

# The Greater Victoria Wellbeing Survey

## Mini Report – Time Crunch

March 2011



**United Way**  
OF GREATER VICTORIA



University  
of Victoria



**VICTORIA  
FOUNDATION**

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The Capital Region Wellbeing Survey was implemented in 2008 by a partnership of eight organizations in Greater Victoria: The United Way of Greater Victoria, University of Victoria, City of Victoria, Community Council, Capital Regional District, Victoria Foundation, Vancouver Island Health Authority, and the Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport.

The contributors to happiness and wellbeing that are employed in the survey are based on a framework that was developed by a group of international scholars from eastern and western countries who came together to help the nation of Bhutan to develop a measurement framework for their philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH). The United Nations Development Program has supported this effort and annual conferences have been held for the past four years in Bhutan, Thailand, Canada and Brazil to review the research literature for the purpose of identifying the primary contributors to happiness and wellbeing in different cultures and countries.

The survey was mailed out in October and November 2008 to a random sample of residents in the Capital Region. A total of 2,400 returns were received.

A summary of the overall results is available at the website of the Victoria Foundation:  
<http://www.victoriafoundation.bc.ca>

### **A Focus on Time-Balance**

On June 15, 2010 the Canadian Index of Wellbeing released their report on time use among Canadians. The report was entitled "Caught In The Time-Crunch." It concluded: "Canadians are caught in a time crunch – struggling to meet the demands of the workplace, their families and their own needs to refresh body and mind." (Canadian Index of Wellbeing, *Caught in the Time Crunch*, June 15, 2010).

The Greater Victoria Wellbeing survey of 2008 arrived at a similar conclusion. Among all of the contributors to wellbeing and happiness in a population, residents of Greater Victoria reported having the greatest challenge in trying to establish balanced lifestyles. The survey measured the principal factors that are known to contribute to life-satisfaction and happiness:

- Physical and Mental Health
- Time Balance
- Social and Community Vitality
- Cultural Vitality
- Material Standards
- Quality of Governance
- Environmental Vitality



The scores on happiness and the various contributors were calculated as a percentage of the maximum score that was possible for each dimension. Each score is out of 100.

For example, if a survey participant was experiencing no problems with time balance and no stress in their life, they would have a score of 100. The lower the score, the greater the problems of stress and time-balance.

Of all of the contributors to happiness and wellbeing, time-balance appeared to be the most problematic for the survey respondents, receiving an average score of 46 out of 100 (see chart 1).

#### **How Was Time-Balance Measured?**

Time-balance was measured through twelve items which addressed a variety of issues, including: general levels of stress, time-related stress, and self-reported satisfaction with how survey participants were spending their time. The items are presented in the Appendix to this report.

**Chart 1: Scores for Happiness Contributors, 2008.**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Score (Out of 100)</b>
<b>Happiness</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>Social and Community Vitality</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Material Wellbeing</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Cultural Vitality</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Health Status</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>Quality of Environment</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Time Balance</b>	<b>46</b>



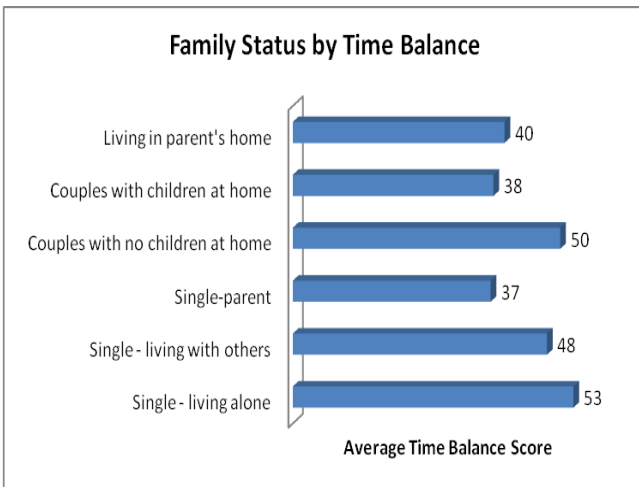
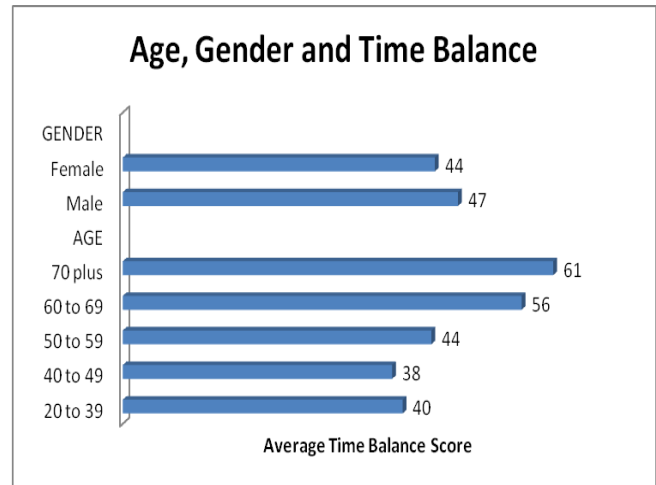
## Key Points

