

UNFINISHED WORK

Building Equality and Democracy
in an Era of Working Families

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*The National Story:
How Americans Spend Their Time
on Work, Family, and Community*

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“Sorry, I have too much on my plate right now.” “Too busy.” “Not enough time.” While recruiting volunteers for a Parent-Teacher Association fund-raiser, one of the authors of this chapter heard these common explanations for people not having the time to participate. The finite nature of hours, minutes, and seconds in the course of a day suggests a zero-sum equation: time spent in one pursuit necessarily detracts from time spent in another. Adding up the hours spent working for pay, engaging in leisure activities, caring for others, and sleeping can total no more than twenty-four. Whether we have time to savor the moment or are constantly on the run depends on the degree of discretion we have in determining how we use our time. How Americans spend the limited resource of time is of great interest to working parents, elected officials, volunteer organizations, and employers—especially as the topic concerns the changing nature of time spent at the workplace, plus time devoted to family, social relationships, and civic affiliations. For the purposes of this study, we have chosen to broaden the scope of what is considered socially responsible behavior to include activities that reach beyond civic involvement to capture the more familial and informal endeavors that constitute everyday contributions to society.¹ Specifically, we examine how time in paid employment is associated with the time devoted to family, friends, and community on a day-to-day basis over time.

BALANCING THE DEMANDS OF WORK, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY

The extent to which we can choose how and with whom we spend our time may be influenced by several factors, including gender, socioeconomic resources, and social roles.² For instance, Barnett found that men have greater discretion than women do in how they spend their time outside of work with family and in leisure.³ According to Rossi, people with fewer resources, such as less education and income, are more likely to provide practical support to their families than to make financial contributions, whereas those with higher levels of education and income tend to give more of both time and money to the community.

In our analyses, we focus primarily on education. This strategy was chosen because it captures the well-established gradient of socioeconomic disadvantage and the primary educational benchmarks that provide the foundation for subsequent stratification of occupation and earnings. Moreover, educational attainment has been the primary proxy for socioeconomic status used in previous studies, thereby allowing comparability with other studies; it is less prone to exhibiting missing data values; it is relatively stable across the life course after early adulthood; it is more comparable across men and women than occupation, and more comparable across single and married people than income. Most importantly, education is less prone to endogeneity bias from reverse causality (e.g., work hours affecting the socioeconomic status or SES measure) than measures such as income and occupation. Of course, it is important to note that any association between level of education and time use does not mean that individuals "learn" in college how to spend their time. Rather, education is a marker for social advantage. To illustrate this point we will present some findings assessing the association between income and time spent giving to others.

Age may also play a role in the propensity to engage in socially responsible behaviors, such that providing for the welfare of others apparently evolves over the life span.⁴ Findings from the present sample (as described in the next section) showed that older people, who presumably have more discretionary time due to retirement, give informal assistance to others more frequently and volunteer their time

more often and for longer periods of time than younger people. In addition, our research highlighted the temporal rhythms of giving by showing that individuals are more likely to contribute time to family and community on the weekends and during the summer months.⁵

Previous research has also suggested that the amount of discretionary time available to attend to others' welfare should be associated with participation in paid employment. Direct evidence for this contention, however, has been equivocal. Robinson and Godbey estimated that for each additional hour of work (for those working less than fifty hours per week), there is approximately half an hour less in free time.⁶ Yet Putnam found work hours to be positively associated with civic activity.⁷ It appears that busy and highly involved individuals make time for civic engagement by reducing time spent in other activities such as eating, sleeping, and watching television, although, on average, women employed full time spend less time volunteering. After careful consideration of the possibilities, Putnam concluded that those most likely to be involved in their communities are women who choose to work part time, as opposed to those who work out of necessity.

Putnam also suggested that the manner in which discretionary time is distributed across the day and throughout the week is essential to the understanding of civic engagement.⁸ While some may have morsels of time scattered throughout the day, others possess a few large chunks of available time. Such diverse patterns of discretionary time may account for the decrease in participation among Americans in formal social activities over the past several decades.

Perhaps Americans have devised other ways to balance the often conflicting demands of work, family, and community by weaving the threads—or patches, as the case may be—of discretionary time into the fabric of their daily lives. It may be that the mode and delivery of our social involvement has changed such that we fulfill our social obligations in less structured settings, yet just as meaningful and important ones. Rather than view this social phenomenon as a zero-sum one, we may see it as synergistic, that is, one aspect of life enhancing another. For example, work may enhance the role of men as fathers by enabling them to fulfill their obligations and provide for their families.⁹ Furthermore, becoming a father often points men in the direction of broader community service, such as participation in parent and sporting associations.¹⁰ Likewise, possessing multiple roles appears to

enhance women's overall psychological well-being by enabling them to use all of their talents.¹¹ Women, more often than men, choose occupations that enable them to nurture and care for others while in the work setting.¹²

The zero-sum perspective does not explain Putnam's finding that the busiest among us are more likely than others to be involved in socially responsible activities.¹³ Contrary to what the zero-sum perspective might suggest, Rossi found that the number of hours worked by employed women was not the determining factor in time allocated to volunteering. Rather, the lack of gratification from the job propelled women to seek volunteer opportunities that provided them with a sense of appreciation for their efforts.¹⁴

