect job performance—with making more mistakes (point 1), greater work-life conflict (point 5), and poorer health (point 9) being the most obvious factors. Employers should not assume that squeezing the most work they can out of their employees will necessarily increase productivity. Everyone has a breaking point, a point at which work becomes too much.

**Retention**

Despite the recent flurry of layoffs, retaining valued employees remains a top priority of employers. When employees "feel" overworked, they are more likely to consider other job options with other employers (point 4). Employees who have *chronic* feelings of being overworked are, of course, the most likely to imagine a very different future—a less pressured job with another employer, scaling back the time they invest in paid work, or a more meaningful career.

**Health care costs**

Employees who feel more overworked tend to report being less successful in their relationships with spouse/partners, children, and/or friends (point 6); to neglect themselves (point 7); to lose sleep because of work (point 8); to feel less healthy (point 9); and to feel more stressed and less able to cope with everyday life (10).
symptoms are associated with greater utilization of physical and mental health care and with impaired performance on the job (or departure from the labor force entirely). Mental health problems and associated physical health problems appear to be increasing dramatically. Both imply substantially higher health care costs for employers who subsidize health care insurance for their employees.

If one accepts the proposition that the psychological state of feeling overworked can have negative consequences for employees and employers, the next logical step is to identify characteristics of jobs and workplaces that are associated with (and possibly "cause") such feelings of being overworked. Our focus in this section is on factors that are potentially within the power of employers to change.

**WHY DO EMPLOYEES FEEL OVERWORKED AND WHAT MIGHT BE DONE ABOUT IT?**

Many of characteristics of jobs and workplaces are related to feeling overworked:

1. Employees who work more paid and unpaid hours per week at their main/only jobs and more hours than they would prefer feel more overworked.
2. Employees who work more days per week at their main/only jobs and more days than they would prefer feel more overworked.
3. Employees who believe they cannot change their work schedule so they can work the hours or days they prefer feel more overworked.
4. Employees who work longer hours for external reasons—to get all their work completed, to meet their employer's expectations—feel more overworked.
5. Employees who experience greater pressure on the job—having to work very fast and very hard, not having enough time to get everything done—feel much more overworked.
6. Employees who have more difficulty focusing at work—have difficulty focusing on the work they have to do, experience more frequent interruptions, have to work on too many tasks at once—feel much more overworked.
7. Employees who do not take all of the vacation to which they are entitled because of the demands of their jobs feel more overworked.
8. Employees who use more technology (cell/mobile phones, beepers, pagers, computers, email, fax) for their jobs during nonwork hours or days feel more overworked.
9. Employees who feel they have to be more accessible to their employers during nonwork hours and days feel more overworked.
10. Employees who feel they are more accessible than necessary to their employers feel much more overworked.
11. Employees who work for companies that have downsized or have had difficulty hiring new employees feel more overworked.

12. Employees who have poorer quality jobs—less autonomy, more wasted time, fewer learning opportunities, less job security—feel more overworked.

13. Employees who have less supportive workplaces—inadequate materials and equipment to do a good job, inadequate support from people at work to do a good job, insufficient flexibility to manage work and family responsibilities, unsupportive supervisors, lack of respect—feel more overworked.

What is an employer to do? One-size solutions do not fit all. However, it does appear that efforts to maximize the output of employees by inducing (or pushing) them to work longer and harder will ultimately backfire, if they have not already.

Amount of work, preferences, control, and reasons for working more

The relationships among these factors are complex. Many employees who typically work longer hours and more days than their counterparts do not feel more overworked. However, on average, employees who work more hours per week and days per week, who would like to work fewer hours and/or days, and who feel they cannot control how many hours or days they work, do feel more overworked. Employees who feel pushed to work more because of employer expectations or unreasonable amounts of work also feel more overworked than those who have their own motives for working more time than they would ideally prefer to work. Being able to work the amount one wants to work appears to make the difference.

Pressures and distractions on the job

When work is not well paced and sufficiently focused, employees are more likely to feel overworked. Employees who experience greater pressure on the job—having to work very fast, having to work very hard, not having enough time to get everything done—feel much more overworked. Similarly, employees who have more difficulty focusing at work—having difficulty focusing on the work they have to do, experience more frequent interruptions, have to work on too many tasks at once—feel much more overworked. Feeling that one has an appropriate amount of work to do within the time allotted and the right environment within which to do it seems to be extremely important.