- Of all of the primary contributors to happiness and wellbeing, the challenge of time-balance is the most problematic for residents of Greater Victoria.
- Not surprisingly, the group that was least challenged by the problems of time-balance were older and retired residents. Next in line came homemakers and couples without children.
- The most time-stressed group was young adults who were employed and had children living at home. For these people, the problems of time-balance could not be dismissed as the price of prosperity and affluence. It would be more accurate to say that it was the price of making ends meet.
- Nor was the time-crunch related to a relentless pursuit of material wealth. Only a very small minority of survey participants rated material wealth as an important value in their lives. The most important values were responsibility, freedom, family and friendship. The survey also showed that the most time-crunched participants were no more materialistic than the least time-crunched. They did tend, however, to value both family and career success more highly.
- The time-crunch experienced by older persons related to “not having enough hours in the day” but, for most, did not entail the same pressures and stresses as the time-crunch experienced by younger adults.
- Employed persons faced more of a time-crunch than unemployed persons or homemakers, and the amount of time-stress they experienced was related to the number of roles they were balancing. Single employed persons experienced the least, followed by spouses with no children at home, followed by spouses with children at home and finally, single-parents. Living in a committed relationship added more challenges than being single and adding children to the mix created even more.
- The results also indicated that the extent to which a person experienced the time-crunch was strongly associated with their rating of their physical and mental health. This is not surprising given the known direct relationship between stress and health.
- Time-balance is an extremely important issue for the wellbeing of families in Greater Victoria.

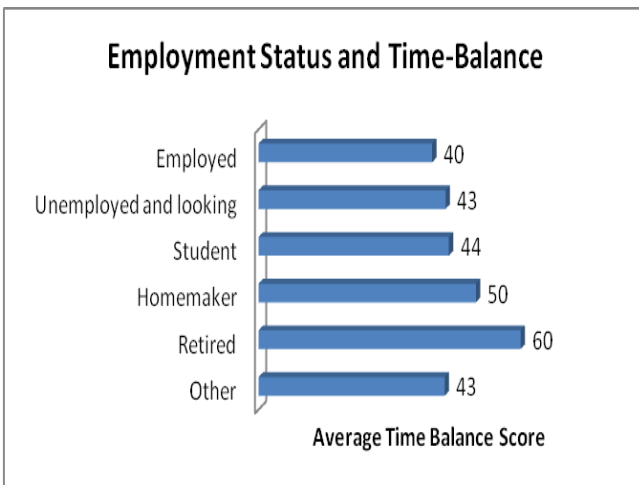


## Time Crunch and Demographics

Males (47%) had slightly higher time-balance scores than females (44%). Persons aged 60 and over had substantially higher time-balance scores than young and middle-aged adults.



Not surprisingly, the presence of children had a major impact on time balance. Couples with children at home (38%) and single-parents (37%) recorded the lowest time-balance scores while couples with no children at home (50%) and singles (48% and 53%) had substantially higher scores.