Approaches to Studying Daily Time Use

One way to examine this interweaving of work, family, and community is to study the day-to-day linkages among these overlapping spheres of adult life. The use of innovative research tools such as time diaries and event sampling methodology has permitted researchers to obtain detailed accounts of how people spend their time. This daily approach to examining the work-family-community interweave affords the researcher benefits that cannot be easily achieved through the use of standard designs. Daily measurement helps resolve recall problems by allowing respondents to report about experiences in various domains of life much nearer to the time when they occur.¹⁵ Daily designs are especially useful in capturing information about the dynamics of daily experiences that appear static in traditional cross-sectional designs. The amount of time individuals spend contributing to others is likely to vary day to day.¹⁶ By following individuals intensively over time, researchers can compute estimates of time based on several days, rather than relying on a single report about one day or subjective estimates of time use over several days.

THE NATIONAL STUDY OF DAILY EXPERIENCES

The chief aim of our daily telephone interview study, the focus of this chapter, has been to add to our understanding of how Americans use their time. More specifically, we have been examining the quantity

of time adults spend giving of themselves daily for the welfare of others, including their children, other relatives, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and community. We also have assessed the quality or type of giving performed, such as providing emotional support, lending informal assistance, spending time with children, or volunteering for an organization. The data are from a U.S. national study of daily experiences, the overarching goal of which was to chart the day-to-day stressors and challenges that individuals face during middle adulthood.

From a wide-angle perspective, how much time do American adults spend giving to family members (parents, siblings, children, and other relatives) and to their communities (friends, neighbors, co-workers, and organizations)? The first step toward answering this question was to capture a wide array of giving experiences that encompassed both the quantity and quality of daily giving activities. During daily interviews, we asked respondents how much time they spent in the following activities: (1) providing anyone with informal assistance such as shopping or free babysitting; (2) providing anyone with emotional support such as comforting him or her, listening to personal problems, or giving advice; (3) doing things with their children, such as helping with homework, playing, eating meals, or watching television; and (4) volunteering at a community organization such as a church, hospital, or senior center.

Looking more closely at the individual differences in giving, we asked: What is the social demography of those who give to family and community? Our analysis allowed us to assess the extent to which sociodemographic factors such as gender, education, and marital status predicted how much time people contributed to a variety of family and community activities. Given the theme of this volume, we now take a close look at the impact of employment status and daily giving. We do this by first assessing the gross associations between employment and each type of giving. We then conduct more fine-grained descriptive analyses of individuals' profiles, based on a combination of their socioeconomic characteristics, in order to determine who is giving most in specific areas and in the total amount of time across all areas.

Methodology

Data for the present analyses came from the National Study of Daily Experiences (NSDE), one of the in-depth studies that are part of the National Survey of Midlife in the United States (MIDUS) carried out under the auspices of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Successful Midlife. Respondents in the NSDE were randomly selected from the MIDUS sample and received \$20 for their participation in the project. Of the 1,242 MIDUS respondents we attempted to contact, 1,031 agreed to participate, yielding a response rate of 83 percent. Respondents completed an average of seven of the eight interviews, resulting in a total of 7,221 daily interviews.

A comparison of the characteristics of the NSDE subsample and the MIDUS parent sample from which it was drawn revealed that the two samples were very similar in terms of age, marital status, and parenting status. The NSDE sample contained fewer minority respondents than were in the MIDUS sample, 9.7 percent and 12.2 percent, respectively. Individuals in the NSDE sample were on average slightly better educated than those in the MIDUS sample, with 62.3 percent of NSDE respondents and 60.8 percent of the MIDUS sample having thirteen or more years of education. Respondents for the present analysis were, on average, forty-seven years old; men were slightly older than women, but they had similar levels of education. Seventy-seven percent of the women and 85 percent of the men were married at the time of the study. Forty-seven percent of the households reported having at least one child present. The average family income was between \$50,000 and \$55,000.

Study Design

Over the course of eight consecutive evenings, respondents completed short telephone interviews about their daily experiences. On the final evening, respondents also answered several questions about their previous week. Data collection spanned an entire year (March 1996 to March 1997) and consisted of forty separate flights of interviews, with each flight representing the eight-day sequence of interviews from approximately thirty-eight respondents. The initiation of interview

flights was staggered across the days of the week to control for the possible confounding between day of study and day of week.

Measures

The daily telephone interview included questions about daily experiences in the previous twenty-four hours concerning time use, mood, physical symptoms, productivity, and daily stressors. Table 7-1 describes the measures of daily giving behaviors in family and community domains. Because respondents were interviewed over eight days,

TABLE 7-1. Domains and Dimensions Tapped by Daily Giving Measures

Domains	Descriptive Detail
FAMILY	
Time with Children	Summed number of hours and minutes per week spent doing things with children such as helping them with homework, playing with them, taking them places, or doing other things with them
Informal Help	Summed number of hours and minutes per week providing unpaid assistance such as free babysitting or help with shopping for family members (outside of their household)
Emotional Support	Summed number of hours and minutes per week providing emotional support such as comforting, listening to, or advising family members
COMMUNITY	
Volunteer Help	Summed number of hours and minutes per week doing formal volunteer work at a church, hospital, senior center, or any other organization.
Informal Help	Summed number of hours and minutes per week providing unpaid assistance such as free babysitting or help with shopping for friends, neighbors, co-workers, or others outside of the family
Emotional Support	Summed number of hours and minutes per week providing emotional support such as comforting, listening to, or advising friends, neighbors, co-workers, or others outside of the family

we averaged the first and last days of the interviews before computing the mean across the rest of the interviews. We did so to eliminate day-of-week bias in the average daily estimate. The actual quantity of weekly giving was estimated by summing the total amount of time each respondent gave each day across the entire week.

