

**Self-Employment:  
A better reconciliation of personal and professional life  
...or more crossover in social times?**

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**Research Note of the Bell Canada Research Chair  
on Technology and Work Organization**

**Télé-université, UQAM**

**No 2007-07**

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**NOTE:**

The original version of this article in French has been accepted and published in a special issue of *Revue Loisir et société* (2007) vol.29, no.01, on social time and social values.

**Summary**

Self-employment at home is often understood as a solution to help resolve the complications arising in work-family balance or reconciliation. We have undertaken to determine whether self-employment provides better means for reconciliation or if it adds to the quandary. We have noted that men and women entertain a different approach to family life and to the management of family or domestic activities. Numerous respondents, however, do report the interference of work time in private or family life. Business start-up trepidation urges self-employed workers to remain available and prevents them from turning down or deferring client assignments. Self-employed work impinges frequently upon personal or family life and other members of the household do not welcome such encroachment. The issue is often identified with telework and has seldom been investigated where self-employment is the playing field.

\*This research was conducted with the financial support of the Bell Canada Chair on Technology and Work Organization and the [Canada Research Chair on the Socio-Organizational Challenges of the Knowledge Economy](#) where Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay is Chair and research director. Catherine Chevrier and Martine Di Loreto are UQAM post-graduates under the Masters direction of Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay.

## **Self-Employment:**

### **A better reconciliation of personal and professional life**

#### **...or more crossover in social time?**

‘The most difficult is when one is self-employed ... I try to keep an 8 to 5 beat, but I sometimes find myself working evenings. My wife works more regular hours and it may happen that I work weekends or evenings indeed. It isn’t always easy to come to terms, especially when I’m almost ill with stress.’

[Training consultant, couple, self-employed 14 years] 028

‘[...] It’s crazy, people are at their computer and you have the baby, feed the baby and everything, makes no sense, like buying the food for both of us. You have to feed the baby and feed yourself and you’re working. I agree that we don’t qualify for unemployment compensations because... but there should at least exist conditions for... accommodation measures.’

[Photographer (♂), couple, self-employed 4 years] 020<sup>1</sup>

A number of studies, mostly American, state that new work forms like self-employment and telework would satisfy the needs of individuals where the opportunity is given them to shape their daily planning, better manage their social times (work-, family-, parental-time, etc.) and hence accommodate work and activities in their personal life (Anthias and Mehta 2003 ; Boden Jr. 1999a ; Feldman and Bolino 2000 ; Golden, 2001 ; Holmes, Smith and Cane 1997 ; Loscocco 1997 ; Parslow *et al.* 2004). The latter theses will be addressed in the following sections and it should be noted from the outset that they are at the foundation of a research project on both these new work forms and work-family or personal life accommodation; this paper deals specifically with the self-employment issues<sup>2</sup>. The research aimed at assessing the extent to which self-employment is likely to improve one’s handle on social times and on accommodating personal and professional life, especially when working at home. The course of this study is novel in that it introduces the following elements: profile and career path of the self-employed participants, reasons for choosing this form of work, advantages and drawbacks, work organization, training, formal and informal networking, expressions of personal satisfaction, work-family-personal life balance, and organization of working time (Tremblay, Chevrier and Di Loreto 2005).

Where articulation of professional and personal life is involved, the latter term includes all of the parental responsibilities or family concerns, and personal activities such as sport, culture, community contacts and even domestic chores. Nowadays however, it

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1 Each comment quoted bears the participant’s profession, gender, family situation, and how long the person has been self-employed. The last figure (020) refers to the specific quote in the research database.

2 Another segment of the research was concerned with telework or homeworking by wage earners. For results on telework, see: Tremblay, Chevrier and Di Loreto 2006; Tremblay, Paquet and Najem 2006; Tremblay 2002, 2003.

must be recognized that parental and family responsibilities remain the core concern for it is an additional problem facing persons with children or elders in their care. Therefore, where reconciliation of professional life and personal life in general is concerned, we often refer to work-family balance, a most pressing issue (Tremblay 2004b, 2005a, 2005b). Although the importance of recreational and personal activities is generally recognized, people that bear family responsibilities experience more trouble with time allocation. Given the current importance of family responsibilities and issues, governments and employers have begun to concern themselves with work-family reconciliation and more generally with work-life balance. Instead of the ‘balance’ concept, a number of authors tend to prefer the notion of articulation (Tremblay, 2004a, 2005a). The “articulation” concept is used to underline the organizing required to manage family- and work-time within one’s social time, and to indicate that all the activities involved are not (necessarily) accommodated. The word articulation may be more frequent in academic spheres and is not fully part of the general debate in Québec; this is why we often use ‘balance’ or ‘reconciliation’, which are more frequently used although in our view ‘articulation’ gives a better idea of what is at stake. In spite of the different expressions used to refer to the subtleties of work-family reconciliation, our research encompasses the overall articulation between professional and personal life and focuses mainly on the work-family facet. All the above expressions are therefore used interchangeably, and not only to unburden the vocabulary. They all refer to the mainstream ‘work-life’ issues concerned as well with the ageing workforce.

This paper offers first a few elements for a definition of self-employment and then data on the extent of self-employment in Canada. We also provide the profiles of our respondents, the research methodology, a review of the literature and finally the results as they aggregate around the research question: does self-employment increase one’s control over work time and social times (parent, family, training, sports, etc.) and as the case may be, is self-employment an adequate solution for improving work-family accommodation and generally for improving professional and personal activity accommodation.

## **1. Scope and definition of self-employment**

Social, economic and political actors agree that no single definition exists for ‘self-employment’. Although the expression *self-employed worker* is most commonly used, the independent person may be distinguished from other self-employed persons who hire help. In the last census<sup>3</sup>, Statistics Canada included in the self-employment category those persons who operate a farm either as owners or tenants; workers, for example freelancers or contract workers (architects and private nurses); franchisees or concession holders in the sale or direct distribution of products such as beauty products, newspapers, brushes or household products; and those who fish, either with personally owned equipment or equipment in which they are co-owners.

Nevertheless work activities involved in the self-employment concept cover more ground and includes the entrepreneur or contractor, the freelancer or the tradesperson, professionals remunerated per consultation, contract or item, and day workers. In the

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<sup>3</sup> In 2002, latest data available from Statistics Canada, revised January 2005.

framework of our research, and in keeping with Delage's (2002) investigation on independent work, we shall consider self-employed the following: independent workers (self-employed and without hired help), self-employed workers who hire a very small number of associates –mostly casual, freelancers under contract (journalists, translators, etc.) and professionals in co-partnership (lawyers, notaries) on an individual basis. It should be noted that home working was also a discriminating factor since we also intend to study the impact of this work form.

Some have wondered why our sample is mainly composed of professionals while in the country self-employment remains mostly rural (Statistics Canada 2005). We answer that the rural population is diminishing in North America and that the proportion of other self-employed workers is on the rise (Dennis 1996). A few authors even go as far as eliminating farm owners or tenants from their sampling of self-employed workers due to special work conditions hardly comparable with that of other activity sectors (Hundley 2001). According to 1997 Canadian data, non-farm self-employment had become the primary source of new jobs (Moore and Mueller 2002). As is the case for other workers, a majority of self-employed persons are active in the service sector and the increase in their number is greater than in the manufacturing sector.

Before we examine the profile of our sample of respondents, let us measure the scope of self-employment in Canada.

#### ***The scope of self-employment in Canada and in Québec***

According to the Labour Force Survey (LFS), there were 2 541 100 Canadian independent workers in December 2005, a 3,6% increase over the previous year (Statistics Canada 2006). Self-employment registers the largest increase among worker categories. In Québec, there are 453 400 self-employed workers (2003 figures, ISQ 2005). The percentage of self-employed in Canada is 16% of all workers, 13% in Québec (OECD 2003). The national average matches that of industrialized countries overall.

According to 1997 data, non-farm self-employment has become the primary source of new jobs in Canada (Moore and Mueller 2002). In terms of self-employment characteristics, there is a typical Canadian feature in the frequency of self-sufficient self-employment relative to self-employment as an hiring employer (OECD 2000). This may be observed for both men and women, in all age groups (and more so in ageing workers), for all training levels in all professional and industrial sectors (except agriculture).

