

Changing Lives of American Families

Started in 1968, the ISR Panel Study of Income Dynamics has followed a representative sample of U.S. families and their lineal descendants for almost 40 years. Funded primarily by the National Science Foundation, the study now includes more than 8,000 families and 65,000 individuals. Recent findings have revealed an increase in income volatility and a widening gap between the rich and the poor. A special part of the study focuses on families with children under the age of 18. Funded mainly by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, this part of the study includes a wealth of information about how children spend their time.

For more information, visit <http://psidonline.isr.umich.edu/>



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TIME, MONEY AND WHO DOES THE LAUNDRY

On an average day, American schoolchildren spend nine hours and 43 minutes sleeping, six hours and 29 minutes in school and two hours and 18 minutes watching television. That's according to the time diaries children and their parents filled out in 2002 and 2003 as part of the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, conducted by the U-M Institute for Social Research.

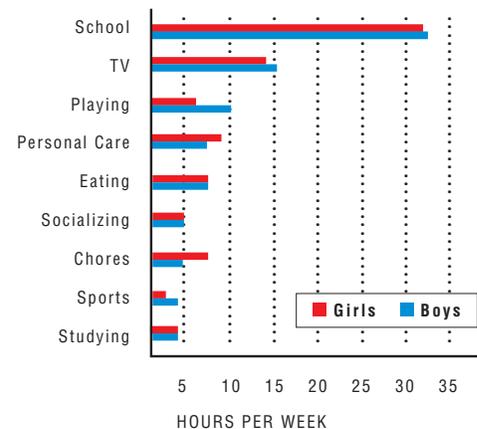
While the basics have remained much the same over the last couple of decades, the survey shows that for many children and their families, the rhythm of life has changed considerably. Younger children have less free time today and spend more time in school and organized childcare.

The study shows that girls spend more time doing housework than they do playing, while boys spend about 30

percent less time doing household chores than girls and more than twice as much time playing.

According to study director Frank Stafford, girls are also less likely than boys to get paid for doing housework. A recent analysis of data on 3,000 children between ages 10 and 17 shows that boys are up to 15 percent more likely than girls of the same age to get an allowance for doing household chores.

Average Time U.S. Children Ages 6-17 Spent on Activities, 2002-03

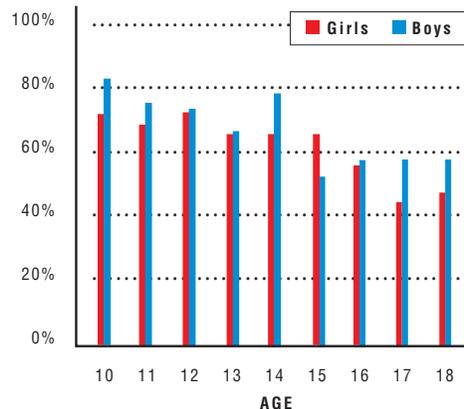


The story continues into adulthood, according to Stafford. "In 1968, married women between the ages of 25 and 64 did an average of 2,000 hours of housework a year – basically as much time as a full-time job," says Stafford. "Today, working women do an average of 25 hours a week of housework – that's about 1,000 hours a year."

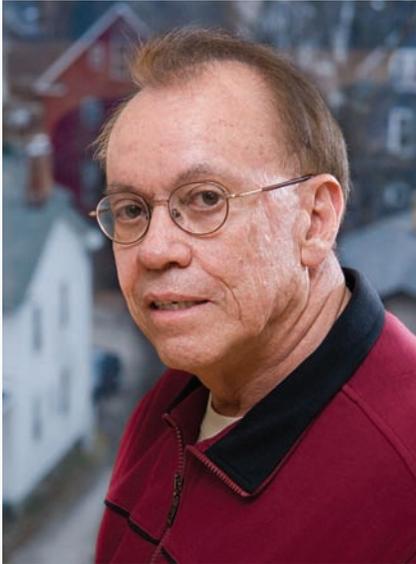
The amount of housework men do has also changed. Instead of doing about 3.5 hours a week, they're now up to about 7 hours a week. But that's still less than a third of the time working women spend.

Along with the continuing gender differences in the amount of housework done by boys and girls, this may be a sign that the more things change, the more they stay the same.

Percent of Girls/Boys Getting Allowances for Doing Chores



FRANK P. STAFFORD
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Q&A with Frank P. Stafford

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Q. *The Panel Study of Income Dynamics is now the longest-running panel study in the world. You've been following up to four generations of the original study families. If you had to identify one main insight from this uniquely long-term look at human behavior, what would it be?*

A. People's lives change more than most of us might think. The study shows that there's a great deal of volatility over time in almost every aspect of life – income, employment, marital status, living arrangements, time use, even weight! And over the years, the study shows that these changes have become more dramatic. The degree of volatility is much greater in the last 10 years than it ever was. Job tenure, for example, has become a lot shorter today than it was in the '70s or '80s, and the more job turnover people experience, the more likely they are to experience health problems, divorce, moves and other major life changes.

Q. *How does the study assess economic well-being?*

A. When the study began, its traditional focus was on income. But over the years, we've realized that income is just one important element in economic well-being. We've also realized that the elements contributing to economic health are not as closely tied together as most people think. For example, among families in the top income group, many don't have pensions. Others haven't accumulated much wealth – they've made a lot of money but they've spent it instead of saving it. There are some families who are in the top income group because they have multiple earners who pool resources. And there are even some families in the top income group who don't have health insurance! So it turns out that economic well-being involves a lot more than just income. To be okay economically, families have a lot to juggle.

Q. *What have been the most important findings from the study?*

A. Early on, the founder of the study, ISR economist James Morgan, discovered that although about the same percentage of the population lived in poverty year after year, the identity of those people changed. In other words, people moved in and out of poverty. There wasn't a "culture of poverty" in which the same families stayed poor for generations. At first, this kind of mobility makes it seem as if America really is a land of opportunity, where people do move up – or down – the income ladder. But recently we've been able to look at intergenerational patterns of change in families. And we have found there's a great deal of carry-over in some areas; there's a lot less movement than we thought we'd see. The earnings of today's male boomers, for example, are the same as their dads' earnings when their dads were the same age. So in a way, the more things change, the more they stay the same.

Q. *What's coming up for the study?*

A. We're going into the field again in 2007. We'll be collecting what we call "core" data on health, wealth, income and jobs, but we'll also be doing some new things. One of these is that we'll be collecting information on early childhood health using a health history calendar to see whether health problems in early childhood carry over into adulthood, and if so, how. We'll also be conducting a follow-up to the Child Development Supplement, looking at about 1,000 young adults ages 18-22 to look at the transition to adulthood. Then, starting in the fall of 2007 and through the spring of 2008, we'll be collecting time-diary information for the third time from teenagers in the study. This should be really interesting because we'll then be able to look at changes from earlier groups of teens in terms of how they're doing and the ways they spend their time.