Results

The goal of our initial set of analyses was to present a broad description of the pattern of time our respondents contributed to several family and community domains. We analyzed how much time the entire sample spent per week in each of these domains, the percentage of the sample who spent *any* time in each of these domains, and how much time this subset of respondents contributed. On average, the entire sample reported spending 13.3 hours per week with their children, with close to 74 percent of the sample spending any time with children; 50 percent spent at least 7.3 hours, and 10 percent of the sample spent 40 hours during the week with their children. Respondents who reported *any* time with children spent close to 18 hours per week taking care of or interacting with children. These figures are based on the entire sample. Not surprisingly, the most important factor in spending time with children is whether there are children in the house. We will discuss this topic later in the chapter.

It is important to note that these estimates were much higher than estimates obtained from time budget studies in which respondents kept a log of all of their activities over a twenty-four-hour period. However, they were similar to results from studies that used average workday and nonworkday estimates of time use.¹⁷ We believe that the discrepancy between these telephone diary estimates and results from time budget studies had to do with our less restrictive estimate of time with children. Whereas time diary estimates count only time spent providing child care as the primary activity, our estimate included many secondary activities with children, such as eating meals and watching television together.

Our estimates of time spent providing informal help and emotional support to family members show that on average, respondents spent approximately 1.5 hours per week helping and supporting family members, with 10 percent of the sample spending at least 10 hours

supporting family members. However, fewer respondents gave informal help than gave emotional support. Among respondents who gave any support, they spent 8 hours per week contributing informal help and 3.3 hours giving emotional support.

Our findings regarding the amount of time respondents gave to the community show that on average, the entire sample spent between 45 minutes and 1 hour 45 minutes per week contributing to the community across these three domains, with 40 percent of the sample giving at least 1 hour and 10 percent of the sample giving 5.4 hours of their time to fellow workers and community members. Respondents were much more likely to have given emotional support to others than to have given informal and volunteer help. Among those who gave to their community, each week they spent an average of 3.6 hours volunteering for organizations, 3.4 hours providing informal help, and 2.5 hours giving emotional support to community members.

Across all of the categories of giving, our participants reported spending 22.04 ($SD = 24.13$) hours during the study week giving of themselves to their families and communities. Only 4 percent reported giving no time in any of the areas of giving, and 50 percent of the sample gave at least 14.35 hours, while 10 percent gave at least 50.75 hours of their time to others during the study week.

Sociodemographic Assessment of Contributing to Family and Community

The next set of analyses addresses who was most likely to have contributed *any* time to family and community. Table 7-2 brings together several sociodemographic characteristics as simultaneous predictors of whether respondents spent any time in each of the giving domains. The first row of odds ratios (that is, the likelihood of contributing any time) shows that respondents with higher levels of education were less likely to have given any informal help to family members, but they were more likely to have given emotional support to family members and to have contributed time to all three community domains. Married individuals were more likely to have spent time with children and to have engaged in volunteer work, but they were less likely to have contributed any informal help and emotional support to community members. Not surprisingly, respondents with more children in the home were more likely to have spent time with children, but they were also more likely to have contributed volunteer hours. The findings for

TABLE 7-2. Logistic Regressions of the Social Demography of People Who Give to Family and Community (Odds Ratios)

Predictor Variables	Family Domain			Community Domain		
	Any Time with Children	Any Informal Help	Any Emotional Support	Any Volunteer Help	Any Informal Help	Any Emotional Support
Education	1.05	.82*	1.25*	1.53*	1.24*	1.69*
Married (no = 0, yes = 1)	3.33*	1.26	1.06	1.61*	.74*	.62*
Number of Children at Home	9.16*	1.02	1.15	1.42*	1.17	.94
Gender (male = 0, female = 1)	1.62*	1.57*	1.36*	.89	.84*	2.12*
Employment Hours	.85*	.88*	.93	.96	.92	.98

N = 608

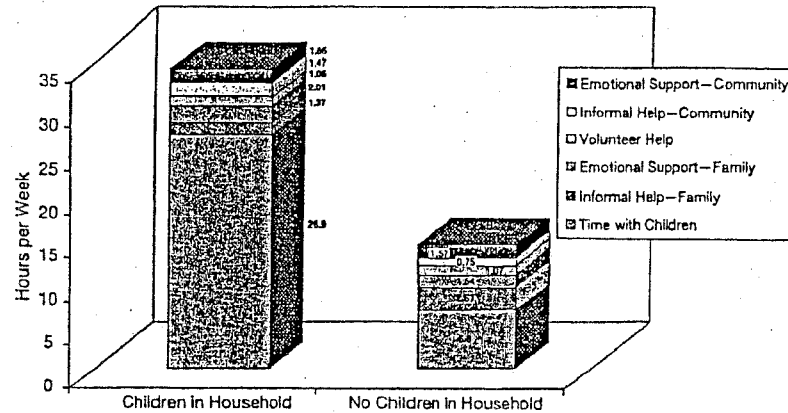
* *p* < .05

gender indicate that women were more likely not only to have spent some time in each of the family domains but also to have provided emotional support to community members. Men were more likely to have provided informal assistance to community members. Finally, respondents with more paid work hours were less likely to have spent any time taking care of children and providing informal help to family members.