As a matter of fact in keeping with tendencies observed elsewhere and although the proportion of independent workers remains higher in Canadian men, women display a higher percentage of growth than men do. Indeed, according to 2001 figures (annualized and distributed by gender) the growth in self-employment is 2,3% in men and 2,7% in women (Delage 2002). Compared with international data, the rate of Canadian non-farm female independent workers is second only to Australia. In Australia, the proportion of non-farm female independent workers was 9 % of the overall female workforce in 2002, and 8% in Canada. In men, this proportion is 15% in Australia and Great Britain, and 9% in Canada (Delage 2002).

In short, the frequency of self-employment increases with age. Lately, the increase was higher in women and in the younger groups although men continue to form the largest group in absolute terms (Delage 2002). Let us now verify whether this information matches the profile of the self-employed workers interviewed in the wake of our investigation.

## **2. Methodology and respondent profiles**

Our preferred approach was essentially qualitative and aimed at complementing the quantitative studies carried out to this day on self-employed workers (Beaucage, Laplante and Légaré 2004, Delage 2002, CIRETA 1999, D'Amours *et al.* 2004). To this end, the interview appeared to be the most appropriate data gathering method since it allows to investigate in better detail the unique circumstances that shape the rational experience as reported by the subjects.

Other research efforts have thought us how difficult it is to reach independent workers for individual interviews (Laferté 2005, Peel and Inkson 2004). We have therefore contacted prominent organizations involved in the defence of their interests and have sought their collaboration. They contributed their help either by providing name of independent workers we could invite to participate, or by providing our research some visibility within their network in order to call on participating prospects. The response of these organizations was positive. JCCM (Jeune Chambre de commerce de Montréal) and the CDEC Plateau-Centre-sud have provided us with the name of a few self-employed workers. The CDEC has also publicized our research over its website. In addition, a number of selected professional corporations were contacted and have agreed to mention our research in their newsletters including our call for participants. These occupational corporations regulate the following professions: architects, lawyers, accountants, human resources and industrial relations counsellors, interpreters and terminologists, notaries. We also secured the helpful collaboration of the women's committee in the law profession corporation, Barreau du Québec (Bar of the Province of Québec). Finally, a number of participants to our study have replied to an invitation at large posted on the Toile du Québec while others were recruited by other self-employed workers already engaged in the research process with the authors (a snowball method)<sup>4</sup>.

Interviews were conducted between December 2003 and April 2004. Participants were met where convenient, either at home or at their work place, or in our offices. Interviews lasted between 30 and 150 minutes (2.5 hours) and averaged 90 minutes (1.5h). As will be seen in tables further down, the questionnaire included mostly open-ended questions and a few unique answer questions (closed-ended). Answers were compiled using QSR NVivo.

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<sup>4</sup> Magazines like Jobboom and L'Autonome, as well as the Montréal daily newspaper La Presse allowed us to reach potential participants thanks to several announcements of the research in their pages. The business weekly Les Affaires also provided support and mentioned our research by publishing a few articles on work-family reconciliation. In addition, Option Réseau Estrie offered us its cooperation and informed its members.

### ***Respondent profiles***

In order to deal with the work-family – and personal life – reconciliation problem, we needed to assemble a sample of self-employed participants displaying a variety of family or household profiles: persons without a spouse, with and without children, persons that form couples –with or without children, and persons caring for a relative or a parent. We also sought self-employed persons that operate independently, without the help of hired others, and who carried out most of their work from the home<sup>5</sup> since it is generally held that working from home provides flexibility and allows for improved work-family balance. Moreover, given the discrepancies observed by a number of researchers in the professional and domestic sharing of duties between women and men, it appeared essential that we retain the gender breakdown. Our research therefore focuses on two main categories to which our respondents belong: (i) being a parent or not<sup>6</sup>, and (ii) being a man or a woman.

Among the 71 participants to our interviews, there are 34 persons with children but only 24 are parents according to our definition<sup>7</sup>. We therefore have 33,8 % of respondents that live in a family environment where caring for young children may impact the professional life enough to entail a redeployment of work routines. Let us nevertheless keep in mind that 47,9 % of our respondents have had, at one time or another, to balance work and family responsibilities toward young children. In this group, ten (10) persons are not concerned any more with young children, but they sometimes mentioned the trade-offs drawn into their lives when they cared for young children.

In terms of gender, females are slightly over represented in our sample of respondents. In addition, more women than men are involved in a household situation where children 16 y.o. and under live under the same roof. This observation is valid not only in absolute terms but also in proportion with the number of individuals in each group. Table 1 posts the family situation of our participants, according to gender.

Table 1  
Family situation of participants, according to gender

	Number (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)
Single w/out child	20 (28,2%)	11 (36,7%)	9 (22,0%)

<sup>5</sup> We finally focused exclusively on self-employed workers operating mostly from their home since workers who travel to an office or elsewhere outside the home are akin to salaried workers and they would not have contributed to the adequate testing of the hypothesis concerning the increased flexibility of work time. We also included persons working full time although this notion bears a different significance in the context of self-employment from one year to the other and according to the field of activity. Nevertheless, our sample is not composed of part-time workers although self-employed workers may cutback on work hours at will.

<sup>6</sup> In this study, being a parent means that one or several children 16 y.o. or under live under the same roof as the respondent on a regular basis and that the respondent feels somewhat responsible for the children.

<sup>7</sup> Although certain parental responsibilities remain beyond that age, the 16 y.o. limit was set because most participants deem that these responsibilities do not impact much on work organization compared with that of younger children.

Single w/child 16 y.o. and under	9 (12,7%)	3 (10,0%)	6 (14,6%)
Couple w/out child	27 (38.0%)	14 (46,7%)	13 (31,7%)
Couple w/child 16 y.o. and under <sup>3</sup>	15 (21,1%)	2 (6,7%)	13 (31,7%)
Total*	71 (100%)	30 (100%)	41 (100%)

\*The sum of component units expressed in percentage does not always amount to 100% due to rounding off.

In terms of professional classification, our sample displays a variety of occupations as shown in Table 2. A majority of interviewed participants (58 participants out of 71, that is 81,6 %) are involved in professional, intellectual or creative work activities; among them (40 out of 58 professionals, that is 69%), however, do not belong to a professional order (or Corporation). This is not surprising, although unexpected, given our sampling method<sup>8</sup>; many of our participants had either not yet applied for membership, had not renewed their membership, had no intention of belonging to the Order or simply because no Corporation exists in that field of activity. Finally, we have classified under ‘Other’ the 13 participants whose activities may not be classified under the ‘professional’ label<sup>9</sup> (that is 18,3% of our total sample of participants). Table 2 displays the occupation of our respondents, whether they belong to a professional Order or not, and their distribution according to gender.

Table 2  
Composition of our sample according to occupation, membership to a professional corporation and gender

	Total	Men	Women
<b>Professionals, member of an Order (18)</b>			
Lawyer and notary	5	1	4
Accountant	1	0	1
Nutritionist	1	0	1
Human resources and industrial relations	5	3	2
Psychologist	2	2	0
Translator, writer-editor, proof-reader	4	2	2
<b>Professionals (40)</b>			
Graphic artist / designer	3	2	1
Photographer, filmmaker	3	2	1
Human resources and industrial relations consultant, training & development, coaching	5	2	3
Translator, writer-editor, proof-reader	7	2	5
Accountant	2	1	1
Financial counsellor	1	1	0
Researcher	1	0	1
Researcher	2	2	0

<sup>8</sup> See section 2, Methodology.

<sup>9</sup> Sales person, caterer, administrative assistant and clerk are among those occupations. We were hoping for a larger sample of non professional occupations but could not gather more than 18,3% in this category. Most research projects on self-employment have encountered the same problem where professionals seem more comfortable to participate in surveys.

Trainer (teaching)	4	1	3
Journalist	2	0	2
Public relations, advertising and communications	5	1	4
Graphic design and printing broker	1	0	1
Event organiser and project management	4	3	1
<b>Other occupations (13)</b>			
Nursing personnel job placement	1	0	1
Human resources and business help and services	2	0	2
Sales representative	5	3	2
Caterer	1	0	1
Computer consultant	3	2	1
Administrative assistant and clerk	1	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>41</b>

Since self-employment performed from the home or another location is deemed to determine the flexibility with which individuals organize their daily work schedule and balance work with personal life, including family life, we have focused on self-employed workers operating without hired help and from their home. Consequently, our sample of respondents is composed of 83% (59) home workers<sup>10</sup>. A proportion of 40,8% split their time between their office at home and the client's premises, 9,8% of participants rent their workspace and finally 7,0% of respondents combine these options or encounter other situations.

