

The Game: Easier or Tougher?

A Study of Hamilton Millennials
And Self-Employment

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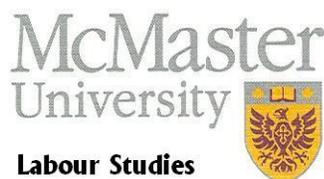
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POVERTY AND
EMPLOYMENT PRECARIETY
IN SOUTHERN ONTARIO

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The Game: Easier or Tougher?

A Brief Study of Hamilton Millennials and Self-Employment

Executive Summary

The effects of neoliberal capitalism have had a significant impact on the structure of the Canadian labour market and economy, but also on the employment opportunities for young workers in the early 21st century. And despite being the most educated generation ever, the millennials are faced with fewer full-time, secure jobs. Many have opted to embrace self-employment, sometimes not by choice but by necessity.

This qualitative study embraced similar themes from the McMaster University/United Way of Toronto/PEPSO study, *“The Precarity Penalty,”* to determine how self-employment affects their personal, work, social and community lives. One-on-one interviews were conducted with 10 Hamilton millennials (born 1981-1997), who were recruited through the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce’s affiliated organizations, *Hamilton HIVE* and *Young Entrepreneurs and Professionals Hamilton*.

A total of 28 questions explored five topical areas: 1) their employment relationship; 2) how their employment relationship affected their life outside of work – i.e., family life, friends, community involvement; 3) physical and mental health; 4) their outlook on the future in terms of employment-related opportunities and potential barriers; and 5) their overall view on work and the current generation of workers. This research provided a glimpse into the challenges that young, well-educated, self-employed millennials face, and their views on work and the labour market today.

Although a small qualitative study of self-employed millennials, there were several issues and consequential outcomes related to self-employment that were identified by a majority of interviewees. Overall, most interviewees identified “flexibility” and “freedom” as the key reasons for their preference of self-employment — being able to determine hours and place of work — despite some of the social and economic effects on their personal lives.

Concurrently, however, the cost of having this flexibility is irregular working hours (e.g., evenings, weekends), as they work far more hours in a week than someone holding a more traditional full time job (e.g., 35-40 hours per week), and there are financial limitations on social activities, which affects to different degrees, their life outside of work with family life, friends and community. Although income was not a topic of discussion for this small study, it would be fair to say that these self-employed millennials seem over-worked, underpaid and overwhelmed.

The majority of interviewees also identified the “lack of benefits” as a major disadvantage to self-employment, and many have accepted the fact that “this is how it is for their generation.” All of the interviewees spoke of their experiences with stress, anxiety and in some cases, depression, which were all related to their self-employment status. The majority of the interviewees also indicated that they would not be in a financial position to pay for an expense, i.e., \$900 or more that might come up unexpectedly.

All participants identified with some form of mental health issues, specifically stress and anxiety, because of the demands of self-employment, and the challenge of balancing time between family, friends and their community.

With the burden of high student debt, an over-heated housing market making home purchase unattainable for most and putting greater demand and pressure on rental housing market, fewer full time job options, having to choose between a personal vehicle and public transit and cycling, it would seem that Generation Y or the millennials do seem to have it much tougher today than the generations before them.

Introduction

Four decades of neoliberalism has resulted in a steep rise in social, economic and political inequality, further segmentation of the labour force along racial, ethnic, gender and class divisions, and perhaps now generational. We've seen the significant growth of the non-standard employment relationship, precarious work and/or less- permanent work, defined by increasing uncertainty and insecurity — temporary, part-time, limited contract work and self-employment, and a lack of benefits and pensions.

Many workers today are faced with less secure employment, jobs that lack supplemental benefits (i.e., prescription-drug plan that insures workers' health needs and unexpected expenses) and secure pensions for retirement; and opportunities for training, skills development and career path planning.

A Different Labour Force

Finding a job after graduating from college or university was a natural expectation when growing up in the sixties and seventies. In the 1980s, however, our economies, national and global, were in the early years of the neoliberal makeover of capitalism. This change has evolved over the past four decades and resulted in the rise of precarious work, offshoring, outsourcing, plant shut-downs, private sector union decline, collective bargaining concessions and increasingly, fewer traditional, full time, permanent jobs.