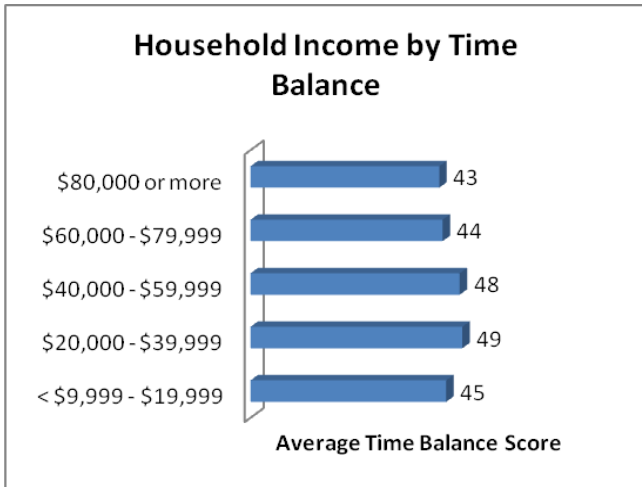
Retired persons reported the highest time-balance scores (60%), followed by homemakers (50%). There was only a small difference between the average time-balance scores of employed persons (40%), unemployed persons (43%) and students (44%).

Geographically, persons in the core communities (Victoria, Oak Bay, Esquimalt and View Royal) reported the highest average time-balance score (49%) while people in Western Shore communities reported the lowest (42%). Participants from Saanich and the Peninsula were midway at 45%.



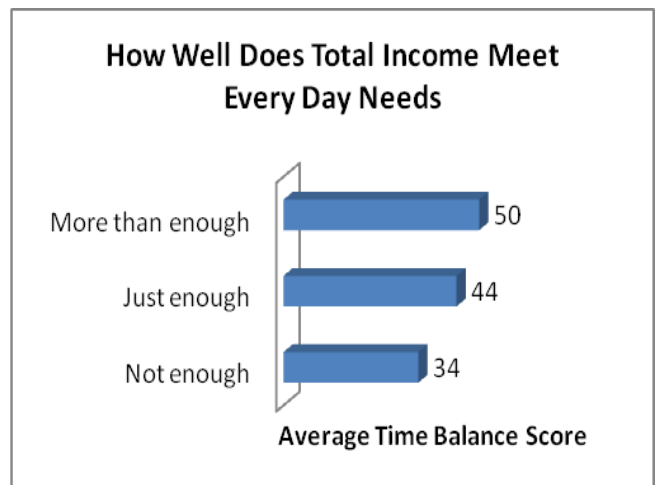
## Is The Time-Crunch the “Price of Prosperity”?

There is a common belief that the busyness of people’s lives simply reflects their desire for higher incomes and prosperous lifestyles. The busyness, in other words, is the price that we pay for a sense of financial satisfaction and financial security.

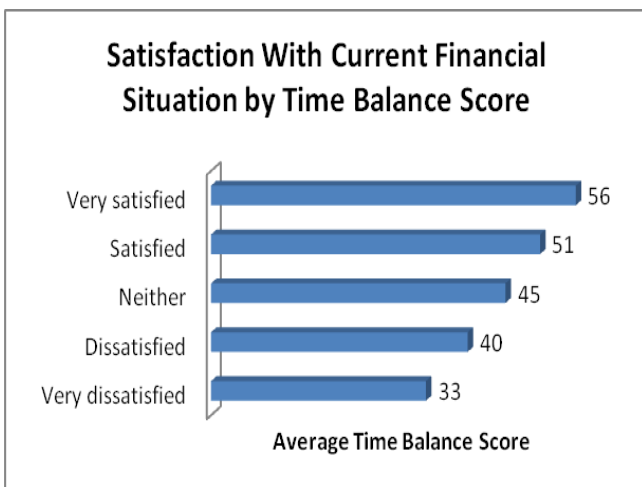


Among the survey participants, however, the relationship between income and time-balance was not particularly strong. There was some tendency for the persons in the middle-income groups to have the fewest time-balance problems but the lowest and highest income groups had almost identical scores.

This picture is complicated by the fact that the need for income can differ substantially across different groups. For example, a young couple with two children who entered the housing market in 2008 has different income needs from a couple in their sixties whose children have left home and who have owned a house in Victoria since the nineteen-seventies. It is instructive, therefore, to look at the participant’s subjective appraisal of their economic circumstances.



The participants who were experiencing the greatest time-balance challenges were those who were struggling to make ends meet. Those participants who reported that their incomes were inadequate to meet every day needs had a substantially lower time-balance average score (34%) than those whose incomes were more than enough (50%).