Table 3  
Work place of participants, according to gender

	Number (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)
Exclusively at home	30 (42,2%)	11 (36,7%)	19 (46,3%)
At the client's only	-	-	-
Home and client's	29 (40,8%)	13 (43,3%)	16 (39,0%)
Premises rented for work purposes	7 (9,8%)	5 (16,7%)	2 (4,9%)
Home, client's and rented for work	3 (4,2%)	1 (3,3%)	2 (4,9%)
Home and rented for work	1 (1,4%)	-	1 (2,4%)
Other situation	1 (1,4%)	-	1 (2,4%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>71 (100,0%)</b>	<b>30 (100,0%)</b>	<b>41 (100,0%)</b>

<sup>10</sup> Total home workers includes those participants who work out of their home exclusively, and those who work at home and at the client's; in the latter group, time spent home working varies between 10% and 90% but more than half the respondents perform 50% or more of their work activities at home. At least two (2) participants even added that they operate 100% from their home although they occasionally visit a client; they rank with those who work exclusively from their home, but their comment provides insight on the perception of workplace by self-employed workers.

In sum, the typical participant to our survey is either a man or a woman; he/she is single or lives with a spouse; almost 50% of participants experience –or may have experienced a family situation with one or several children 16 years or younger; he/she has a professional occupation mostly conducted from the home even though he/she may visit clients weekly. Before we examine the results obtained, let us review certain aspects of work organization as recorded in the literature.

### **3. A review of the literature**

#### **3.1. Flexibility and independence... or conflict intensification?**

Our review of the literature identified a number of papers stating that increased work-hours flexibility and other family considerations underpin women's decisions in favour of self-employment; according to Boden (1999b), men would choose self-employment for other reasons. In another study, Boden explains that women are better disposed than men –or simply prone, to take charge of and manage family obligations, child care in particular, and this would influence their decision in favour of this form of work (Boden 1999a). Others, like Hundley (2001), and Burke, Fitzroy & Nolan (2002) thus explain the substantial income difference between self-employed men and women: women cater more to domestic chores and family responsibilities and therefore have less time for income-earning activities.

Parasuraman and Simmers (2001) note that self-employed workers benefit from greater independence and more work-hours flexibility in their field of activity than salaried workers, yet the authors report more work-family conflicts – probably due to their more intensive involvement in work. It is also possible that greater parental demands on these individuals who stay at home to care for the children contribute to work-family conflict build-up. Further, according to Parasuraman and Simmers (2001), self-employed workers entertain deeper psychological involvement in their professional role, fuelled by their perceived personal responsibility for the survival of their enterprise. In short, Parasuraman and Simmers (2001) believe that self-employment casts ambiguous tones over work-family reconciliation.

Other studies, the like of Christensen (1987), indicate that home working may generate work-family conflicts for two reasons: the presence of work material or equipment in the home and the fact that family members may invade or impinge on work activities. Nevertheless, Tremblay (2003) and Felstead & Jewson (2000) report only minor adaptation problems at start-up during the home installation process. Teleworkers mention that they agree on functional conventions with the members of their families and that no conflicts ensue. Felstead and Jewson (2000) add that home working women especially encounter such difficulties in segregating work and family activities.

In Loscocco's (1997) study, all the respondents display considerable enthusiasm toward the flexibility they enjoy as self-employed workers, especially with work-hours. More women than men, however, identify the work-family reconciliation issue as the end product of this gain in flexibility. According to this author, the family environment tends to impinge upon women's professional environment, while for men it is the other way

around, even for self-employed workers; Felstead and Jewson (2000) made the same observation. The provider status and the parental identity would be key factors in balancing work-family issues. Stages of family life (birth of children, kindergarten, school, teenage years, etc.) and career path (established business, business start-up, career take-up, maturity, preretirement preparation, etc.) are other significant factors.

Therefore, a number of authors (Parasuraman and Simmers 2001) do not agree that self-employment or entrepreneurship offer a solution toward work-family reconciliation; instead, they believe that the approach entails some form of trade-off. Indeed, deeper involvement in work and increased parental demands on home working individuals create conflicting pressures that may not be resolved by self-employment or work-hours flexibility. Self-employed workers would therefore experience more work-family conflicts.

It must be mentioned that a recent Ipsos-Reid poll conducted on behalf of the Royal Bank of Canada indicated that 36% of men intending to create a business do so for the reward and that only 23% of women share the same aspiration. Likewise, self-employed women are motivated less by money and more by flexible work-hours (63%); this is the case for men as well in the proportion of 51% (RBC 2005).

### **3.2. The wish to rear children and family contribution**

Family-driven motivations are chiefly a characteristic of women who undertake self-employment initiatives (Boden 1999a, 1999b; Holmes, Smith and Cane 1997; Loscocco 1997). Among the arguments claimed, authors report the desire to have children and the need to spend more time with children. Anthias and Mehta (2003) observed that more women are driven to self-employment because they are more home-centered and are therefore more likely to seek flexible work-hours arrangements in order to care for the children. Heilbrunn (2004) also confirms that female entrepreneurs are subject to family constraints and this would steer them toward entrepreneurship and self-employment.

Likewise, if self-employment performed at home allows individuals to better connect with their family, it also provides the family with possibilities to contribute to useful earning activities (Baines and Gelder 2003; Wheelock, Oughton and Baines 2003). For example, Wheelock, Oughton and Baines (2003) note that where significant changes have occurred in the way households make their living in western economies in recent decades, these changes have brought to the fore older work practices. According to the authors, the family dependency on a salary and need of a job has shifted toward self-employment as a necessity and small entrepreneurial business.

### **3.3. Technologies and work-hours scheduling**

Baines and Gelder (2003) develop a household approach focused on work and family life and they include children in their analysis. Work-hours scheduling for these families may be classified into four groups or types: *time greedy*, *rigidly scheduled*, *flexibly scheduled*, *work-family inclusive*. For the *time greedy*, work-family balance is very difficult.

According to the authors, this is where many fathers and fewer mothers are encountered. For the *rigidly scheduled* group, the work earnings and family care dilemma is identical to that faced by salaried employees; although this group is self-employed, home working is the exception and work-hours are similar to that of salaried workers. The paper indicates that when work is performed at home, other members of the family are often part of the routine in ways seldom-encountered in conventional work forms.

Access to technologies (mainly computer and Internet) may become a factor of conflict in terms of family rules and practices when the young ones use these. The need for business-dedicated space and work time may call for sensitive family trade-offs. For example, conflicts may arise when the self-employed worker wishes to continue a work assignment later in the day or in the evening while children insist on having access to the computer or Internet. Women who participate in their husband's self-employed activities may find themselves locked-in some type of work for which they are not qualified; they have no time to maintain or develop their own skills for use in the job market outside the home. Young ones are offered learning opportunities while contributing to the "family business". This contribution is particularly significant in matters concerning information technologies when the parents lack the appropriate knowledge or know-how. The offspring of self-employed workers is provided daily opportunities to observe work for pay and to participate in the effort in ways that are not within reach of other children.

Our research intends to examine whether self-employment in the Canadian context accounts for a benefit or a disadvantage in work-family balance. The availability of quality day care facilities and the frequent holidays afforded to most parents in Québec may well make wage-earning more attractive in Québec even though work schedule arrangements are not readily accessible in the employment context (Tremblay 2004b). Let us now examine the results of our survey.