While well-paying full time jobs still exist, the increase in part-time, temporary, independent contracting, and self-employment has led to more workers going without health and supplemental benefits, pensions and access to vacation. What was an expectation of the Baby Boomers is now seemingly an unlikelihood for so many millennials – the Boomers' kids.

According to the Precarity Penalty study, “temporary employment now accounts for 11 per cent of all employees in Canada, an increase of 75 per cent since 1989. Own-account, self-employment now accounts for over 10 per cent of all workers in Canada, an increase of 60 per cent since 1976. Together, these two forms of precarious employment now account for more than one in five jobs, an increase of nearly 60 per cent in the last 25 years with most of the increase taking place between 1990 and 2007.”¹

The Precarity Penalty Study

In 2013, the Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario (PEPSO) research group released “*It's More than Poverty: Employment Precarity and Household Well-Being*,” a report examining the characteristics of employment in the Greater Toronto-Hamilton Area. It documented the range of employment experiences revealing the extent of insecurity associated with insecure employment relationships, and also

¹ Wayne Lewchuk et al, *The Precarity Penalty: The Impact of Employment Precarity on Individuals, Households and Communities – And What to Do About it* (PEPSO, McMaster University, PEPSO, May 2015), 23.

showed the impact of insecure employment relationships on individual and household well-being and community participation.²

“Secure jobs, with benefits and a possible career path, are becoming harder to find for many types of workers.”³ And while the ground-breaking PEPSO study focused on workers aged 25 to 65 years, including racialized workers, another group of workers face similar challenges. An entire birth cohort of well-educated young adults – Generation Y or the millennials⁴ – has to come to terms with a very different labour market and a new work reality. Some of them have chosen the path of self-employment, which shares many of the traits and challenges of precarious work.

The Precarity Penalty study identified six characteristics of the “own-account self-employed” to determine whether a person was truly self-employed or in misclassified or disguised employment relationship. Nine of the 10 millennial participants interviewed for this study have all of the six characteristics of the “own-account self-employed” identified in the Precarity Penalty study.

1. Less than half of income from work done for a former employer;
2. Controls how work is to be performed;
3. Controls where work is to be performed;
4. Controls when work is to be performed;
5. Uses own tools;
6. More than one client.⁵

“Nearly 90% of participants in the Precarity Penalty study who answered yes to the six questions also reported a preference to be self-employed, while those who answered yes to four or fewer questions, 75% report that they still preferred to be self-employed.”⁶ Among our group of millennials, nine out of 10 said they too preferred to be self-employed despite the social and economic challenges.

Hamilton Millennials

Hamilton’s millennial population according to Census data 2011 was approximately 108,250-153,000, representing 21% to 27.5% or approximately one in four or five Hamiltonians (depending on the years used to define the millennial cohort).⁷ In 2012, Hamilton’s growth rate of young adults (aged 20-29) was the highest (3.1%) since at least 1987. In contrast, the growth rate for young adults has declined in both Toronto and Waterloo since 2005-2006.⁸

The rise of youth employment networks in Hamilton, such as HIVE, Young Entrepreneurs and Professionals (YEP) and Hamilton Media Guild, not only reflect the

² Wayne Lewchuk et al., *The Precarity Penalty: The Impact of Employment Precarity on Individuals, Households and Communities – And What to Do About it* (PEPSO, McMaster University, PEPSO, May 2015), 34.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Millennials are defined as the birth cohort 1981-1997, aged 19-35 years in 2016)

⁵ Lewchuk et al., 34.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Frank A. Clayton. Centre for Urban Research & Land Development, Faculty of Community Services, Ryerson University, July 6, 2016.

⁸ Hamilton Community Foundation, VITAL SIGNS, “What’s the evidence that all of Hamilton’s citizens are sharing the prosperity of Hamilton’s renaissance?” <http://hamiltoncommunityfoundation.ca/vital-signs/major-economic-indicators/>

growth of the millennial generation, but also the impact young adults are having on Hamilton's economy and the city's economic and cultural renaissance.

Profile of Interviewees

All 10 interviewees identified with some form of precarious work — self-employment by contract, freelance, sole proprietorship or incorporation of their own company. One participant holds a part-time job in addition to his contract work.

Two participants are married; eight are single (two are engaged). Five participants live with their significant other (married or not married). Only one of 10 participants has children. Three participants rent, four participants own their own home, and three live with their parents.

