Overworked Families

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Most weeks, as I breathlessly try to keep up with my family responsibilities and the demands of my job, I often lament, “There just aren’t enough hours in the day!”

I know I am not alone because many of my friends who are working parents are singing the same tune. When both parents work outside the home, as is usually the case these days, even a 40-hour work week can seem too long.

To understand the family time squeeze, researchers look at the combined work time of family members in the labor force. Research shows that married couples are working more hours—and while professional positions demand even more hours, on average couples worked a combined total of 63 hours a week in 2000, compared to 53 hours in 1970 (Gerson & Jacobs, 2006).

The reason is because married women are far more likely to work than they were 30 years ago. In 2000, three-fifths of all married couple families had two wage-earners, compared to only one-third in 1970. In 2000, only one-quarter of families had a husband-only breadwinner, compared to half of couples in the 1970s.

Another group that is “truly caught in a time squeeze” (p. 354) is single parents, who are working “as much as possible to support their family,” often without “a partner’s help in meeting their children’s daily needs” (p. 355). Single mothers equally match working fathers, working an average of 37 hours a week.
Finding the right balance between work and family becomes increasingly difficult for many American families.

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