#### **4. Research data**

In this section of our paper, we display the results compiled from the interviews concerned with the main thrust of our research: does self-employment provide a better control over one's working hours and social times (parental, family, leisure, sports or other) and, as the case may be, is self-employment an adequate solution to improve the balance between personal life and professional life? As we have seen, a number of authors suggest that work-family balance is promoted due to a better control over one's schedule in the self-employment context, while other sources indicate that self-employment draws in additional constraints.<sup>11</sup>

The research problem suggests several sub-topics: does self-employment provide more working time? Does it allow incorporating more unrelated activities (culture, sports, socializing, etc.)? Or, on the contrary, does home working and work scheduling entail

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<sup>11</sup> Most studies were conducted in the U.S. where daycare services are more or less efficient and indeed less developed than it is in Québec. We investigated whether, in a different social context, self-employment may be seen as an advantage or a drawback in terms of controlling one's social time and for improving work-life balance.

increased interference between professional activities and personal or family life? Does more flexible work scheduling provide better work-life balance? This would mean that self-employed workers who are not provided this kind of flexibility (especially persons who work at client's, for example) draw no advantage in terms of work-life balance.

Let us recall that among the 71 participants, 15 respondents live with a spouse and have at least one (1) child 16 y.o. or younger (21,1%); 9 respondents live by themselves nevertheless with at least one (1) child 16 years or younger (12,7%); and 27 persons form as many couples without children (38%). Among the 51 participants who share their life with at least one other person (spouse and/or child), 12 individuals (23,5%) mention difficulties in balancing work and family life. Nine (9) in these 12 participants are women (75%) and 3 are men (25%). In terms of family situation, this condition is shared by 33,3% of the participants that head a single-parent family (2 women and one man, on a total of 9 single-parent families), by 20% of participants that form a couple with at least one (1) child (3 women out of 15 such families) and by 22,2% of participants that form a couple without children (4 women and 2 men out of 27 couples with no children). Table 4 displays these statistics.

Table 4  
Family situation of respondents who report  
problems with work-life balance

	Total	Men	Women
Lone w/child(ren)	3 / 9 (33,3%)	1	2
Couple w/child.	3 / 15 (20,0%)	0	3
Couple w/o child.	6 / 27 (22,2%)	2	4
Total	12 / 51 (23,5%)	3	9

Self-employment would improve the organization and scheduling of activities and help out in performing the duties related to the attendance of small children. Our interviews indicated that a number of respondents have in fact chosen this work mode precisely in order to give priority to family concerns or to seek some form of balance between professional and family life; more about this further down. Respondents nevertheless indicate that this requires discipline in time management if deadlines are to be met. Felstead and Jewson (2000) and Felstead *et al.* (2002) report how difficult it may be to neatly sandbag issues from one another when working at home. Some home workers interviewed actually schedule a work day and include work activities into their family life while others implement a fixed schedule and consider work-hours flexibility as a simple accessory for use where needed.

#### 4.1. Positive features of self-employment

Respondents were asked to associate positive features with self-employment. Replies were distributed according to gender and to the presence of children in the work environment at home. In comparing tables 5 and 6 below, one may assume which variable has more impact on respondents' opinion; tables 5 and 6 indicate that the bulk of participants –mostly parents with children 16 years and under, and women, believe that work schedule flexibility and work-life balance possibilities are indeed valuable features of self-employment. Men tend to mention reconciliation between work and other personal activities, and non-employment time.

Table 5  
Number of *important* and *very important* mentions\* identifying self-employment features (family situation)

	Number 71 participants	W/o child. 47 participants	W/child. 16 y.o. and under 24 participants
Work-hours flexibility	62 (87,3%)	38 (80,9%)	24 (100%)
Family-life balance	40 (56,3%)	18 (38,3%)	22 (91,7%)
Reconciliation of work with other personal activities	43 (60,6%)	27 (57,4%)	16 (66,7%)
Non-employment time	38 (53,5%)	22 (46,8%)	16 (66,7%)

\* Respondents could check one or several features as they saw fit.

Table 6  
Number of *important* and *very important* mentions identifying self-employment features (gender)

	Number (%) 71 participants	Men 30 men	Femmes 41 women
Work-hours flexibility	62 (87,3%)	24 (80,0%)	38 (92,7%)
Work-life balance	40 (56,3%)	14 (46,7%)	26 (63,4%)
Reconciliation of work and other personal activities	43 (60,6%)	19 (63,3%)	24 (58,5%)
Non-employment time	38 (53,5%)	18 (60,0%)	20 (48,8%)

#### 4.2. Non-employment time

Self-employment at home may generate non-employment time due to work-hours flexibility or travel-time savings, and respondents' family situation creates a significant

difference. For example, among the 9 participants heading a single-parent family, seven (7) stated that self-employment provides more time and is a significant feature of this work mode. Among the latter, 6 participants (85,7%) mentioned that their work provides them with enough non-employment time and only one (1) respondent disagreed with this statement. Among the 15 participants that form a couple with children, only 9 have replied to this closed question. In the group of 9, five (5) respondents (55,6%) mentioned that their work provided them with enough non-employment time and four (4) respondents (44,4%) witnessed to the contrary, i.e., that their work did not provide them with enough non-employment time. Among the couples without children, 18 participants (/27) replied to this closed question; in this group, 10 (55,6%) stated that that their work provided them with enough non-employment time and 7 (38,9%) forwarded a differing opinion. At least one (1) participant stated that self-employment provided too much non-employment time compared to a salaried position. Finally, half (50%) of the 20 participants living alone (no spouse or children) replied to this question: four (4) of them mentioned that their work provided them enough free time and six (6) did not agree with the statement. Table 7 below displays the results obtained and it is quite surprising to note that single-parent families are those who seem most satisfied. Differences may be noted in this regard: persons without children refer more often to the requirements of work, and couples with children insist on work-life balance.

Table 7  
Does self-employment provide you with enough non-employment time?  
(Family situation)

	Number of participants replied to the question	Yes, work does provide enough non-employment time	No, work doesn't provide enough non-employment time
Parent w/o spouse (9 participants)	7	6 (85,7%)	1 (14,3%)
Parent w/spouse (15 participants)	9	5 (55,6%)	4 (44,4%)
Single person (20 participants)	10	4 (40,0%)	6 (60,0%)
Couple (27 participants)	18	11* (61,1%)	7 (38,9%)

\* One (1) participant even mentioned that self-employed work provided more non-employment time than needed.

Where we focus on family situations and whether there are children or not, the results become even more striking: persons without children remain the group that expresses a shortage of time. It is possible that persons without children would more easily let themselves be flooded with work; this would require more in-depth study.

Table 8  
Does self-employment provide you with enough non-employment time?  
(Family situation w/ or w/o children)

	Number of participants	Yes, work does provide	No, work doesn't
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	replied to the question	enough non-employment time	provide enough non-employment time
W/children 16 y.o. and under living under same roof (24 participants)	16	11 (68,9%)	5 (31,3%)
W/o children (47 participants)	28	15* (53,6%)	13 (46,4%)

\* One (1) participant even mentioned that self-employed work provided more non-employment time than needed.

Where we distribute non-employment time according to gender (table 9), we observe that more women than men have replied to the question, proportionally, and that more women than men state that work does not provide them with enough non-employment time. When these figures, however, are weighed against work-hours and non-employment time in a past salaried position (table 10), more women than men state that they work fewer hours (47,8% of women and 38% of men who answered the question), and fewer women than men state that they work more hours (26,1% of women and 33,3% of men who answered the question). Interestingly enough, the proportion of respondents who see no real difference is very much the same (26,1% of women and 28,6% of men who answered the question). These findings seem to confirm a statement whereby women often work fewer hours and that as self-employed persons, women are more likely to shorten their work-hours if they wish to.

Table 9  
Does self-employment provide you with enough non-employment time (gender)?

	Number of participants replied to the question	Yes, work does provide enough non-employment time	No, work doesn't provide enough non-employment time
Men (30 participants)	17	11* (64,7%)	6 (35,3%)
Women (41 participants)	27	15 (55,6%)	12 (44,4%)

\* One (1) participant even mentioned that self-employed work provided more non-employment time than needed.

Table 10  
Do you believe work-hours are longer or shorter compared to work-hours before self-employment (Gender)

	Number of participants replied to the question	Shorter hours	No difference	Longer hours
Men (30 participants)	21	8 (38,1%)	6 (28,6%)	7 (33,3%)
Women (41 participants)	23	11 (47,8%)	6 (26,1%)	6 (26,1%)

In the comments we gathered it seems that personal ambition and a wish for set revenues may have an influence on non-employment time. For example, when asked whether self-employment provided her with enough non-employment time, one participant told us:

Listen, I don't know if a lot of people doubt this, but weeks still count seven days, days have 24 hours and hours still have 60 minutes. Thus, more time isn't afforded, it's just time reorganized... I mean that if one wants decent revenues, you have to put in the time.