Amount of Time Contributing to Specific Areas

Next we explored whether these demographic categories made a difference in how much time people gave of themselves. Results of these analyses are portrayed in Figures 7-1 through 7-4. The bars display the average amount of time across the study week that participants spent in each type of giving. Across all of the demographic categories, gender made the biggest difference. Figure 7-1 shows that women spent 12.44 more hours per week than men giving care, support, and assistance to family and community. Compared to men, women spent more time in each category of giving. Marital status also made a big difference in how much time people gave to others, as shown in Figure 7-2. Married individuals gave 8 hours more per week than individuals

FIGURE 7-3. Weekly Hours of Giving to Others Spent by Those with and Without Children in House

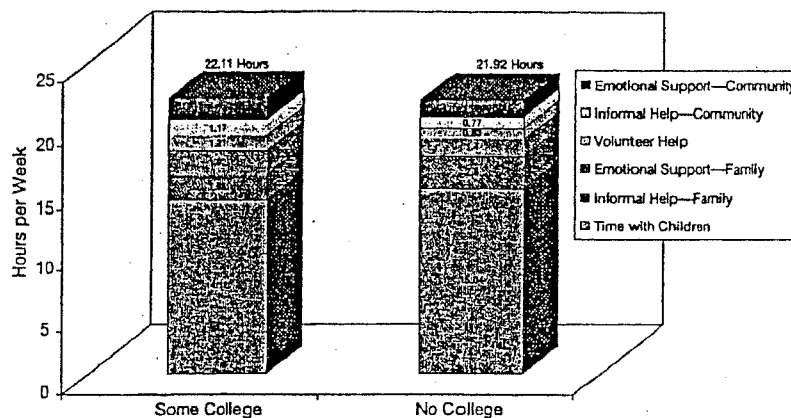


who were not married. The main difference was almost entirely due to time with children, whom married individuals were more likely to have had in their households. Interestingly, single respondents reported having given more emotional and informal assistance to co-workers and community members than married respondents.

Figure 7-3 compares respondents with children (i.e., less than 18 years) in the household with respondents without children in the home. Respondents with children at home spent 20 more hours per week providing for others than respondents without children; time spent with children actually accounts for this difference. One interesting difference was that respondents without children at home spent more time providing informal assistance to family members.

With regard to educational status, Figure 7-4 shows no difference between the total time that college-educated and non-college-educated respondents gave to others. However, college-educated participants contributed more time to their community, while non-college-educated participants gave more time to family members. The same pattern was observed when we divided the respondents by household income (above the national average and below the national average; see Figure 7-5). Those with higher income may have been able to pay for more assistance in caring for family members and thus provided less themselves while spending more time in the community. However,

FIGURE 7-4. Weekly Hours of Giving to Others by Education



resulting differences in income are only one of the several potential important mechanisms for how education may determine how people contribute their time. For example, higher education is also associated with better and more flexible working conditions. This may translate into more availability to participate in community activities. Indeed, future research should assess the multiple modes of social advantage that fosters how individuals spend their time. Finally, Figure 7-6 shows differences in giving by employment status. Employed participants

FIGURE 7-5. Weekly Hours of Giving to Others by Household Income

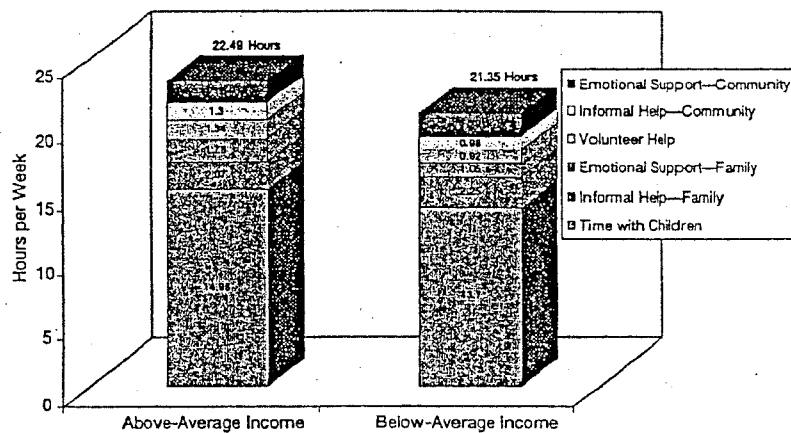
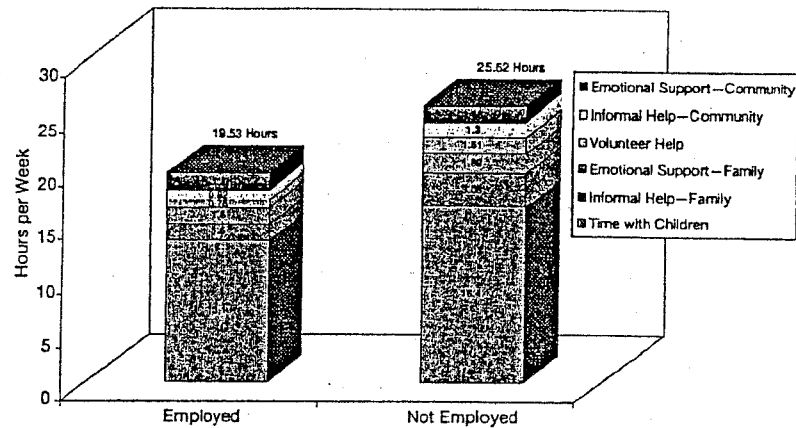


