

Leisure Time Plummets 20% in 2008 - Hits New Low

Americans lose 10 hours of leisure time since 1973, reallocate what's left

ROCHESTER, N.Y. – December 4, 2008 – Evidently the stock markets aren't the only indices declining this year. America's leisure time is shrinking, and how we spend that time is changing too. These are the latest results from *The Harris Poll*®, which has been tracking America's leisure time since 1973.

[Harris Interactive](#)® surveyed 1,010 adults, by telephone between October 16 and 19, 2008 and found:

- The median number of leisure hours available each week dropped 20% in 2008, from 20 hours in 2007, to an all-time low of only 16 hours this year. This continues a trend which has seen America's median weekly leisure time shrink 10 hours - from 26 hours per week in 1973, the first year we tracked it;
- The biggest changes this year in how people are using their precious leisure time were in TV watching (up 6 points), exercise (up 3 points) and spending time with family and kids (up 3 points);
- Since 1995 the largest changes in how people are spending their leisure time are exercising (up 6 points), computer activities (up 5 points), spending time with family and kids (up 5 points) and swimming (down 5 points).
- Three in ten (30%) Americans say their favorite activity is reading (up from 29% in 2007) while one-quarter (24%) say it is TV watching and 17% say it is spending time with family and kids (up from 14% in 2007). Rounding out the top five leisure time activities are exercise (8%) and computer activities and fishing (each at 7%);
- The median amount of time spent working, including housekeeping and studying, is now at 46 hours per week, up slightly from 45 hours in 2007. In 1973, when this question was first asked, the median was 41 hours a week;
- By generation, Generation Xers (those aged 32-43) are working the most hours (55 each week), followed by 50 hours each week for Echo Boomers (aged 18-31) and Baby Boomers (44-62). As many Matures are retired, they are only working 15 hours each week;

So What?

In 2008, Americans increased their work week one hour, yet claim to have lost four hours of leisure time. Where did the rest of the time go? We have a theory. As the American economic situation worsened, people who were worried about their jobs spent more time “just checking in” via computer or wireless device. While our respondents didn’t consider this as time spent working, they also didn’t count it as leisure time and landing instead in a nebulous grey area.

Also, as leisure time shrinks, Americans appear to be indulging more in solo activities. Four of this year’s top five choices are typically done alone: reading, watching TV, exercising, and computer activities. Reading, watching TV and exercising all increased this year, while computer activities dropped 2 points. While this may seem counterintuitive, since our research indicates that US Internet penetration is at an all-time [high](#), it does add credence to our theory that Americans may be spending just as much or more time on computer activities, yet are considering this time as neither work nor leisure.

TABLE 1
FAVORITE LEISURE-TIME ACTIVITIES
(Spontaneous, Unaided Responses)

“What are your two or three most favorite leisure-time activities?”

Base: All Adults

	1995	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2007	2008
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Reading	28	28	30	27	31	28	26	24	35	29	30
TV watching	25	19	21	22	23	20	15	17	21	18	24
Spending time with family/kids	12	12	13	12	14	12	11	17	20	14	17
Exercise (aerobics, weights)	2	4	3	3	6	5	4	6	6	5	8
Computer activities	2	3	3	7	6	7	4	5	7	9	7
Fishing	10	12	11	13	9	12	8	9	8	7	7
Going to movies	8	7	8	8	6	7	6	7	10	7	6
Golf	6	8	6	6	5	6	5	3	4	5	6
Walking	8	8	7	9	8	6	4	4	6	6	6
Gardening	9	11	14	15	13	10	8	6	6	6	5
Playing team sports	9	9	9	8	5	5	7	6	5	6	5
Renting movies	5	5	3	4	5	4	3	3	6	3	5
Church/church activities	3	4	2	3	4	3	2	5	4	5	4
Outdoor activities	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	1	3	4
Relaxing	*	*	1	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	4
Watching sporting events	*	*	2	5	4	2	2	5	3	4	4
Socializing with friends/ neighbors	*	*	2	5	6	4	5	7	4	4	4
Hunting	4	4	4	6	3	3	3	4	5	3	4
Shopping	3	3	3	4	3	4	2	4	5	4	3
Traveling	4	5	4	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	3
Playing music	3	2	2	3	3	2	1	3	3	3	3
Entertaining	7	3	5	3	2	1	2	3	5	3	3
Eating out/dining out	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	5	2	3	3
Housework	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	2	3	2	3
Cooking	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	3	2	2	3
Crafts (unspecified)	*	*	*	3	4	4	2	4	3	3	3
Woodworking	1	*	1	2	1	1	2	1	2	1	2
Running	2	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	2
Bowling	4	3	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	2
Listening to music	5	3	4	4	4	4	4	4	6	4	2

