

Society affected the
work life balance
sociology essay



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The argument of how an individual's work/life interfaces can affect their social life and standing within a community has long been a sociological concern. Sociologists have been concerned with the ways in which an individual's participation in work can shape other institutions, such as social relationships, community participation, identities along with the influence it can have on values and beliefs. How society's individuals manage a work/life balance has also been a sociological concern. Clark (2000) defines balance as "satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict". This report shall attempt to explore how the connections amongst work activity and 'community' participation and how the links between domestic divisions of labour and the labour market can transform how an individual balances their participation in work and their social self.

To avoid social isolation, individuals need to have the feeling of belonging and included in some kind of institution, be it a family group or to form a community link through work (Flum, 2001). Finding the balance of combining such important institutions can prove difficult for some and this report shall examine the impact this can have on an individual's social self, with the wider community and within their personal relationships.

The way we work is changing fast, and can be seen to be the result of advancements in new technologies, changes in employment legislation and an increasingly competitive and connected global world. Not only has there been a change in work and working life, a change in life outside of work can also be seen to have changed within contemporary society. A change in family units and structures, reduced leisure time and community participation and a change in the way individuals spend their leisure time. An

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increase in '24' hour activities has also both affected the way work can affect an individual, both for the good and for the bad.

There have been great changes in the British economy, with a move from major manufacturing into a growth of service sector employment and the expansion of part-time employment. Such expansion can be seen to attribute to the rise in opportunities for married women, with children, who comprise almost 45% of the British labour market, taking low-paid and part-time employment. Despite equal pay and anti-discrimination legislation, a gap between earning and discriminatory practices can still exist within the workplace and individuals within it. Middle-class white men are arguably the most common social group to be over represented in high level jobs, such as management and business owners, while women, ethnic minorities, elderly and youth and individuals from lower classes are more likely to perform low skilled and low paid jobs, such as in the service industry, retail or care (Castells, 2000). Although they experience difference in terms of job role, some similarity can be seen. This similarity often comes in the structure or demands a job may come with, and the way that these impacts on the way individuals can manage their work/life balance.

Factors such as the advancement in technology have increased the expectation and need for fast responses and increase in constant availability from workers and lead to increase pressure on employees. It can be seen that the UK has the longest working hours compared to the rest of Europe, and the average number of hours worked per day has remained steady, but the number of employees working more than 48 hours has increased in the past ten years. A rise in the number of hours being work, it can be argued <https://assignbuster.com/society-affected-the-work-life-balance-sociology-essay/>

that the demands of work begin to dominate life and a sense of work-life imbalance follows (Guest 2001).

Work in this instance is being defined as paid employment, but it is also important to remember that many individuals also take part in unpaid work. These can include extra unpaid hours, travelling to and from work (commuting) or in fact the roles and responsibilities of some work require constant communication, via email, phone calls and other technological communication tools via the development of the internet, is said to have profound implications for the organization of economic activity and for increasing productivity (Castells, 2001) which can be seen as a reason as to why the home and work boundary can see to have become very vague. Much interest into the definitions of work has come from the rise in occupations that allow individuals to complete their work in none 'traditional' forms. For example rather than travelling into a communal office or destination, many roles and tasks can be completed independently and as a result there had been a rise in employees working from home. This essay shall attempt to uncover the impact that such a shift in definitions and positions of work has had on the both completing jobs roles successfully as well as maintaining a personal and social identity within the wider community.

Richard Sennett (1998) stated that new forms of work can become destroyed. New working systems and types of occupation can in fact lead to an imbalance between the tools and value that social individuals hold to create a successful working life, and those that are required to maintain a stable family and social life have also changed, Sennett noted this as the ' <https://assignbuster.com/society-affected-the-work-life-balance-sociology-essay/>

Corrosion of character'. The new working patterns that have been created have changed the rhythms of working life and the concept of the fixed working day have declined for many individuals, and as hours have become more varied and flexible, so must the availability and commitment of the individuals who hold these positions. This change in schedules and lifestyle with ultimately have an effect on how well workers can participate in wider society or maintain that work/life balance.

Focus on patterns of work life balance are often seen to focus on the imbalance that members of society face trying to maintain both a work life and social life. Attempting to maintain healthy relationships, both at home and in the workplace and a pressure to decide between attempting to progress within an individual's chosen career and maintain a positive life outside of work.

Throughout his work Sennett attempts to look at how the act of capitalism had changed. Throughout his work he draws on the work of past writers such as Weber and argues that although the new flexible, competitive workplace gave workers a new sense of mobility, choice and freedom to 'control' their work schedule, it ultimately has not delivered such promises. Instead it has replaced the existing work life culture with a new society with workplaces that are without stability, routine and an environment that encourages self-determination and risk but also provides disorientation and produces uncertainty for employees. Sennett recognises that this 'chaos' denies workers a sense of self or 'frame of reference' by which to conduct their social life and social self.