[Entrepreneurial coach (♀), single w/older child, self-employed 18 years] 039

In certain fields of activity, it is the profession more than the self-employed status that would preclude one from having more non-employment time (3 mentions; 2 men and 1 woman). In terms of reward, self-employment would allow at the least to concentrate on what activity one prefers (2 mentions; 2 men). Others believe that available non-employment time is adequate but that energy is short after work (1 mention; 1 woman). Self-employment activities require a lot of time especially in the start-up phase (1 mention; 1 woman). It appears therefore that time shortages are inevitable (1 mention; 1 man). Indeed self-employment is a never ending occupation since related tasks such as accounting and administration are called for shortly after work performance as such (1 mention; 1 man).

I sometimes run out of time. Since I allocate a lot of time for work sometimes, yes, work impinges on my social life. It doesn't always cause problems, but sometimes it does... I find that I work too much, too much time.

[Researcher, couple, self-employed 17 years] 048

Well it's not so much the fact that I'm self-employed, it has more to do with my profession, or performing in a competitive corporate environment that takes up so much time, that's it. When I look at people who are salaried and who don't have more time than I have, it is because they too must perform in a competitive corporate environment and that's all. Let's not get mixed up, it's not because you're self-employed that you have less time, it's because the job market today, and the market... is increasingly competitive and you have to allow more time if you want to move up, whether you are self-employed, or a lawyer or mid-management [...].

[Event organizer, couple, self-employed 7 years] 01

Finally, let us add that in certain instances time shortage is not always work-related or related to work status but to the fact that individuals pursue several non-employment activities (4 mentions; 2 men and 2 women); a larger scope of activities will often translate into some form of time shortage sentiment.

We realize that work is not the only important thing in life, that there are many other fields in which one may be useful, or achieve one's potential...that's the way I am, I'm interested in many domains [...]

nevertheless, I sometimes ask myself whether I spend too much time on these other issues and not enough on work, and this may explain why I don't have enough work assignments. There is indeed a risk of going overboard with these other issues or concerns, for example my wish to travel... we should be able to do what we want, it's really crazy...

[Writer/editor, couple, self-employed 3 years] 055

### 4.3. Participating in a wide range of family-related activities

With the possibilities offered by flexible work-hours, self-employed workers are able to attend school activities or events organized at the kindergarten where the presence of a parent is required. In addition, being at home when children come back from school may have positive repercussions, whether this aspect was planned at the outset of the maternity process or not, and whether or not the question belongs to the objectives pursued when adhering to self-employment. Finally, if the 9 to 5 work schedule was chosen by the self-employed worker –even though he/she usually works outside the home, self-employment nevertheless eases schedule modifications when children are sick or on holidays, recess, etc., as witnessed by our participants:

The primary goal of this type of work, for me, was to spend more time with my children; therefore I postponed job assignments or I managed to perform the work in the morning in order to schedule quality time in the afternoon [when my children were younger].

[Graphic design account executive (♀), couple-2 children, self-employed 6 years] 046

I attend these [school events] systematically, this is a major advantage, because I indeed, whenever there's a school activity [...] am always in attendance, never missed one and they occur quite frequently.

[Journalist (♀), couple-3 children, self-employed 15 years] 035

The only thing is, if my son is sick one-day [...] he stays home with me and I try to find a way ... when he is ill, he doesn't sleep at all. [...] So if someone calls and I can't talk, well then 'I am in a meeting'. You know, a lot of people attend unproductive meetings, so... You know, nobody needs to be informed that my son was drooling in my neck, sick and everything. Sometimes I say to myself in these circumstances 'it would be cruel to drive the kid to school', but most women are left with no alternative.

[Public relations agent (♀), couple-1 child, self-employed 10 years] 027

Most of the time they are in kindergarten and I manage to work until 5PM then I pick them up. Work isn't easy when they're home, I have two boys 7 and 8 y.o. and would you believe they are 'active' [...] In fact, it doesn't happen very often but when it does, I will change, yes, reorganize my schedule accordingly in order to make myself more available to the children and work later or at another time.

[Event organizer, single-parent 2 children, self-employed 3 years] 030

When I decided to revert permanently to self-employment it was first and foremost because I want to have children. And I want to be home when they come back from school, I want to drive them to school and be there when they come home for lunch as often as possible. Therefore self-employment will allow this. Maternity leave is something else. [...] I don't have children yet, but eventually...

[Public relations agent (♀), couple, self-employed 10 years] 002

In some professions, however, which may involve travel, or a more rigid schedule, or that require many consecutive hours, scheduling may turn out to be rather complex. Although this does not defeat the positive outcome of self-employment on work-family balance, some categories of workers, the like of female lawyers we have met, face the issue and they need their spouse's or their family's support. This respondent mentioned this critical condition:

If you're a single-parent family in this profession [criminal law], self-employment becomes impossible. You must have a spouse because work-family balance would be too difficult.

[Lawyer, couple-2 children, self-employed 10 years] 066

Finally, heading a single-parent family in joint custody conditions allows for different work time management. Periods during which one is alone would open up horizons whereby the self-employed worker may perform more intensively:

Well then, already with joint custody, it is easier, I know when I have the child and when I don't [...] so my daughter needs not suffer from the fact that I'm self-employed, that I work at home.

[Administrative assistant (♀), single-parent family 1 child, self-employed less than 1 year] 063

#### **4.4. More time for leisure and physical activity?**

Since a number of studies claim that home working or being self-employed allows to free up some time, we intended to find out whether self-employed workers were able to manage more leisure or take on physical activity. In general, participants have identified a wide variety of activities: walking, bicycle, roller blade, ski, snowboard, swimming, reading, music, yoga, meditation, etc. Walking is the most popular activity. Among the participants interviewed, 19 (4 men and 15 women) mentioned that they prefer this activity because it allows them to relax and think. Where a few participants (2 mentions; 1 man and 1 woman) state that it is difficult to engage in sports on a regular basis, others (2 mentions) maintain that they are able to be active enough, and profitably so. Many participants (7 mentions; 2 men and 5 women) said that the only way they can secure enough time for such activities is when they include it in their schedule, however difficult it is sometimes to abide by this. Finally, although they do not have enough time to attend a fitness centre, some workers use workout or fitness videos (3 mentions; 3 women). Globally, it appears that self-employment does not increase significantly the time devoted to physical activity. Indeed while home working allows to include foreign activities into

the work schedule or to include such activity at lunchtime, the unpredictability of client assignments often overruns that part of the day schedule. Moreover, some participants said that once an assignment or project is underway, it becomes difficult for them to manage interruptions for fear of losing the momentum.

I feel lucky because I can attend at lunchtime... we are a bunch of self-employed workers, almost, including TV people. But it's so hard [...] you get this telephone call ten minutes before leaving, and you learn that you must deliver something or that you must send out something or that you must submit a proposal. Of course I'd like to say no, I'm not here... as if I was in a business meeting, or doing a shoot ... but it's all on a case-by-case basis... you assess the urgency and then decide the course of action... or sometimes you have the momentum and you know you must exercise but things are so well underway at work and you tell yourself that when you're back, the momentum will be lost... than on the other side you feel guilty; remorse tells you that you must exercise if you want to feel better tomorrow. It isn't easy.

[Photographer (♂), couple, self-employed 4 years] 020

Some things never impinge... I mean that my work never prevents me from playing soccer on Wednesdays during the summer, or from playing my Saturday morning hockey game during winter. These are priorities. I turn down meetings if... I'll find reasons to avoid going somewhere if it believe it can jeopardize one of these activities. Family reasons may have precedence, however, but professional reasons, never will I miss my soccer or hockey games. Therefore sports activity will generally have precedence over work.

[Researcher, couple w/older children, self-employed 8 years] 069S

Where several participants state that their chosen work mode allows them more time and flexibility to attend such activities (6 mentions; 4 men and 2 women), the presence of younger children may have the opposite effect and even prevent workers from scheduling physical or leisure activities. This occurs more frequently in the female population. Nevertheless, a sport offers the family an opportunity to participate in physical activity as children grow up. Time is also made available to the parent when children are busy with their own recreational or competitive activities.