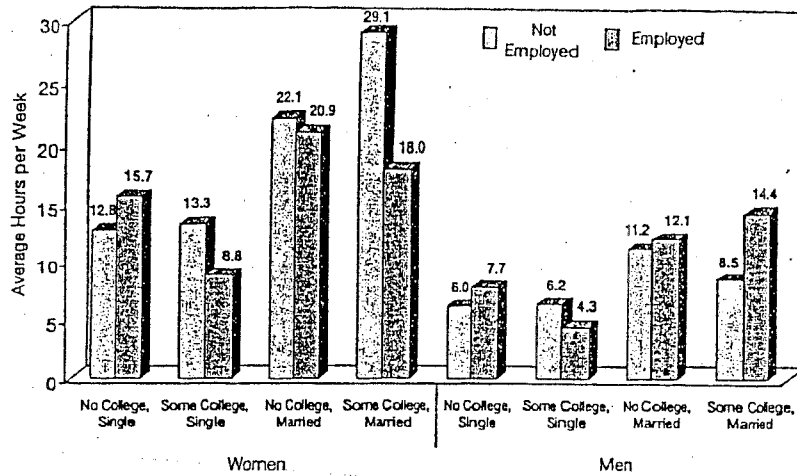
FIGURE 7-6. Weekly Hours of Giving to Others by Employment



spent 6.09 fewer hours during the week giving to others than did non-employed respondents. Much of the difference was due to differences in child care, informal family assistance, and formal volunteer time.

While these analyses provide an initial picture of the American social demography of giving, they do not provide a very detailed account of who was most likely to have given in specific areas. To refine our description, we investigated various participant profiles based on a combination of their social demographic characteristics. The results of these analyses are presented in Figures 7-7 through 7-13. Because one of our main goals for this chapter was to examine the interconnections between paid work and time spent contributing to family and community, the bars in the figures highlight differences in employment status. Our initial analyses showed that work hours played a role in whether or not people contributed to the family. The next set of analyses addressed how employment status might have affected the amount of time individuals contributed to family and community. For the following analyses, the sample was divided into sixteen mutually exclusive profiles based on employment status (employed, not employed), gender (male, female), level of education (no college, some college), and marital status (single, married). It is important to note that, due to limited sample size, we grouped divorced and widowed respondents into the single group and limited assessment of socioeconomic advantage to education. A series of analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were

FIGURE 7-7. Time with Children



conducted to detect differences between groups for each category of giving as well as the total for all giving.

Figure 7-7 shows the average amount of time respondents were engaged in some activity with their children throughout the week. As compared with other groups, married women outside of the workforce, regardless of their level of education, spent more time on average engaging in activities with their children. In contrast, married employed men with some college education spent more time on average in activities with their children than did single employed men with similar levels of education, who spent the least amount of time with children during the study week.

Figure 7-8 shows the average amount of time respondents spent providing practical assistance to other family members during the week. Among women, employment status made a large difference in this category of giving. College-educated women outside the paid workforce spent an average of 2.5 more hours per week providing assistance to family members than did their employed counterparts. Single employed men with no college education provided the least amount of time in helping family, averaging 23 minutes per week, and married nonemployed men provided the most time assisting family members.