Family units and communities can be seen as the initial institutions for social integration. In times of social change, for example from agricultural to industrial/industrial to post-industrial/national to global, families and communities have remained a constant institution that has helped with promoting and maintaining a sense of social cohesion. Along with providing a basis for its members, families can also be seen as an important tool for teaching the next generation how to cope with such social change and the adult world of work. As the family provide this foundation, it can be argued when such 'work' changes in the family unit and wider community they are a part of can be put under stress. Staines and Pleck (1983) state those working late nights, weekends, every changing shift patterns or any other 'disruptive' work patterns can make managing and scheduling sufficient family time and leisure activities difficult. Working shift patterns that unsettle family life activities can have a long standing and somewhat negative effect on the level of marital happiness and also the overall satisfaction of family life.

Arguments surrounding the work-life interface have primarily been concerned with how family members are able to balance work and home life activities, primarily with how working mothers are able to balance their work and childcare responsibilities. Contemporary arguments concerning the work life balance can be seen to have shifted from such a view to how society has changed and developed and how such changes have influenced a work life balance. A change in society has led to a change in how companies and organisations have adapted employees working arrangements to be compatible with such social change and new responsibilities and lifestyles.

Workers, who have chosen flexible working hours or have chosen non-permanent agency work, are seen to have more control over maintaining a successful working and private life balance. This is achievable by having more control and to ability to create a work schedule structure that allows them to work around childcare or other domestic responsibilities that they have. Such agency work or self-arranged tasks do come at a price. Giving up company benefits, socialising with other employees, having employees' rights or job security are sacrifices that working from home or agency workers have to make (Lambert 1999).

Flexible hours and the rise in individuals working from home are seen to be practiced to organise time around working time or domestic responsibilities. Flexible and working from home can be seen to be practiced to help to balance domestic responsibilities or to complete an ever increasing volume of work. Those who participate in part time work, or maintain a low status within the workplace are seen to avoid high levels of stress commonly associated with full time occupation, and as a result are able to care and maintain their family household and associated workload without any burden or stress (Ginn and Sandall 1997: 415). As mentioned previously the members of a family unit who participate in such forms of work are women. By allowing women to participate in work as well as maintain a successful family lifestyle, can in fact make up for the heavy or unsociable workload of the male member of a family.

Longer working hours for many organisations can be seen to a rise in 'new' forms of occupations. As individuals can be seen to be living and working a '24' hour lifestyle, there has been a rise in the expansion of jobs that can be <https://assignbuster.com/society-affected-the-work-life-balance-sociology-essay/>

seen as personal care and consumer services to cater for such employees (Perrons, 2002). '24' hours supermarkets and the rise in request for out of hour's doctors' surgeries can all be attributed to the rise in new and flexible working hours as well as creating new and expanding job roles.

It can also be seen that a change in the work life balance can also be of benefit to organisations and companies, as a shift into new policies or procedure of work could lead to a rise in productivity and profits and can help companies to respond to any new and developing consumer needs more effectively. The Employment Act was updated in 2003 to include more benefits to assist employees and employers alike with managing the demands of a successful work life balance. Reforming policies such as increased maternity and paternity leave helps to encourage and support employees maintain a healthy relationship with their working life and family life. (REFERNECE)

Research by the Institute of Employment Studies (DATE) looked into workplace policies that are in place to allow employees to create a successful work life balance. Throughout research, there was a noticeable trend in the resistance of taking up such policies, there were a number of reasons why workers felt unable to take advantage of organisational work-life policies. A main reason for such resistance may be due to the fact the employees may feel that accepting flexibility may affect their career progression or may result in a change in wages. Also as a result of flexibility, an employee's workload could increase and their wages could reduce, which in fact would negatively impact their personal time, instead of helping it.

Even though many organisational policies are put into place in the workplace, <https://assignbuster.com/society-affected-the-work-life-balance-sociology-essay/>

many workers could be left feeling that they would not be supported if they did take advantage of them (REFERENCE)

Throughout this paper we have examined that factors that can negatively affect the work life balance of those in work. It has examined how changes in work have also changed how an individual balances their family and personal leisure commitments. Many of these changes reference how intense involvement or over commitment to either work or family life can result in a damaging balance, but that is not always the case. Studying the work life balance, Greenhaus, Collins and Shaw (2002) found that individuals who invested more time and involvement in family and personal leisure activities, rather than work, experienced a more equal work life balance than those who concentrated on work and working patterns outside of work (Greenhaus, Collins and Shaw 2002: pp. 526).

What we have explored as the term work life balance can be seen to supposedly communicate the needs all of all employees, throughout this essay it has become apparent that not all employees struggle with maintaining, or accessing such a balance. When reference to a work life balance, most research categorises such ' life' as maintain a successful family unit and work life, but does not take into account those without such caring responsibilities and the access they have to a happy and successful work life balance.