Well, activities under 'other activities' ... I don't ... no, really, I have enough with running around after them and try to organize their activities... that, in itself, is quite a feat.

[Lawyer, couple-2 children, self-employed 10 ans] 066

My son plays soccer and during that time I workout because it's in the same sports complex [...] it's the only time frame I have.

[Administrative assistant (♀), single-parent family 1 child, self-employed 1 year] 032

This year is the first year we've resumed skiing together as a family. Well, in fact, children have taken it up and skiing has become a family activity this year. Really, every Saturday. And that's been quite an undertaking. Children didn't ski before and I had been a skier for a long time, but we dropped the activity. And now, this winter, the kids were old enough to ski on their own. But it's quite something... I'm somewhat at a turning point in this, a decision I've made to get back in shape because I've been unable in the past 5 years to be consistent in this regard. So now I compel myself ... because I used to, yes, I've always been a ski buff and when came the children I stopped, well, that's life...

[Caterer, couple-3 children, self-employed 5 years] 044

... I have one session per week, one hour, outside the home but for the rest, I do video workout, sometimes at lunchtime and clearly my self-employed status allows this because I'm home, I'm here, and I really try to perform workout at least twice a week. I don't do the entire program on the cassette because they last 1 hour and that's too much, but I try to carry it out 30 minutes. So the fact that I work at home really helps. Now in the summer I follow a walking program by Josée Lavigneur, which is 30 minutes as well, you walk at different paces and you perform physical drill. I'm lucky because the bike trail isn't very far, actually it's just next door. So in the summer, this allows me to introduce variety in my daily activities; I have lunch and then go out for my 30-minute walk. I try to do it twice a week. If I was a salaried employee ... how could I workout with a video program if I was salaried?...I wouldn't do it...and it would impinge on my family life. What would I do, I'd go out for lunch with my co-workers at a restaurant or on some shopping spree downtown; I can do more exercising this way.

[Journalist (♀), couple-3 children, self-employed 15 years] 035

Among the rewards mentioned by the participants who have replied to this question, we note that physical activity, sports and leisure contribute to abate stress (8 mentions; 4 men and 4 women), to get away from work and experience physical well-being (4 mentions; 3 men and 1 woman), and to increase efficiency and productivity (4 mentions; 2 men and 2 women). In particular, relaxation activities contribute to personal and emotional balance (4 mentions; 1 man and 3 women).

Conversely for some people, personal time happens to be that last thing a self-employed person may hope for (2 mentions; 2 women). Taking time for oneself may even induce guilt, especially during start-up as witnessed by this participant:

No, not yet. I'm still in an intensive organizing phase, making tests with my schedule; I do have more time for my family, but I haven't found much time of my own yet. [...] Because this is all new for me, this status, and all the long-sought freedom I have it now... but when I take time for myself, example a massage or the hairdresser on Tuesday afternoon 2PM, well, I feel guilt. I do it because I tell myself that I must... That's why I became self-employed. This way I don't need to get an appointment at the

hairdresser's on a Saturday at 10AM, with 52 people waiting, I can go to the supermarket at 10AM on Friday, it's fantastic instead of rushing there at 4h30PM on Saturday. So this is part of the schedule benefits but I must stop the feeling of guilt because I perform the same work. I don't do those things as usual and it's a thing in my mind that on Tuesday afternoon I'm supposed to be at work. I'm in sort of a personal adjustment period.

[Human resources counsellor, couple – 1 child, self-employed less than 1 year] 026

#### **4.5. Time for other activities?**

Self-employment holds an advantage for the parents who may, for example, greet the kids home after school or spend more time with them (7 mentions; 7 women). Yet one participant notes that increased family involvement is mainly a matter of choice, regardless of employment status. This may explain why a number of participants see little change in their familial relationship when comparing their self-employment timetable with previous employee schedules (3 mentions; 3 men). Other participants believe that self-employment actually curtails the time they may spend with their children because of availability requirements, especially where evening schedules are involved (2 mentions; 1 man and 1 woman).

After summing up the time spent with the children, for benevolent activity and self-employment work-related tasks, there may be less time left for the spouse or for matrimonial life (1 mention; 1 woman). This point of view is not general; a number of participants believe that self-employment provides them more time for their matrimonial life, including an improvement in the quality of their relationship with the spouse (3 mentions; 1 man and 2 women). Indeed flexible scheduling allowed by self-employment may be used to spend more time with a spouse but all the more so it offers a quality improvement in that respect (2 mentions; 2 women). In general, where the self-employed worker accommodates the spouse's fixed work schedule or holiday calendar (4 mentions; 2 man and 2 women), the spouse does not always realize or identify with the changeover incurred by the self-employed worker. The spouse may find difficult to recognize the workload involved in this changeover for the self-employed worker. Conflicts may arise from this (2 mentions; 1 man and 1 woman) as is the case with domestic chores that a number of spouses expect to be accomplished by the partner during her/his workday at home. This situation may however be mitigated when the spouse also works long hours, including evenings and weekends, or when the spouse has numerous activities outside the home; this allows the spouse to better understand and accept the schedule of the self-employed partner (4 mentions; 2 men and 2 women). In other words, even where the spouse's situation imposes constraints on one's schedule, she/he nevertheless helps with taking time off (2 mentions; 1 man and 1 woman).

My partner will often work a lot, that job is 'open-ended' and my partner must work overtime. In addition, he has several leisure activities outside the home. He coaches a hockey team and this keeps him away from the house. So he too has a lot of activities outside, and therefore he will not suffer if I work evenings or if I'm busy with work on Saturday morning, he will not feel distressed because he is busy as I am. He is so busy that any other

woman working regular hours could suffer with him... in short, we have a lifestyle with a lot of beat.

[Nutritionist, couple, self-employed 4 years] 061

#### **4.6. More time for friends?**

In light of the interviews conducted, it remains unclear whether self-employment at home increases the time one could spend with friends. For example, if work hours flexibility allows for visiting friends during week days (2 mentions; 2 men), or if that flexibility accommodates activities shared with other self-employed persons (6 mentions; 2 men and 4 women), the freedom is of limited scope where a majority of friends work day jobs and self-employed workers cannot socialize to any greater extent with them (1 mention; 1 woman). Incidentally, the self-determination of self-employed workers is not necessarily greater. A number of interviewees even stated that socializing conditions have not changed since they have switched to self-employment (8 mentions; 8 men); it is interesting to note that this is the case for men while a majority of women, as we have seen earlier, indicate that they include domestic chores into their work schedule: few men even mention this issue. We may be facing different types of 'independence', or there may be gender differences in the rapport to domestic space or the home environment as was proposed by Felstead and Jewson (2000) and which translates in dissimilar terms for self-employed men and women. Finally, several reasons coupled to self-employment may explain why self-employed workers experience a downswing in their social times. First, the self-employed person has no co-workers and therefore she/he meets fewer people daily (4 mentions; 2 men and 2 women); and the increased workload leaves little time for friends (3 mentions; 1 man and 2 women).

No, I don't think that it has changed anything except that I'm not free at the same moments as before... when I worked 8 to 5, well... of course during the day I could not leave work and help out my brother or my parents if they needed me, but now if they need me I can take time off and see them for an hour or two, I come back home to resume work on a translation or I can do something else... Same with friends... we can talk over the phone... I already had a few friends who didn't work from the office anymore, who work at home, and already I would see them less often, at the office we could not see each other at all so we met over the phone, emailed each other and once in a while we'd go out... no, it hasn't changed much, it's just a matter of time breakdown... schedules for get-togethers and outings may change a little.

[Translator, single, self-employed 2 years] 062

I have the feeling, somehow, that I have more time for others because, well, say I want to have lunch with a friend and that person is able to take all his/her time for lunch, then we may spend two full hours, have fun and enjoy, that's something I could not have done when I worked for an employer, so in that sense I'd say self-employment provides more time in terms of quantity.

[Translator, couple, self-employed 6 years] 041

... the work is intellectual work and therefore you must do it by yourself. Even if we talk to people, to clients over the phone, etc., the need for socialization therefore remains almost intact. It is not satisfied at work since I have very little. So to balance out I really need to see my close friends, go out with them, have a good time, take them out to dinner, attend shows, etc. Well then I do it more often and in my view my relationship with these people since I need to be with them more, it's easier because at the end of the day I'm not exhausted by other relationships that have, that... my affective life... So that's it. My opinion is that it's more rewarding. I socialize with people that I like, we have fun.

