

Dow Jones Reprints: This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers, use the Order Reprints tool at the bottom of any article or visit [www.djreprints.com](http://www.djreprints.com)

[See a sample reprint in PDF format.](#)

[Order a reprint of this article now](#)

## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

WSJ.com

LIFE & STYLE | JUNE 23, 2010

# What Would You Do With an Extra Hour?

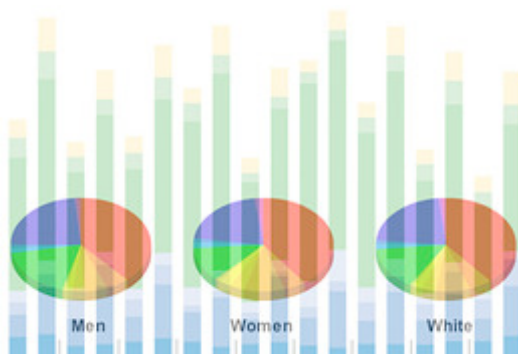
*Americans Are Spending More Time Watching TV and Sleeping as Unemployment Rises, Survey Finds*

By [JUSTIN LAHART](#) and [EMMELINE ZHAO](#)

Rising unemployment has left Americans with more spare time on their hands. But those free hours are largely being frittered away, a new government survey finds.

The average American aged 15 or older spent three hours, 11 minutes a day working in 2009, according to the American Time Use Survey released by the Labor Department on Tuesday. That's 17 minutes less time a day engaged in work than in 2007, before the recession hit. While 17 minutes might not seem a lot, when it's averaged over the entire population, including employed people, those who have lost a job and retirees, it represents a significant amount.

### At Work and At Play



See how Americans spend their days, and how much time they devote to different kinds of leisure activities.

[More photos and interactive graphics](#)

"It's a waste."

The government survey, conducted annually since 2003, is based on data gathered by the Census Bureau from households that are selected to represent a range of demographic characteristics. One member of each participating household is asked to keep a time-use diary on a predetermined day of

What did people do with that extra time? Mainly they slept and watched TV. Time spent in front of the television rose by 12 minutes, to two hours, 49 minutes a day in the two years through 2009. Sleep was the next big gainer, increasing by six minutes to eight hours, 40 minutes a day.

The data also show what Americans aren't doing with their extra time: There was virtually no change between 2007 and 2009 in the time devoted to volunteering, religious activities, exercise or education. In sum, time people might have used productively is instead being squandered, says University of Texas economist Daniel Hamermesh.

"It's not like we're using the recession to build our skills —the skills are depreciating," says Mr. Hamermesh.

the week and then report how they spent their time via a telephone interview. In 2009, approximately 13,100 people were interviewed.

The unemployment rate rose to 10% at the end of 2009 from 5% two years earlier, while the U.S. economy lost 8.4 million jobs in that period. Today, unemployment stands at 9.7%.



Justin Lahart discusses a new government report that shows that rising unemployment has left Americans with more spare time on their hands, but that those free hours are largely frittered away.

**32:** The number of additional minutes a day men spend watching TV than women do

The government data are providing researchers with their first in-depth glimpse of how an economic downturn affects the way people spend their time. The findings are challenging some established ideas about how people behave when confronted with joblessness.

Many economists had surmised, for example, that people who had lost their jobs, or whose work hours had been reduced, would engage in activities they previously might have paid someone else to do, like cooking meals, cleaning or fixing up the house.

But the data suggest that hasn't happened. Time spent on household activities, in the kitchen and yard, for instance, averaged one hour, 48 minutes a day last year, down slightly from one hour, 50 minutes in 2007.

There are exceptions, of course. Philip Sexton, of Goldsboro, N.C., says he now works 40 hours a week at his job as an auto repairman, down from the 56 to 67 hours a week he used to put in.

## Discuss on The Juggle

[What Would You Do with Extra Time?](#) Join the conversation on [The Juggle](#), the WSJ's work and family blog.



[View Full Image](#)

Associated Press

Rising unemployment has left Americans with more spare time on their hands. But those free hours are largely being frittered away, a new government survey finds.

In his free time, "I come home and cut the grass, run and do some church business...see my mom, she's 82 years old, pay bills," the 57-year-old says. "Before, I never had time to do it except on weekends."

Among people who weren't employed, which includes retirees as well as those who have lost their jobs, the amount of time spent watching television on weekdays rose 10 minutes to three hours, 44 minutes. The time those people spent playing sports or exercising on weekdays was virtually unchanged at 22 minutes a day. And they spent less time reading.

"The exact kinds of behavior that you want people who are out of work to engage in, these are the hardest things to do," says Sarah Burgard, a sociologist at the University of Michigan who studies the effects of job insecurity and unemployment on health. Losing one's job often can bring on feelings of depression and anxiety, keeping people from helping themselves, she

says.

While some experts had hypothesized that job losses during the recession have been so pervasive that people would feel less shame over being unemployed, the time-use survey suggests that may not have

been so, says Ms. Burgard. Indeed, people who weren't employed spent a little less time socializing in 2009 than they did in 2007.

---

## Journal Community

[DISCUSS](#)

*Striving to always be productive is great for an economy but is harmful to the overall quality of life we live. Money isn't everything.*

—Jeremy Bowerman

"It's really hard to walk into the bowling alley or the Elks Club and your friend asks you, 'Did you get a job?' " she says.

The survey also shows that more people are working from home, a reflection of how many people have turned to consulting and other at-home work in the face of a weak job market. Of the country's estimated 108 million people who worked full- or part-time on an average day, some 23.9 million, or 23.6% of the total, worked at home last year. In 2007, 19.9% of all workers worked from home.

Behavior by men and women also varied. Television—which ranks after sleep and work as the activity Americans devote the most time to—remains a larger draw among men than among women.

Men spent an average of three hours, six minutes a day watching TV in 2009, compared with two hours, 34 minutes for women.

Women spent a total of three hours, 10 minutes doing chores like housework, childcare and caring for older family members. That compares with one hour, 53 minutes men devoted to these tasks.

**Write to** Justin Lahart at [justin.lahart@wsj.com](mailto:justin.lahart@wsj.com)

Copyright 2009 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our [Subscriber Agreement](#) and by copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit [www.djreprints.com](http://www.djreprints.com)