All interviewees are post-secondary graduates – nine hold undergraduate degrees and one has two diplomas; two also have Master degrees. As a group, they are somewhat optimistic, have visions and dreams of where they want or expect to be in 10 years. However, they consistently work long hours, spend a lot of time networking, and looking for potential work opportunities, and are actively involved in several Hamilton-based professional organizations. Most participants lack health-related benefits and pensions, are financially unable to purchase a home, and have come to accept that their socio-economic position isn't changing anytime soon (i.e., no benefits, limited funds, long hours, etc.).

This small qualitative study used some of the same themes from the PEPSO study to determine how self-employment affects their personal, work and community lives. During May and June, personal, one-on-one interviews were conducted with 10 Hamilton millennials (born 1981-1997). The study's participants were contacted through the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce's *Young Entrepreneurs and Professionals Hamilton (YEP)* and *Hamilton HIVE* — five males and five females responded.

A total of 28 questions explored five topical areas: 1) their employment relationship; 2) how their employment relationship affected their life outside of work — i.e., family life, friends, community involvement; 3) physical and mental health; 4) their outlook on the future in terms of employment-related opportunities and potential barriers; and 5) their overall view on work and the current generation of workers. Interviewees were also asked about their weekly hours of work, how they see themselves in terms of level of security of their employment, and whether they would be in a financial position to pay for unforeseen or unexpected expenditures.

The results of these interviews provide a glimpse into the challenges that young, well-educated, self-employed millennials are facing today, as well as their views on employment today.

A. Work and Their Employment Relationship

Type of Work

While the type of work that the participants do for pay is as diverse as the 10 individuals, almost all of them shared similar experiences, challenges and views on the nature of their work, and expectations relating to both their work and personal lives.

The types of businesses are diverse, but all of them are part of the growing service sector. They range from health services, sports and entertainment to communications, IT and professional consulting.

The location of their workplaces varies from home office to co-sharing offices to individual offices. The majority of participants work on short-term (client) contracts usually with pre-defined fees and/or hourly rates. One participant works strictly on commissions while another is provided a small base salary but also receives a form of commission on sales, but lacks any benefits. One participant was able to secure a small grant from the City of Hamilton through its small business start-up program.

Job Security

Participants had varying viewpoints on the level of security associated with their type of work. Some participants explained that they went without income for months at a time, and only paid themselves eight months after starting the business. Some participants also challenged the notion that people with full time jobs are more secure today than those who are self-employed or hold other jobs with precarious characteristics.

Elaine runs a design consulting firm and office recycling business in Hamilton. When asked about the level of security of her employment, she explained:

“I feel pretty secure because I feel like I am in control of the success of it. That being said too, and I think this is probably a common thought amongst people in my generation, even though [some have] permanent, full-time jobs. I don’t think anyone really feels super secure, at least anyone in my generation feels all that secure in those positions. Take teaching for example, I have friends that are teachers, at one time that was a position that if you got into it, you figured you were set for life. But that’s not even the case anymore. I know people who are getting laid off because enrolment’s down and things like that or they can’t get a job in the first place. So, I think overall, the perception is that nothing is really guaranteed for us. So take matters into your own hands and you maybe have a little better of a chance. It depends on the person I guess.”

Participants were asked to rank how they perceive their own level of job security (see Table 1). Three indicated they felt insecure about their employment status, six indicated they were somewhat secure, and only one participant indicated their employment status was secure.

Table 1: Security level of participants' self-employment

Unsecure (1-4)	Somewhat Secure (5-7)	Secure (8-10)
3	6	1

Perceptions of Millennials

Some participants talked about how family, peers and friends have made negative statements about their self-employment as not really working, or doing very little. The challenges of being self-employed were hard enough they explained, but several participants shared their disappointment when people perceive their work as less worthy than a traditional, full time job. Ruth owns two businesses. She believes many people have misperceptions of what it is to be self-employed:

“My sister works in Mississauga and she has a 9 to 5 job, and her and I kind of always have these little debates because she will be like, ‘It must be nice to be self-employed and just take time off whenever you want.’ And I am like, ‘Well you know that is nice, but then at the same time, I think it must be nice to be you to go to work from 9 to 5, not have to think about work when you leave there, because your work is left at work,’ and then she has her whole weekend and she doesn’t have to think about work until she goes back to work Monday morning.”