[Translator, couple, self-employed 9 years] 013

Yes, quality, a lot, because previously... I've been employed for so long [...] I used to define myself through this job exclusively but today I'm much closer to others, much more receptive to others [...] I meet different people all the time, deal with different businesses and this forces me to adapt much faster than I need to in my social life... I now appreciate the presence of others to a greater extent [...] I listen better to what they have to say, I want to learn about them, what they do and everything, yes I'd say being self-employed has changed something.

[Psychologist (♂), couple, self-employed 3 years] 060

For some, hours spent with friends or with former co-workers do not necessarily increase with self-employment. This work status, however, would improve the quality of relationships that self-employed workers maintain with others.

#### **4.7. Qualitative improvement in relationships?**

Where a number of participants have noticed improvement in the quality of their family relationships (parents, brothers and sisters, grand-parents) (3 mentions; 3 women) since they have become self-employed, others perceive no real difference in that respect (4 mentions; 2 men and 2 women). For example, self-employment may offer flexibility to care for one's ageing parents; the schedule may free up a few hours every day (6 mentions; 2 men and 4 women) or it may multiply the visiting occurrences and improve the quality of the relationship even if the parents live in another city (1 mention; 1 woman). Nevertheless, other self-employed workers interviewed state that their parents do not hesitate to get involved in their professional activities either by helping out for the purchase of equipment or by offering financial support; this translates into a quality relationship (1 mention; 1 man). Performing self-employed work would have an influence on the mood and on the relationship of self-employed workers with their spouse and children and with family in general. Indeed according to some participants, self-employment diminishes tiredness and this opens up improvement opportunities for relationships when encounters occur (2 mentions; 2 women). This shrinking of tiredness associated with self-employment also impacts on one's mood with the children and the spouse, and with friends and clients (2 mentions; 1 man and 1 woman). Finally, self-

employment involves less tedious work (1 mention; 1 woman) and increases satisfaction at work (2 mentions; 1 man and 1 woman).

Nevertheless some adverse effects of self-employment may also cause problems in relationships. For example, the unstable flexibility inherent to the self-employment status may also force one to cancel an event with friends at the last moment, and this is expected to degrade the relationship (1 mention; 1 man). The number of relationships may in fact dwindle since disposable income or money available for theatre-going, dancing, etc., is lower for one who is the self-employed than it is for a salaried person (2 mentions; 1 man and 1 woman). This may explain why a number of respondents believe that self-employment introduces more distance in the relationships (3 mentions; 3 women).

Things have changed. I find that I maintain less today [relationships]. Because it was easier, in fact, when I was employed to have lunch with a friend who also works downtown or with a co-worker or [...]. For me, socializing has dwindled... I spend more time networking than before, but this is more superficial [...].

[Human resources and business help and services (♀), single-parent 1 child, self-employed 1 year] 032

It may happen, however, that self-employment will provide more opportunities to create friendly ties with other self-employed persons (4 mentions; 2 men and 2 women) and therefore self-employment would foster the development of friendships to a larger extent than salaried work:

It allowed me to meet people who became good friends, yes... other self-employed persons with whom we share... When you have a job, you're with the same people all the time, people you often have to put up with, I find. Of course there may be 1 or 2 persons with whom one may develop friendship, you can have a good bunch of friends at the workplace, it happened, but it seems that it remains... a little more superficial [...].

[Writer, couple, self-employed 3 years] 055

#### **4.8. Increased exposure to intrusion**

Schedule flexibility and the relative freedom afforded to layout the work may contribute to the fact that self-employed workers are more frequently called upon by the people in their work environment. It seems indeed that self-employed workers are more likely to be intruded upon when people know that they are at home during the day. Self-employed workers must learn to say no and even to draw a line or set limits (9 mentions; 1 man and 8 women).

In the beginning, it was tough... because people would come at the door, friends would come over for a coffee and I'd say to myself 'I have this lesson planning to finish and how am I going to kick this one out without hurting his feelings'. But at one point they understood that I was asking

them to call me up beforehand, the next time, because I had a lesson planning to finalize... and yes one must show determination in these matters because it can drain your energy and when you're ready for work you find yourself exhausted... now that's important.

[Coach (music), single-parent 1 child and 1 older child, self-employed 15 years] 038

Me, people expect me to listen... They tell me 'Well, you're not working'. I reply 'Yes, I'm working, but I work at home, it's not the same'.

[Representative, couple-2 children, self-employed less than 1 year] 045c

People tend to think that because we're at home we have time for everything... Could you pick up mom to take her to the doctor's... look now, I waste three hours, I must shift my clients around... you, could you take... So, of course... true, there's more flexibility, obviously but somehow things may well run overboard. A lot of things must be taken into account. It's hard for me to say 'No' and so he calls me... but if I said 'No, I'm working', they probably wouldn't call again so soon.

[Accountant (♀), couple-3 children, self-employed 13 years] 009

At one point, I had to set them straight because for them [members of the family] I have no more time. Now things are better, but I've learned to say 'No'. They even asked me to baby-sit their children.

[Researcher, couple, self-employed 17 years] 048

#### **4.9. Scrambling of work and off-duty activities**

I think that if one grants herself such freedom, it is precisely because you don't want to hear that errands must be done on Friday evening or Saturday morning and that work can't be performed on Saturday, that work is carried out on weekdays. I think we have to stop imposing ourselves barriers; I deal with my clients when it is suitable to do so and with the family at other times. It may turn out that my husband, as he grows older, organizes activities with my daughter only or with a group of children and that I find myself alone and decide that I'll dive into a substantial assignment and take advantage of their absence on Saturday or Sunday to do so, I'm likely to do just that.

[Human resources consultant, couple 1 child, self-employed less than 1 year] 026

One of the recognized benefits of self-employment is that no justification or explanation needs to be given when time is taken for personal activities or obligations during working hours. Of course, it is all a matter of choice and organization. Errands may run parallel to client meetings that require daytime travel, or early in the morning or at lunchtime. It is therefore not surprising that some would include these activities in their workday schedule and thus avoid peak hours in retail stores (9 mentions; 5 men and 4 women) or rush-hour traffic (10 mentions; 2 men and 8 women). While a large number of respondents find it practical to perform other personal duties or functions during work hours, some attempt to discharge these at lunchtime or at the end of the day because

clients expect them to be normally available (6 mentions; 1 man and 5 women). Likewise, if the self-employed workers we have met make use of this flexibility, they often recoup those working hours in the evening or during the weekend. Some participants will hesitate to take advantage of this flexibility in view of such perceived 'requirement' to recoup working hours, and they consider that schedule flexibility may turn into a job trap (3 mentions; 1 man and 2 women). Others squarely refuse to use office hours to carry out personal responsibilities (4 mentions; 3 men and 1 woman); they do errands in the evening or on weekends although they allow themselves to do domestic chores or accommodate visiting professionals and receive couriers and deliveries. Let us mention that many participants (13 mentions; 6 men and 7 women) attempt to include medical appointments into their workday schedule (doctor, dentist, and optometrist) in order to avoid this particular type of waiting-room downtime.

The important advantage is that we, self-employed workers, have an added action point that salaried workers don't have, because salaried personnel accomplishes day-to-day yet recurrent work actions, so you work fixed hours and at the end of the day when kids come home from school you have to prepare supper, wash the children in the bath, and it's always so supervised and boring. Therefore it's the same, day in day out while we, self-employed workers, it isn't the same, it's never the same, every day brings something new; you can walk out and go see your child in the afternoon and meet a client afterwards, and then you can... it's different on every level. So that's the chance we have, we supervise our own business and that's quite determining, you can work... like last weekend we had friends over, so what... in the afternoon I can organize and do something with my children, in the evening my wife and I ate out and so everything is really under control, you really have control over your work schedule.

[Representative, couple-3 children, self-employed less than 1 year] 045b

It may seem laid-back but if my work allows me to, I'll do whatever and I consider that if I spend an hour running errands on Tuesday afternoon instead of two or three on Saturday I'm better off... because there's a crowd, because it takes me 15 minutes to find a parking spot... if I run errands on weekends, then I take a lot of time away from my family and I'm not more productive for that matter... somehow we must try to balance it all.