Time off

Not surprisingly, employees who, because of the demands of their jobs, do not take all of the vacation time to which they are entitled feel more overworked. Vacation time exists because of its presumed "restorative" impact on employees. To make this time effectively unavailable is to deny its importance.
Technology and accessibility

Technology has promised new ways to manage complicated work, personal, and family lives, as well as ways to "get a life" while also working long and hard. Unfortunately, technology has not yet lived up to these promises. On balance, those who use more technology for their jobs during nonwork hours and nonwork days feel more overworked.

Technology—including the old-fashioned telephone—encourages spillover of work activity from job to home and makes employees more accessible to work. Employees who feel they have to be more accessible to their employers during nonwork hours and days feel more overworked. Moreover, employees who feel they are more accessible than is necessary feel much more overworked. Those rare employers who give permission to turn off the beeper and cell phone on evenings and weekends, and not read email at home before going to bed, seem to be speaking directly to today's chronically overworked employees.

Organizations with internal labor market issues

In recent years, recruiting new employees has been a major challenge for employers; now, downsizing is becoming more frequent. Both trends may coincide in some industries. In either case, current employees are likely to be saddled with more work, at least temporarily. Not surprisingly, employees who work for organizations that have difficulty hiring and for organizations that are downsizing feel more overworked than others. While these situations may be unavoidable for employers, sensitivity to their apparent effects and efforts to limit these are certainly warranted.

Job quality

Although one would not immediately think of job quality as a predictor of feeling overworked, it is. Employees who feel they have less autonomy (control) in their jobs feel more overworked: they are more driven by external pressures. Employees who feel that they spend more "wasted time" at work feel more overworked: they have less time for the "real" work they are expected to do. Employees who feel they have fewer learning opportunities feel more overworked: perhaps they are so caught up in fulfilling immediate expectations that they are unable to step back and learn, particularly if they do not have support from their employers to do so. Finally, employees who feel less secure in their jobs feel more overworked: perhaps they are working longer and harder to avoid losing their jobs.

Workplace support

As with job quality, the relationship between workplace support and feelings of being overworked may not be immediately obvious. However, the application of firsthand experience and everyday logic sheds light on these relationships.

Employees who have inadequate materials and equipment to do a good job feel more overworked, almost certainly because they need to get the job done and have difficulty doing it well.
Employees who do not get the support they need from people at work to get the job done feel more overworked: again, it takes them longer to get the job done.

Employees who do not have sufficient flexibility to manage work and family responsibilities feel more overworked: lack of work schedule flexibility is associated with greater work-family conflict, which makes it more difficult to get the job done.

Employees who do not have supportive supervisors when it comes to work-life issues feel more overworked: again, this situation gives rise to greater work-family conflict, which makes it more difficult to get the job done.

Finally, employees who do not feel respected in their workplaces feel more overworked: not feeling respected at work may have a "back door" effect—that is, "I'm doing all this work, but no one respects my contributions. So why am I working so hard?"

In search of balanced responses by employers

Many of the job and workplace characteristics described above that are associated with feeling more overworked are within the power of employers to change. More difficult, however, is finding a workable balance between organizational needs and employee needs, as well as rethinking long-held assumptions about how work gets done. Employers will probably draw different conclusions from our findings according to differences among their organizations and their personal views. In our work at the Families and Work Institute, we have observed that companies are responding in different ways.

Some employers believe that pushing employees to do more and do it faster is the only way to remain competitive in the global economy. Of these, some will dismiss our findings and simply continue to push employees to work harder and longer. Others in this category may read the findings of this study and conclude that they can get the same or more effort out of employees, for example, by providing more work schedule flexibility; after all, employees with greater flexibility to manage their personal and family lives do tend to feel less overworked. However, if employers expect even higher productivity, will greater flexibility really offset the negative effects of longer hours and more pressured jobs over the long run?

Still other employers may view our findings as an invitation to experiment with redesigning work to reduce wasted or low-value time at work, interruptions during the work day, or unnecessary demands. We have witnessed how a few employers have addressed these issues so that employees can work more efficiently and get more done during the regular work day. Yet, do such gains in efficiency mean that employees will be able to spend less time on their jobs and more time on their personal and family lives if they so wish? Potentially, yes, but not necessarily.