Jeff has a consulting business that focuses on helping companies with web technology issues. He also commented on how people perceive self-employed millennials.

“People measure your worth when you’re a freelancer differently than if you have a full-time job. People just automatically assume, ‘Oh a full-time job, you’re employed. You must be a good worker.’ Whereas some people are full-time employed and they think maybe twice a day. So when you’re freelancing, you’re not really getting recognition or rewards for every task that you’re doing.”

Benefits, Pensions

Six of the 10 participants receive no supplemental health benefits, drug plans or pension options at all (one participant had benefits previously and another plans to join the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce members program); one participant receives some benefits; another participant receives benefits through a spouse; and two participants self-finance their benefits through an organizational group plan and personal insurance program.

Jeff reflected on how many in his generation are coming to terms with a lack of benefits.

“This is just one of those things I’ve accepted based on like, the demographic that I’m in, but yeah, not being able to have dental, being afraid if you get sick. Will I be able to get antibiotics? Will I be able to afford, like, crutches? Like stupid stuff like that, that makes you feel

almost like that you're in the States. Well yeah, it's like you know it could always happen and there's no safety net. Like, again I feel like that safety net doesn't exist anyways."

Collin holds a "full time" contract position but receives no benefits from his employer, has constantly changing schedules and was forced to sign away any overtime work in his contract. He is a major contributor to the overall revenue of the firm he works for (almost 25% of revenue), but now is under pressure to contribute more as the firm is in some financial difficulty, yet he is denied his entitlement to basic benefits like overtime pay.

"In the last two weeks, I have now had a manager come to me say I need you to sit down with cold call list for hours every day because we are not doing well enough. It's time for everyone to sort of like, lace up their boots and hit the pavement for a bit. But to feel like that onus comes completely to me, it's the tone of it, is very, very stressful. And I think over the course of December, which was 4 ½ weeks, I ended up working something like 180 hours. One of the forms that I signed when I sort of agreed to work with them was acknowledging that there will be occasional circumstance where I may work more than – between 40 and 60 hours a week and I think it was waiving ... the right to be paid, compensated for these additional hours."

Training and New Skills Development

Participants update their current skills and knowledge, and acquire new skills through a variety of methods. All of their skills development and training, however, are undertaken at their own expense (where needed) and on their own time.

The majority of participants attend local networking events, conferences and workshops, and other services offered through, for example, the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce (Hamilton Hive) and Young Entrepreneurs and Professionals of Hamilton (YEP), McMaster Innovation Factory, and other local professional organizations. One participant goes to competitors' locations to research products, customer experience as well as training provided by product suppliers.

Participants are also involved in a lot of "self-learning" via the Internet (i.e., videos, seminars, webinars, online courses) and books – the majority of which are free or have a minimal fee. One participant is required to complete a minimum number of hours per year in training and skills development, which is provided through a professional association.

Treatment by Employer

One participant's description of his experience in a previous full time job was harsh. After working for three years, this individual had not received a raise, bonus, vacation or

benefits, and felt as though the company had little concern for his well-being. He was also being paid almost \$5,000 less than others in the same field.

Another participant, who works a full time contract, believes his current employer treats him unfairly. Although there is an opportunity to bring forth minor grievances at regular manager/owner meetings, he will not bring up major grievances that could have an impact on the business and potentially, his employment status.

While one of the participants has been exposed to or involved in a union or professional association, none of them have ever engaged in formal or informal collective actions with other workers.

When asked whether he was treated fairly by a full time employer, John, who is now self-employed, described his previous experience working for a temporary employment agency as a very negative experience.

“Well when I was working for the temp, absolutely not. Temp work, it sucks – and knowing the fact that I have a university degree. Mentally, it can take a toll on you. You are sitting in there. People don’t treat you with respect. They have no idea about you, where you have come from, what you know. The management talking – they belittle you; they talk down to you. Because remember you are a temp. Temps have a bad reputation because some temps they are just that. They don’t give a crap. They come in they do shit work. But someone that has the skills and education that I have when I go somewhere, it’s a reflection of who I am.”

B. Self-Employment: Advantages and Disadvantages

The key advantages of being self-employed identified by our participants included: flexibility/freedom, control/time management/being your own boss/decision-making, happiness, passion, loyalty and building positive relationships. In terms of overall advantages, the majority of participants believe there is a trade-off for flexibility and freedom — more uncertainty, longer hours of work, and few or no benefits or pension plans. But they see their self-employment as providing the freedom to create, to choose how to spend time, and to create new services.