Figure 7-9 shows the results for the average amount of time respon-

FIGURE 7-8. Providing Practical Assistance to Other Family Members

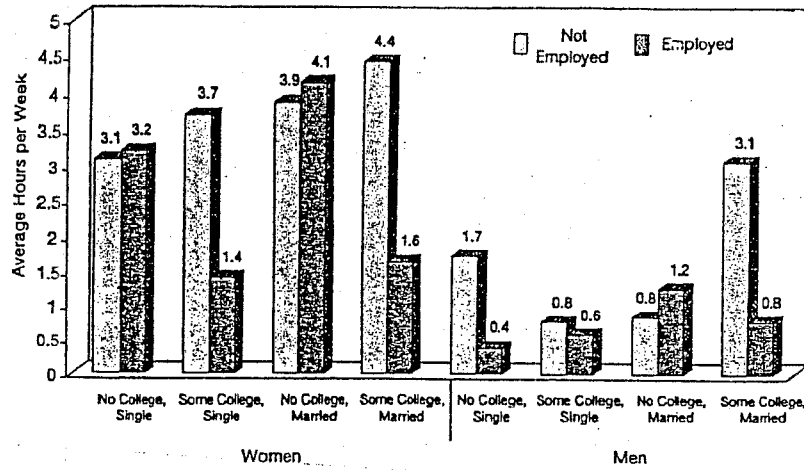
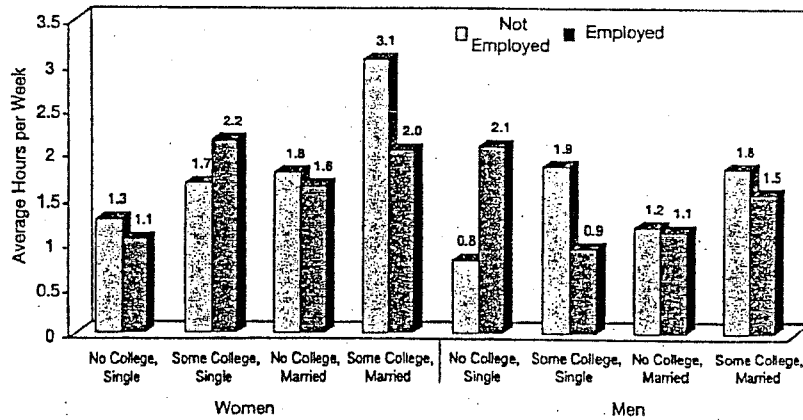


FIGURE 7-9. Providing Emotional Support to Family Members



dents spent providing emotional support to family members. Again, married women with higher levels of education who were not participating in the paid workforce provided the greatest amount of emotional support to family members (3 hours per week, on average). This provision of emotional support was approximately 1 to 2 hours more than that provided by all other groups. In contrast, among men, single employed respondents with no college education provided the most emotional support.

FIGURE 7-10. Providing Practical Assistance to Their Communities

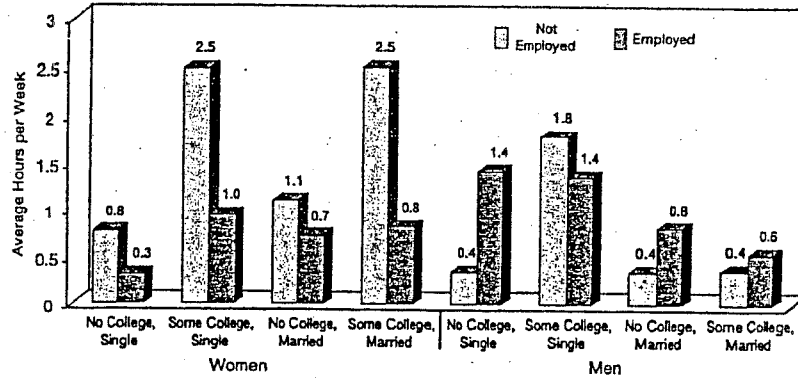
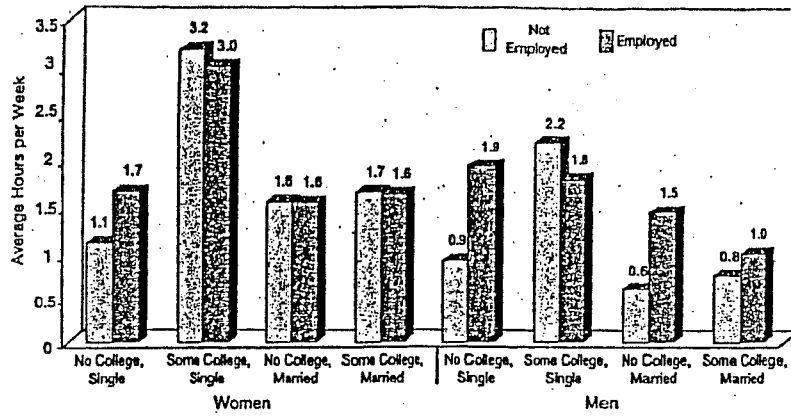


Figure 7-10 shows the results for the average amount of time respondents reported having provided practical assistance to those in their communities such as friends and co-workers. In comparison with other women, college-educated nonemployed women, regardless of marital status, spent an average of 1.5 more hours per week assisting co-workers and community members. Married women with some college education who were outside the workforce provided the greatest amount of time on average (2 hours 30 minutes), which was statistically greater than the average amount of time provided by more highly educated married men, whether employed or not (employed, 33 minutes; not employed, 23 minutes). Single women with higher levels of education were a close second in terms of average time committed to informal help (2 hours 29 minutes). Single employed women with lower levels of education allocated the least amount of time overall to this category of giving, with just under 20 minutes per week. For men, marital status appeared to be an important factor in this area: single men (with the exception of nonemployed non-college-educated ones) contributed almost twice as much time to assisting others than did married men.