Our findings strongly suggest that there comes a time for every employee when increasing work demands simply become too much—a point at which personal and family relations, personal health, and the quality of work itself are seriously threatened. Today's 24/7 economy appears to be pushing many employees to and beyond that point.
NOTES

1 For examples, see National Sleep Foundation. (2000, March 28). Sleeplessness taking
toll on nation’s workforce [News release (poll)]; Peters, R. D., Kloeppel, Alicandri, E,
of partial and total sleep deprivation on driving performance. Washington, DC: Federal
of sleep deprivation on decision making: a review. Journal of Experimental Psychology,
6 (3), 236–249.

Health Organization; Murray, C. J. L. & Lopez, A. D., eds. (1996). The global burden of
disease: A comprehensive assessment of mortality and disability from diseases,
School of Public Health on behalf of the World Health Organization and The World
Bank (Global Burden of Disease and Injury Series, Vol. 1).


4 Hymowitz, C. (2001, February 27). Taking time to focus on the big picture despite the

5 Comparisons were made between employees working 20 or more hours per week in
1977 and 1997, which resulted in higher estimates of weekly hours than would be found
in the workforce as a whole.


7 Jacobs, J. A. & Gerson, K. (2001). Overworked individuals or overworked
families? Explaining trends in work, leisure, and family time. Work and
Occupations, 28 (1), 40–64.

8 Bond, Galinsky, & Swanberg (1998).


Journal of Occupational Medicine, 36, 983–988.


Harris Interactive uses random digit selection procedures to assure representation of persons in households "listed" in telephone directories, as well as persons in households that have "unlisted" telephone numbers. The final sample was then weighted to the U.S. Census Bureau’s latest population statistics on education, gender, race or ethnicity, and age.

In this report, we mention “differences,” “changes” or “relationships” only when they are statistically significant at a *minimum* threshold of p<.05. That is, our reported findings represent real differences, changes or relationships that would occur by chance no more often than 1 in 20 times. It should also be noted that many results were found to be significant at the p<.01 level, which indicates that a difference, change or relationship reported as significant would occur by chance only 1 time in 100, which provides even greater confidence in these findings.


For examples, see Bosma, et al. (1997); North et al. (1996); Repetti, R. L. (1987).

To determine whether these three items reliably described a single phenomenon—"feeling overworked"—we tested for internal consistency. Cronbach’s alpha was .77. (Alphas range from 0 to 1 where the greater the alpha, the higher the reliability. As a rule of thumb, an alpha greater than .6 is considered reliable.)

The three questions are: In the last few months, how often have you 1) felt overworked, 2) felt overwhelmed by how much work you had to do, and 3) felt that you don’t have the time to step back and process or reflect on the work you’re doing?

We found 31.9% of employees were in the low-level group (those with scores from 1.0 through 2.0); 34.3% were in the mid-level group (those with scores from 2.1 through 3.0); and 33.8% were in the high-level group (those with scores from 3.1 through 5.0).

If respondents had more than one job, they were asked only about their "main job," the job where they work the most hours. Within our sample of 1,003 employees, 15 percent reported having more than one job.

In many of the subsequent analyses, we analyzed questions with four or five response choices (such as this one) by collapsing the responses into dichotomous variables; for instance, we grouped responses of somewhat agree with strongly agree; and grouped responses of somewhat disagree with strongly disagree.

We conducted separate multiple linear regression analyses for each set of reasons (external, internal, and financial reasons) to examine the relative explanatory power of feeling overworked, controlling for employee and family demographics.


Galinsky (2000).


A hierarchical linear regression revealed that gender differences in feeling overworked disappear when difficulty in focusing is controlled.


In this study, the "Generation X" group also includes younger workers who are sometimes considered part of "Generation Y" or the "Millennials."

These questions are similar to questions developed by Sheldon Cohen and his colleagues. For more information about their perceived stress scale, please refer to Cohen, S., Kamarck, T., & Mermelstein, R. (1983). A global measure of perceived stress. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 24*, 385–396.

While it is not possible to reach firm conclusions about causality using data from a cross-sectional survey, the pattern of findings presented in this report is internally consistent and quite compelling.


Harnois & Gabriel (2000).