

# Employment

Affects Our  
Health & Happiness



## What is an Ideal Job?

One MIDUS study defined the ideal job as including three or more economic resources:

- ▶ adequate income
- ▶ a pension
- ▶ health insurance
- ▶ job stability

and two or more psychological assets:

- ▶ **high control:** choosing your own tasks at work and deciding how to accomplish them
- ▶ **low demands:** having enough time to get your work done with few interruptions or competing demands
- ▶ **supportive co-workers.**

Women, people over 65, minorities, and those with less education were more likely to have less than “ideal” jobs.

[Grzywacz & Dooley, 2003]



*Find a job you like and you add  
five days to every week.*

- H. Jackson Brown

# MIDUS

Midlife in the United States

A National Study of Health & Well-Being

## Thank you so much for your contributions to MIDUS!

*Your participation in MIDUS has helped us gather important information about working Americans, showing that employment is more than just a way to earn a living. The quality of our jobs and how work demands interact with family responsibilities influence many aspects of our lives, including our health and happiness.*

*We've been asking questions about employment since the study began in 1995, but have not yet shared any results about this topic that touches most of our lives. We hope you find something of interest in these pages, as our small thanks for the time and effort that you have given to this important national study.*

*Sincerely,*

Carol D. Ryff, Director  
MIDUS National Study  
of Health & Well-Being



## How Does Job Quality Affect Our Health?

- ▶ Workers in ideal jobs were less depressed.
- ▶ Workers in less than ideal jobs reported worse physical health.
- ▶ Middle aged men in jobs that required little physical activity or sitting for long periods of time were more likely to be obese.
- ▶ Workers who felt their jobs were so unstable that they worried about losing them, and reported the same worries 10 years later, also reported being in significantly worse overall health. The estimated impact of worrying was greater than the effects of actually losing a job.
- ▶ Workers who reported unfair treatment (such as getting the jobs no one wanted, being too closely supervised, or seeing less qualified people promoted first) had higher blood pressure, even if they had good self-esteem. Women who had supportive co-workers, though, were less affected.

[Grzywacz & Dooley, 2003; Choi, 2010; Burgard, 2009; Ford, 2013]



# Balancing Work & Family

## Conflicts

**MIDUS** was one of the first national studies to assess how well work demands and family responsibilities fit together:



### Work Sometimes Conflicts with Family Life:

- ▶ Work can make us too tired to do things at home.
- ▶ Problems at work can make us irritable at home.



### Family Life Sometimes Conflicts with Work:

- ▶ Problems at home can distract us at work and reduce the amount of effort we put into our job.

### What is Involved:

- ▶ Workers with a demanding job, an unsupportive family, or who argued more with their spouse were more likely to have conflicts between work and family.
- ▶ Workers with an uncaring or unreliable spouse were more likely to have a family life that conflicted with work.

### Effects on Our Health:

- ▶ Workers whose jobs conflicted with family were sad more often, had worse physical health, and were more obese.
- ▶ Workers whose family life conflicted with work were more likely to have multiple chronic health problems (such as diabetes or heart trouble).

[Grzywacz, 2000; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000]

### Family Problems are Worse

- ▶ Events that increase conflict in one area can backlash to cause problems in the other, but family troubles had twice the impact on work as work problems had on family.
- ▶ This suggests that families are better at adapting to conflict when work demands increase, but work situations are less flexible in responding to family issues.

[Rotondo & Kincaid, 2008]



### Night Work Causes More Conflict

- ▶ **Night workers reported more conflicts between work and family.**
- ▶ However, only night workers with children under 14 reported that family responsibilities distracted them at work. This may be because younger children are more dependent on their parents than older children.
- ▶ Only white collar night workers reported being more tired and irritable at home due to work. This may be because they are likely to have sporadic night shifts, so do not adjust to its disruptions as well as blue collar employees who routinely work nights.
- ▶ **Night workers reported more marital disagreements and a higher likelihood of leaving their spouses.**
- ▶ However, older night workers reported fewer problems, which may indicate that those in long term relationships had found ways to adjust to being without their partners in the evening. [Davis, 2008]



*I believe that being successful means having a balance of success stories across the many areas of your life. You can't truly be considered successful in your business life if your home life is in shambles.*  
- Zig Ziglar

## Contrary to Stereotypes, Mothers Make Good Workers



Stereotypes label fathers as hard working breadwinners supporting their families, but characterize mothers as more involved with their kids than their jobs. This seems to have resulted in employers awarding fathers and penalizing mothers.