Swimming	7	6	7	6	5	8	5	2	2	3	2
Bicycling	4	3	3	3	2	3	3	2	3	3	2
Sewing/crocheting	7	4	8	4	3	3	3	3	4	2	2
Playing cards	*	*	*	*	*	*	1	2	2	2	2
Hiking	3	3	2	2	1	*	3	3	2	2	2
Working on cars	2	1	2	2	2	1	1	1	2	2	1
Camping	4	3	3	4	4	3	2	1	2	3	1
Boating	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	1	2	2	1
Animals/pets/dogs	*	*	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	1
Painting	2	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	2	1
Dancing	1	*	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	1
Horseback riding	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	3	1	2	1
Sleeping	2	3	1	2	2	2	3	2	4	1	1
Writing	*	*	*	*	*	1	1	1	2	1	1
Motorcycling	*	*	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Skiing	1	*	*	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1
Tennis	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

Other activities mentioned by one percent include racing, beach, and theater. * indicates less than 0.5%.

**TABLE 2
BIGGEST CHANGES SINCE 1995**

		1995	2008	CHANGE
Exercise	%	2	8	+6
Computer activities	%	2	7	+5
Spending time with family/kids	%	12	17	+5
Swimming	%	7	2	-5

**TABLE 3
BIGGEST CHANGES SINCE LAST YEAR**

		2007	2008	CHANGE
T.V. Watching	%	18	24	+6
Spending time with family/kids	%	14	17	+3
Exercise	%	5	8	+3

**TABLE 4
WORK HOURS PER WEEK**

"First, we would like to know approximately how many hours a week you spend at your job or occupation, and that includes keeping house or going to school as well as working for pay or profit. How many hours would you estimate you spend at work, housekeeping or studies, including any travel time to and from the job or school?"

Base: All Adults

Year	Median Number of Work Hours
2008	46
2007	45
2004	50
2003	49
2002	47
2001	50
2000	50
1999	50
1998	50
1997	51
1995	51
1994	51
1993	50
1989	49

1987	47
1984	47
1980	47
1975	43
1973	41

TABLE 5
HOURS AVAILABLE FOR LEISURE PER WEEK

"And about how many hours each week do you estimate you have available to relax, watch TV, take part in sports or hobbies, go swimming or skiing, go to the movies, theater, concerts, or other forms of entertainment, get together with friends, and so forth?"

Base: All Adults

Year	Median Number of Leisure Hours
2008	16
2007	20
2004	19
2003	19
2002	20
2001	20
2000	20
1999	20
1998	19
1997	20
1995	19
1994	20
1993	19
1989	19
1987	17
1984	18
1980	19
1975	24
1973	26

**TABLE 6
WORK AND LEISURE TIME BY DEMOGRAPHIC CATEGORIES**

	Work hours	Leisure hours
All Adults	46	16
AGE		
Echo Boomers (18-31)	50	14
Gen. X (32-43)	55	20
Baby Boomers (44-62)	50	20
Matures (63+)	15	24
REGION		
East	45	20
Midwest	49	14
South	50	20
West	40	15
GENDER		
Male	50	20
Female	40	15
RACE/ETHNICITY		
White	50	20
Black	40	10
Hispanic	50	10
HOUSEHOLD INCOME		
Less than \$35,000	40	10
\$35,000 - \$49,999	45	15
\$50,000 - \$74,999	50	20
\$75,000 or more	50	20
CHILDREN		
Households with children	50	12
Households with no children	45	16
PARTY IDENTIFICATION		
Republican	45	20
Democrat	42	12
Independent	50	20

Methodology

The Harris Poll[®] was conducted by telephone within the United States between October 16 and 19, 2008 among 1,010 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region, number of adults in the household, size of place (urbanicity) and number of phone lines in the household were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words “margin of error” as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

About Harris Interactive

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