An even stronger relationship was apparent when they were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with their current financial situation. People who were very satisfied recorded time-balance scores that were almost twice as high as people who were very dissatisfied. For many people, the challenge of

time-balance was not the price of prosperity – rather, it was the price of staying afloat.



## Are We Too Materialistic?

Perhaps we are just too materialistic – too willing to sacrifice our quality of life in an exhausting pursuit for more money and “stuff”. The Wellbeing survey asked the participants to rate the importance of a number of personal values on a 10-point scale. The graph below indicates the percentage who rated



each value as 8, 9 or 10 where 10 was “extremely important”.

Material wealth was rated highly by only 16% of the participants. The most important values were responsibility, freedom, family and friendship. Further down the list, but still highly prized were pleasure/play, financial security and generosity.

When highly time-stressed participants were compared with less time-stressed participants, they differed on only two values. Only persons aged sixty and under were included in this part of the analysis. The most highly time-crunched participants rated both

“Family” and “Career Success” significantly more highly than the less time-crunched participants. They were no more likely to value material wealth or financial security than the less time-stressed.

## The Time-Crunch Among Older Persons

Although older retired persons reported substantially better scores on the time-balance dimension than younger age groups, it was still surprising that overall scores were still relatively low (60 and 61 out of 100). Why are older persons experiencing a time-crunch?

One answer may lie in Table 1 below. Older persons are less likely to report that “days are too short” or that they often “feel that they don’t accomplish all that they set out to do” than younger persons. It is still true, however, that approximately half of persons aged seventy and over report these symptoms of the time-crunch. They are, however, substantially less likely than younger groups to report that these time-pressures produce stress or that they are under pressure to accomplish more than they can handle.



**Table 1: Time Crunch by Age**

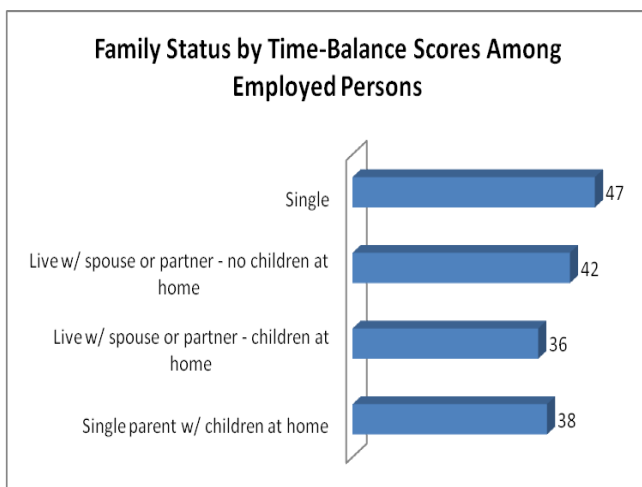
	Percent reporting "Yes"				
	20 to 39	40 to 49	50 to 59	60 to 69	70 plus
<b>Days are too short to accomplish all you want.</b>	70.9	73.9	64.8	49.7	47.2
<b>Feel you have not accomplished what you set out to do</b>	54.9	54.1	51.9	41.9	50.5
<b>Feel under stress when you don't have enough time</b>	71.4	69.6	59.6	37.3	25.0
<b>Constantly under pressure to accomplish more than you can handle</b>	48.0	46.3	38.8	20.4	16.5

What is happening here? It is not unusual to hear an older person say that they don't know how they ever held down a job because they are so busy in retirement that there "aren't enough hours in the day." The results simply demonstrate that all of our time pressures are not due to external factors like work and children. Older persons can experience their own time pressures because of their desire to live a full life, but the time-pressures of older persons are substantially less stressful than those of younger adults.

**The Time-Crunch Among Employed Persons**

Half of the employed respondents reported that too many demands on the job caused excess stress or worry. Women were more likely to report this issue (54%) than men (45%). Interestingly, however, only 27% reported that too many hours were causing excess stress and worry, with relatively little difference between males and females. It appears, therefore, that half of workers experience too many demands but these demands are translated into excess hours for a substantially smaller group.

The results also suggest that the balancing of roles among employed persons affects their time-crunch.