Figure 7-11 shows the results for the average amount of time respondents spent each week providing emotional support to others in their communities. Compared to other groups, single women with some college education, regardless of their employment status, provided the greatest amount of emotional support to co-workers and

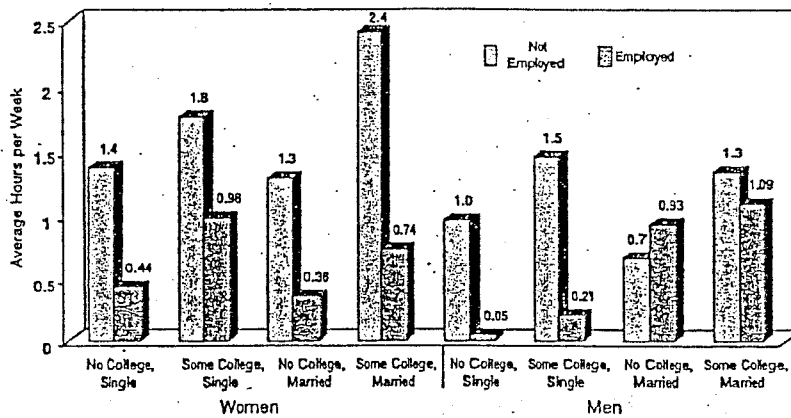
FIGURE 7-11. Providing Emotional Support to Their Community



community members. These women spent significantly more time giving emotional support than did most of the married male groups. Single nonemployed men with some college education provided the third largest amount of time for the provision of emotional support to others in their communities, averaging 2 hours 12 minutes.

Figure 7-12 shows the results for the average amount of time respondents reported volunteering at community organizations. For men and women, employment status made a consistent difference in the amount of volunteer time. Nonemployed married women with

FIGURE 7-12. Volunteering in the Community

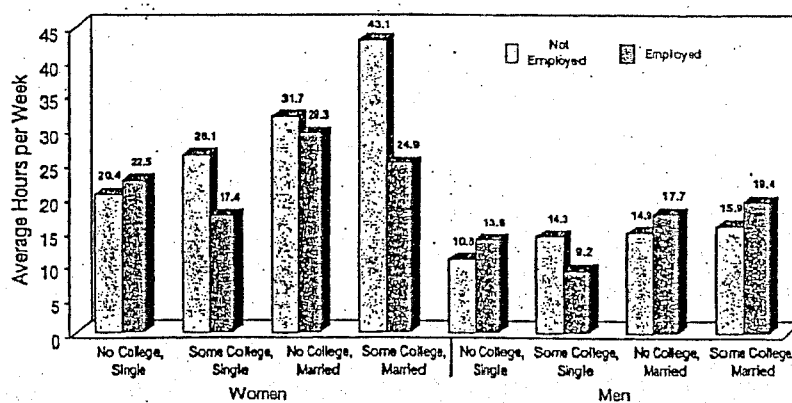


higher levels of education spent the greatest amount of time, on average, volunteering their services in the community. Members of this group were statistically different from employed married women, regardless of their level of education. Among men, college-educated nonemployed men spent the most time volunteering.

Total Amount of Time Contributing to Family and Community

Figure 7-13 provides an illustration of the overall amount of time respondents reported having provided any of the helping activities, on average, for the week. Married women not in the workforce spent the greatest amount of time, on average, caring for others (those with some college, 43 hours per week; those with no college, 32 hours per week). No significant differences were detected within the male groupings. When we excluded the amount of time spent providing child care (not shown in this figure), which accounted for most of the overall giving time, we found that nonemployed married women with higher levels of education still provided the greatest amount of care to others (on average, 14 hours per week), as compared to other groups. Among males, the groups that provided the least amount of time to overall giving were those who were married, were not employed, and had high levels of education. Other male groups were fairly similar in their overall giving patterns. The least amount of time, on average, for women

FIGURE 7-13. Total Time Giving



(6 hours 42 minutes) was provided by employed single individuals who had no college education.

CONCLUSION

The results presented in this chapter shed some light on who is spending the most time attending to the welfare of family, friends, and members of their communities. By focusing our social science microscope on giving experiences within the domains of family and community, we can begin to understand the sociodemographic patterns of their work, family, and community lives. Consistent with previous research, these findings showed giving behaviors to be multidimensional, weaving an intricate tapestry of work life, family life, and community life.¹⁸ Furthermore, by widening the angle of our lens, we were able to capture the more familial aspects of giving and to provide what we believe to be a broader and more refined perspective on what it means to contribute to society. Finally, we showed that the availability of time on a daily basis and throughout the week was clearly associated with patterns of giving.¹⁹ Our findings supported Robinson and Godbey's contention that the degree of discretion people have in regard to socially responsible behavior is associated with certain social and temporal factors.²⁰

By examining the demographic evidence, we can create a composite of who is most likely to provide *any* care within the respective domains of family and community. Based on the results from Table 7-2, the person most likely to provide practical help to family members is a woman who works fewer hours and has a lower level of education. On the other hand, the typical person providing practical help to those in the workplace and community domains appears to be a single man with a higher level of education. Furthermore, more highly educated women are most likely to provide emotional support to relatives, and those who are single are most likely to provide that support to members of the community. The person most likely to volunteer in the community is a more highly educated married woman with children. Finally, our findings confirmed those of previous research and suggested that married mothers who work fewer hours are most likely to spend time with their children.

A slightly different pattern emerges when we consider the *amount of time* people spend in each of these caring domains (see Figures 7-5 through 7-11). Women are clearly likely to spend far more time than men in providing care. In addition, employment status appears to play an important role in individuals who provide care. However, the association between employment status and provision of care depends on the domain of care, level of education, and gender. Among college-educated women, those who are not employed are likely to spend more time than their employed counterparts in caring for family members and community. For women with no college education, employment status was less of a factor. Among men, those who are employed tended to provide more care than their nonemployed counterparts. Finally, our sixteen sociodemographic profiles suggest that nonemployed, college-educated, married women are likely to provide the most care, while employed, college-educated, single men are likely to provide the least care. The difference between these two profiles is almost 34 hours per week.