[Human resources consultant, couple – 1 child, self-employed less than 1 year] 026

And it's going to allow me maybe... the assignment I'll carry out on Sunday when all is so quiet and I'm alone, well that means Monday and Tuesday off. That's fantastic when you need to do your Xmas shopping. [...] I think it greatly improves all transactions... Well, with current banking hours those who work 9 to 5 have a hard time. It's much simpler for me. I run to the bank when it opens in the morning, in any case... I'm very very flex with schedules. I find that self-employment, especially working at home because some work in clients' offices, so mainly who work from their home, helps a lot, very much in terms of tasks.

[Relationnist (♀), couple, self-employed 10 years] 002

You know, me, if I take this example, you know, that poor lady who leaves home with her child at 8AM, drops him at daycare, and then rushes to work, well before she leaves the house, she has to perform everything that needs to be done in the house. Me, my laundry is being done when I'm working at home. Well, when one load is finished I take it and hang it on the clothesline and *that's it*. I don't need to do it all before I leave home or when I come back from work. It's all done concurrently. The same for dishes... The dishwasher may just the same operate at 2PM, it's not a problem. To say that I take advantage... at the gym, yes it's less crowded at lunchtime than it is at 5PM for sure when everybody goes there at the end of their workday. [...]

[Translator, single-parent family – 1 young child, self-employed 22 years] 019

#### 4.10. Personal and professional life interference

I would not be self-employed, I would not work at home just for that reason, but... it's included in the package. And that's very, very good. When messenger services tell you 'we'll deliver sometime during the day' and can't tell you at what time, well... Chances are that I'll be there unless I have an appointment somewhere. I always visit Club Price in off-peak periods... So there are things that I can do... I can accomplish because I'm here at home.

[Researcher, couple-older children, self-employed 8 years] 069

Me, I mix up everything. Today at lunchtime I took my bike over to the repair shop, went to place an order for new contact lenses, but during lunchtime, however, because I know that my clients expect me to be here on time so when I come back from my errands at 12h45 to eat and it doesn't matter if lunch carries over until 1h15PM, it doesn't matter, I'm there at work.

[Administrative assistant (♀), single-parent family 1 child, self-employed less than 1 year] 063

New communication technologies (Internet and cell phones) seem to be used as means that assist in balancing work-family requirements for the self-employed. The following statement is such an example, but technologies may also cause interference:

With my cell phone I manage to control my schedules in order to spend as much time as possible with [my daughter], obviously... the telephone may be disturbing at times but it allows me somehow to do things I otherwise could not get done. Friday afternoon I'm home with my daughter but I have my phone and should something go wrong, if clients come up with an 'emergency' they call me over the phone, secretaries transfer the calls; so it provides me with a form of freedom, but it's somewhat flimsy. At 5PM, forget it, the phone is on Off... me, when I come home and I want to forget

about it all, well that's it, when I allow myself some time off, there's always the cell phone so I can be reached anytime, it's not that bad.

[Lawyer, couple, self-employed 12 years] 065

Me, I have my cell phone. If something comes up in a crash, the client calls me wherever I am... You know, I turn it off only when I visit the massage parlour. But I can be at the grocery store and the client will call me, I'll take the call and, you know, I can fix the problem. Or I call the client back 10 minutes later at my computer... You know, I'm never more than 10 minutes away from home.

[Event organizer, couple, self-employed 4 years] 018

Here, we realize that work may interfere with private life, the portable phone being the invasive tool of work into private life, more so than working at home per se.

#### **4.11. Implications for the couple**

The conditions under which self-employment is executed may exert pressure on matrimonial life and even lead to separation, as is the case of two of our participants who recount that self-employment played a part in that failure:

Well, my second wedding sort of failed somehow due in part to self-employment... because... that's the story... it was one of the reasons. I had no revenue, not enough client assignments at the time [...] and... since my financial situation was critical...

[Translator, single-1 child, self-employed 4 years] 054

A mate or spouse, I don't have one anymore because things didn't work, simply. He had a fixed schedule and if I had an assignment to hand in, say during the weekend, me you know having someone there at my side asking me endlessly 'so, are you finished?'... It didn't work and I dumped him.

[Coach, single, self-employed 5 years] 003

The latter account exemplifies how the intrusion of work into personal or family life is often abhorred by other members of the household. This reality is frequently brought up raised alongside telework (Felstead and Jewson 2000 ; Taskin and Vendramin 2005), but very seldom in the wake of self-employment (Baines 2002), hence the contribution of our work.

#### **Discussion and conclusion**

Self-employment performed at home is another form of work organisation; according to some studies, this type of work mode has grown in recent decades yet others indicate that self-employment is stagnant. Home working, especially in the form of self-employment, is sometimes offered as a mitigating solution for problems affecting personal and professional life balance (Baines and Gelder 2003 ; Felstead and Jewson 2000).

We have noted in our review of the literature that results concerning the advantages of self-employment are split, especially in the U.S. A number of authors maintain that self-employed workers are blessed with more freedom and work hours flexibility while others report added work-family conflicts and work scheduling problems (Parasuraman and Simmers 2001, among others). Elsewhere, many studies present work-family reconciliation in terms of an advantage for home workers, but others indicate a greater exposure to family-profession conflicts (Felstead and Jewson 2000 ; Felstead *et al.* 2002).

Beyond self-reliance, our research focused on the situation facing home workers. A 1999 investigation carried out in Québec and which surveyed about 500 persons working at home indicated that schedule flexibility is the outstanding feature for near one third of all respondents regardless of gender, and for 44% of full-time home workers. In decreasing order, the other features or advantages sought by the respondents to the latter study are as follows: no commuting (25%), a sense of being more productive at work (10% men and 4% women); also noted but to a lesser degree were savings on travel and meal expenses, attending the family, peace of mind and improvement in the quality of life (Cefrio 2001).

In fact, a majority of our own participants who are parents feel that self-employment performed for the most part at home allows them to allocate more time to their family in the morning and the evening; they feel that they are more readily available to attend the needs of their children, to prepare them for school or daycare in the morning and greet them back at the end of the day (providing work can resume later). Many respondents say that they are able to squeeze chores and errands in the daily work schedule and thus free-up more time in the weekend.

It is interesting to note that many self-employment related benefits identified in our research are cross-linked, most of them issuing from the increased flexibility in work organization and social time, including a measure of additional (although relative) self-reliance. Many participants have also said that the recovery of time otherwise wasted in commuting, when added to their flexible schedule, allows them to spend more time with their family or allocate more time for personal activities, including sports and leisure activities.

We have also found that a majority of male respondents had noticed no difference in their social life since turning to self-employment, and that a majority of female respondents do combine workload and domestic chores. There seems to exist a different attitude toward household activities, and likewise toward the management of domestic or family activities according to gender and therefore, self-employment is performed and acted out quite differently by men and women.

Yet both men and women are equally subject to work time interference on private and family life. Starting up a business prevents both men and women from turning down client requests; they remain available at lunchtime, in the evening and even over weekends in order to finalize pressing assignments. As reported in a substantial number of interview excerpts, self-employed workers are exposed to personal or family life intrusion, and other members of the household will sometimes resent such impingement.

This concern is often associated with telework (Felstead and Jewson 2000 ; Taskin and Vendramin 2005) but seldom with self-employment, hence the contribution of this research. While self-employment is often viewed as an appropriate solution to work-family imbalance, and where a number of authors believe that this approach is chosen by women for the control provided over some form of flexible schedule, it appears that self-employed workers themselves are not always in agreement. During the start-up period mainly and quite frequently still in subsequent years, self-employed workers feel that they must remain accessible to their clients for fear of losing them to competitors.

The portrayal of self-employment as a foundation for improving control over social times (work hours, personal time, family time, etc.) comes in different shades. Where self-employment allows improving working hours flexibility through creative arrangements that accommodate dissimilar activities, it often implies imperative time constraints to perform client assignments on time. Persons who opt for self-employment and work at home arbitrate between the important advantages (autonomy, flexibility, etc.) they find in working from home as self-employed and the challenges of having to respect deadlines and time constraints of clients.

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