

# Work hard, [then maybe] play hard: Do Americans value their happiness on work life?

**By Hannah Pawig** | 20 April 2023

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A substantial part of modern-day culture in the United States is the overworked lifestyle that leaves many Americans with little leisure time each day. Small talk among colleagues likely results in somebody expressing they are simply “too busy” to do other things after arriving home from a shift—a scenario of life that screams misery. Yet the happiest Americans reported the highest average weekly working hours—44.6 hours—according to the U.S. General Social Survey (GSS) in 2021. The University of Chicago’s nonpartisan and objective research organization (NORC) launched the GSS a half-century ago, a national survey that “monitor[s] societal change and studie[s] the growing complexity of American society” (NORC.org). Over four-thousand American adults’ responses to a combination of online and telephone surveys comprise the GSS’s most recent data.

One-in-five people reported themselves as “very happy” when rating life happiness while having the most average work hours per week as opposed to that of the “pretty happy” or “not too happy” respondents—both averaging slightly under 38.3 hours, the overall mean. Still, it’s unexpected that the happiest Americans work about 16% more hours per week than the average. Surprisingly, a tenth of people who reported as “very dissatisfied” with their job reported as generally happiest along with a whopping 60-hour average week. This average workweek was the highest among any group, surpassing the generally happiest or job-satisfied groups.

Of course, the coronavirus pandemic began in 2020, prompting companies’ transitions to remote work. Since then, remote jobs have become commonplace in several work fields. For employees, working at home presents a productive space bubble, more time with kids, extra opportunities for chores, and an *extremely* short commute from the bed to the computer desk.

What’s unknown in the latest GSS is the respondents’ exact job type—remote or in-office. Nevertheless, we can still consider the question: did remote jobs provide more enjoyment and productivity to Americans’ work lives to the point of life enhancement, regardless of whether they like their jobs? Perhaps Americans have merely evolved into workaholics that find joy in clocking in high hours at the workplace, having accepted society’s busy culture.