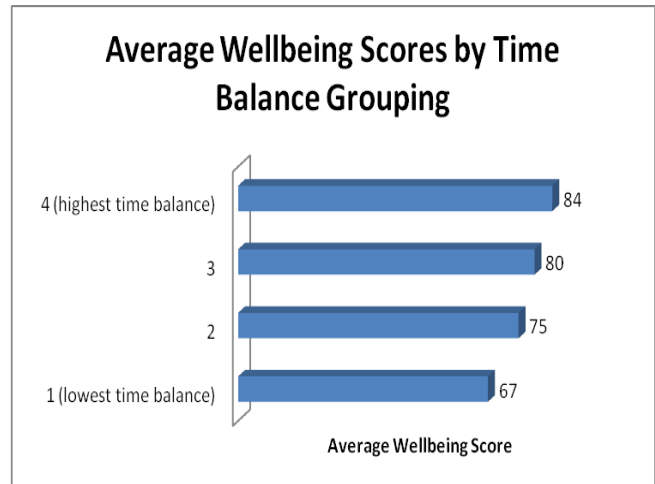
Single employed persons had the highest time-balance scores (47%). Those with a spouse but no children reported somewhat lower average scores (42%). Those with a spouse and children reported the lowest scores (36%). Single-parents had very similar scores to those of two-parent households (38%).



## What Are the Implications?

As highlighted earlier in this report, the time-crunch is a major drag on the sense of wellbeing among people in Greater Victoria. The twenty-five percent of participants who scored the lowest on time balance reported substantially lower wellbeing scores (67%) than the twenty-five percent with the highest time-balance scores.

The stress that accompanies the sense of time-crunch also has important health consequences.



We can see these effects within the survey participants. The time-balance score included the presence or absence of seven indicators or “symptoms” of time imbalance in the questionnaire. The figure to the right shows the percentage of persons who rated their health and mental health as good or excellent by the number of symptoms of time-stress that they indicated were present in their lives. There was a very strong relationship apparent, particularly with mental health. The greater the number of symptoms, the less likely participants were to rate their health as good or excellent.



## Discussion

Our growing concerns about the aging of our population and the challenges of the “silver tsunami” can divert attention away from the challenges being faced by young and middle-aged adults. The results of this survey clearly demonstrate that one of the major obstacles to greater happiness and wellbeing in our region is the problem of time-balance, which is particularly acute among families. These problems do not arise from an over-emphasis upon prosperity or materialism, but from the challenges of balancing career and home life in many working families who struggle with the basic financial requirements of living in Greater Victoria. As the results of this survey indicate, these problems are not merely a nuisance. They have significant impacts upon the physical and mental health of parents. This is an important issue which requires a collaborative response from all sectors of the community – employers, governments, community organizations and the families – if the levels of wellbeing in our community are to improve.



## Appendix

### Time Balance Questions



**Scoring Guide:**

Note: Scores are marked in large font in the tables.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral or Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
I would be much more satisfied with my life if I were able to spend more time with my family and friends.	4	3	2	1	0
I would be much more satisfied with my life if there was less stress in my life.	4	3	2	1	0

3.8 In a typical week, how much of your time are you able to spend doing the kinds of things that you enjoy?

All of my time	Most of my time	Some of my time	Not much of my time	Don't Know
3	2	1	0	

3.9 Would you describe your life as:

Very stressful	Somewhat stressful	Not very stressful	Not at all stressful
0	1	2	3

3.10 How much control do you feel you have in making decisions that affect your everyday activities?

No control	Control over a few decisions	Control over most decisions	Control over all decisions
0	1	2	3



	Yes	No	Don't Know
3.1 . Do you feel that the days are just too short to do all the things you want?	0	1	
3.2. At the end of the day, do you often feel that you have not accomplished what you had set out to do?	0	1	
3.3. Do you worry that you don't spend enough time with your family or friends?	0	1	
3.4. Do you feel that you 're constantly under stress trying to accomplish more than you can handle?	0	1	
3.5. Do you feel trapped in a daily routine?	0	1	
3.6. Do you feel that you just don't have time for fun any more?	0	1	
3.7. Do you often feel under stress when you don't have enough time?	0	1	