Research has shown that when compared to fathers, mothers receive lower wages, fewer promotions, and more negative evaluations at work.

**MIDUS data was used to challenge these stereotypes, by asking whether fathers really are better workers. Results showed that mothers and fathers were similar in their pro-work behaviors:**

- ▶ They put similar amounts of thought and effort into their job.
- ▶ Family responsibilities reduced their work efforts by a similar degree.
- ▶ They both suffered from a lack of sleep due to family activities, even though mothers did more household chores than fathers.



▶ Both mothers and fathers said that providing for their families motivated them to work harder, suggesting that fathers are no longer the only breadwinners.

**In two instances, mothers outperformed fathers:**

- ▶ Mothers were more engaged: they got so involved in their work that they lost track of time more often.
- ▶ Mothers worked harder: they were busy trying to get things done more often than fathers. [Kmec, 2011]

## Benefits

**MIDUS** was the first national study to show that combining work & family can be beneficial:

### Work Can Benefit Family Life:

- ▶ Having a good day on the job can make us a more interesting companion at home.
- ▶ Skills learned at work can help us at home.



### Family Life Can Benefit Work:

- ▶ Relaxing at home can help us feel ready to return to work.
- ▶ Our family's respect can make us more confident at work.
- ▶ Talking with family can help us deal with problems at work.



### What is Involved:

Work benefiting family was more likely among jobs that:

- ▶ had more variety (learning new things more often)
- ▶ had more control (choosing your own tasks)
- ▶ required more complex knowledge or more social skills
- ▶ required more strength, or work in difficult environments.

Workers with a caring spouse were more likely to have a family life that benefited their job.

### Effects on Our Health:

- ▶ Workers whose family life benefited work had fewer chronic diseases, better mental health, and more well-being (e.g., strong relationships & a sense of purpose).
- ▶ Workers whose jobs benefited their family had better physical and mental health.

[Grzywacz, 2000;

Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Grzywacz & Butler, 2005]



# Career Success May Not Buy Happiness

## What if you want a better job?

Although people may want an ideal job that benefits their family and enhances their health, the stress of trying to climb the ladder of success can sometimes be counterproductive:



► Workers who felt they had little control over their work situation, but put a lot of thought and effort into it anyway, were more likely to be in higher status and better paying jobs ten years later, but reported that work had a negative effect on their physical and mental health.

► Workers who felt they had little control over their work situation but were not motivated to improve it, did not get better jobs, but did report that work had a positive effect on their physical and mental health ten years later.

► **This may mean that when we have little control over improving our job situation, it may be better for physical and emotional health to focus our ambitions on improving other aspects of life.** [Shane & Heckhausen, 2012]



## Do We Have Your Current Contact Information?

Please help us stay in touch. Send updates to your address, phone(s), and/or email(s) to:

## MIDUS—Midlife in the United States

Institute on Aging  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
2245 MSC, 1300 University Ave.  
Madison, WI 53706-1532

**Phone:**  
608.262.2056  
**Email:**  
aging@ssc.wisc.edu



## Money may protect us when bad things happen...

► Using information from twins to compare genetic and environmental impacts on well-being, MIDUS investigators found that wealth (higher income, more assets) can help maintain how satisfied people feel with their lives when they are confronted with negative outside events.

► For instance, a collision would not likely lessen life satisfaction for those who have enough money to replace a damaged car. The opposite might be true for those who need the car to get to work, but can't afford to replace it.



## ... however, income seems to be only loosely tied to overall satisfaction with life:

► Those who felt they had enough money to pay their bills and meet their needs, and who felt in control of their lives (their finances, work situation, health, relationships, etc.), reported being more satisfied with life, *even if they had a low income.*

► This suggests that there may be large individual differences between what people earn and how much of it they want to

spend. Those who want more than they can afford may feel pressured to spend their entire paycheck, so may think their income is inadequate. Similarly, those who cannot satisfy their material desires but feel they lack control over improving their finances may be unhappy, no matter how much money they make. [Johnson & Krueger, 2006]



Spring 2014

Publications about employment, including those summarized here (indicated in brackets), can be found on our website:

**MIDUS**  
Midlife in the United States

**MIDUS.wisc.edu**