This pattern of findings indicates that social roles and the social connections arising from those roles shape how people will be able to provide for others. Those with fewer resources and fewer social connections outside of the family provide care and comfort to their family members. Those with greater resources and more expansive social networks, through work and their children's activities, are more outwardly focused in their provision of care. But, as Rossi has pointed out, caution must be taken in how we interpret family-focused versus community-focused socially responsible behaviors.²¹ There is a tendency in American society to place greater value on socially responsible activities that are more publicly visible, such as participating in the political process or making large financial contributions. However, we must not underestimate the value to society of the woman who cares for an elderly parent or the man in the neighborhood who is always there to jump-start a car or help change a flat tire. These are the Good Samaritans of our communities who work silently, providing for others with little acclaim or public recognition. Furthermore, we must bear in mind that those with fewer resources must work all the harder to have extra to give. Those with fewer resources must spend a greater portion of their time trying to make ends meet.²² Therefore, like the poor widow who casts but a farthing into the treasury (Luke 21:2;

Mark 12:42), those with less are giving not from an abundance but from a limited amount of time, money, and energy left over after meeting their families' basic needs.

Spending more hours in the workplace detracts from the number of hours we have available to spend with our children, provide care to our families, and contribute to our communities. However, we can and do make the most of the time available to us. The question then arises: How does public and organizational policy support working families presently? And would policy changes alter the findings of this chapter? Clearly there is a wide range of workplace policies that could facilitate the ability to care for others, including flexible work schedules, sick-child care, and support for workers who need to take time to care for other family members. Less common are explicit policies that allow for nonmedical care for families and contributions to community. An evaluation of the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) provides some evidence concerning the impact of public policy on caring behaviors.²³

The FMLA covers a portion of the U.S. workforce by requiring certain employers to provide up to twelve weeks of unpaid leave, full or intermittent, to employees in cases of personal illness or when caring for a family member. The Department of Labor compared usage of the FMLA between 1995 and 2000 and found that the percentage of employees taking advantage of the leave provisions increased over that time period (1.2 percent in 1995 to 1.9 percent in 2000) and that those reporting a need to take leave but the inability to afford one had decreased from 3.1 percent in 1995 to 2.4 percent in 2000. Respondents who took leave indicated positive effects on their ability to care for family members (78.7 percent) and to attend to their own well-being or that of another family member (70.1 percent). Furthermore, the study shows that employers not covered under the FMLA requirements have gradually increased leave benefits to their employees, perhaps as a means of being competitive in the labor market.

However, there are gaps in the utilization of leave benefits, according to the authors of the FMLA study. The reason for not taking advantage of leave policies most commonly cited was the inability to afford the unpaid leave (77.6 percent). In the 2000 survey, 87.8 percent of respondents who needed to take a leave but did not indicated that they "would have taken leave if some/additional pay had been re-

ceived." Nearly two-thirds of those taking a leave (65.8 percent) received at least partial pay during the leave period. In addition, there were other important reasons provided for not taking a leave, including fear of losing their job (31.9 percent), concern about a leave being detrimental to advancement (42.6 percent), and concern over losing seniority (15.1 percent).

A gender gap is also apparent among those who have utilized the leave provisions, with 58.1 percent of leave-takers being female. Of those with young children, there was a significant difference between women taking a leave (75.8 percent) and men taking a leave (45.1 percent). Levine and Pittinsky suggest that it is often the corporate or organizational culture that covertly discourages men from utilizing leave opportunities.²⁴ However, Pleck contends that men take advantage of "informal" leaves, in the form of sick or vacation time, to a greater extent than is typically reported.²⁵ Finally, those who are covered and eligible to take a leave under the FMLA provisions tended to be more highly educated as compared to those not covered, with 60.2 percent having graduated from college. Those covered also have significantly more household income as compared with those not covered.²⁶

Clearly, the FMLA report demonstrates that public policies providing for leaves to care for ill family members can help to ease the burden of balancing work and family during a crisis. However, the FMLA is only a beginning in terms of the policies needed for working Americans to address family needs. Even with the FMLA, employees fear losing their jobs or jeopardizing opportunities for advancement if they take a leave. Many cannot afford the reduction in wages, and men are less likely to take advantage of such leave policies. For public and organizational policies to be effective in supporting family care, there needs to be a simultaneous change in organizational environments to better reflect an acceptance of leave utilization. Employees, especially men, must alter their attitudes to reflect a willingness to use leave opportunities for care of children and other relatives. Moreover, policies need to be developed so that working Americans can contribute to their communities.

Postscript: After numerous e-mails, faxes, messages on answering machines from work and home, and more than a few cups of coffee

during Saturday morning meetings, the PTA fund-raiser mentioned at the beginning of this chapter went off without a hitch. Many contributed to the event's success in their own way. The students provided the entertainment. Various parents baked desserts. Those who were able moved tables and chairs and cleaned up afterward. Some people wrote out checks, and others gave of themselves. The end result, of course, totaled more than the funds raised.