Overall, flexibility was overwhelmingly cited as the main advantage of self-employment despite the challenges that are associated with it (i.e., lack of benefits, irregular income). Participants explained that they are able to take on work or projects that are appealing and decline those that don’t fit with their personal or business goals.

Not having to deal with “office politics” associated with larger organizations or unappreciative managers, as well as the high satisfaction they get from developing personal relationships with their clients were also cited. Being able to work at home or from any place in the world because of the Internet and technology was another component of “flexibility” cited.

Participants cited that having “control” enables them to attain more balance in their lives. Personal situations such as doctors’ appointments, family issues, vacation allowances or simply taking a day off were cited as reasons that self-employment is

preferred over a traditional full time job. Others mentioned that self-employment “allows you to do the kind of work you want to, leaves the door open to have multiple income streams, and allows you to acquire diversity of work-related experiences.”

The reality is, however, despite the perceived control and flexibility, the millennial participants are challenged on a daily basis with life-work balance issues. Their businesses require in most cases for more hours per week than someone who may be in a traditional full time, 35-40 hour work week.

Mark does social media communications on contract and also holds a part-time job to supplement his income. When asked about the disadvantages of self-employment, he replied:

“Money, security and the benefits. When it is contract, you are not sure, you can’t really plan a head too, too much. Things that require big investments like a mortgage and starting a family, those are things that are a little bit more tentative when you don’t have [regular income]. I mean with a full time job, with a full time position you can plan ahead five years if you need to.”

Rhonda launched her own public relations business in Hamilton. She described some of the financial challenges of self-employment:

“I recently looked into the possibility of buying a house or just how much it would cost. I know that it’s probably not going to happen for about a decade at least. My business partner and I just signed a new partnership agreement last week and it went over maternity leave and we both signed and agreed that we will not get pregnant in this upcoming year because we can’t afford it.”

Disadvantages

While our participants lauded their self-employment status, the disadvantages cited illustrated a level of uncertainty and insecurity associated with self-employment and other forms of precarious work.

As much as participants value the flexibility and freedom that comes with self-employment, there are obvious limitations as to the extent of flexibility and freedom it provides. While they are free to choose the type of work they want to do, the disadvantages cited illustrate the “down” side to self-employment – less freedom and flexibility in their personal and community lives.

The disadvantages cited by participants included a lack of any benefits (supplemental health, dental, vision, pensions), inconsistent/irregular pay/income. Taking time off for personal or family sickness while work comes to a halt and client needs/services are jeopardized was cited as another disadvantage of self-employment. Some participants identified additional stress from the instability and pressure of constantly having to seek new work and secure your income – particularly during slow cycles, as well as pay for business-related overhead and expenses.

Several participants identified that self-employment often means “never really shutting down” despite the control you have over the business and your time — having to wear multiple hats, which requires a lot of effort and time (e.g., sales, marketing, bookkeeping, business development, administration, etc.). Another disadvantage associated with self-employment is the learning process required to run and manage a business, which one participant described as “a trial by error process.”

Trying to secure loans and credit from financial institutions was also cited as a disadvantage of self-employment because they perceive self-employment as insecure. It affects their ability to plan for their future, particularly big items like housing and starting a family. Several participants expressed distraught at how older generations view millennials, particularly those that are self-employed. Being young and self-employed means not being taken seriously by people who may lack an understanding of self-employment and the changes that have created the current labour market and economy.

When asked whether they would be in a financial position to pay for any unexpected expenses (e.g., health issue, household expense, car repair, etc.) that could come up at any time, most interviewees could deal with expenses between \$50 and \$500. However, the majority of interviewees would not have the money for any unexpected expenses of more than \$900. Table 2 illustrates their responses.

Table 2: Ability to pay for unexpected expenses

Amount	Challenge	No Challenge
\$50	1	9
\$200	2	8
\$500	3	7
\$900	6	4
\$2,000	8	2

Brent is a systems and web technology consultant. He expressed his concerns about student debt and the economy, and their effects on his spending abilities:

“The student debt load is just massive. And people are going back to school because they can’t find work, so they incur more student debt. I honestly don’t know and one of my hugest fears is do we want to have kids? I was like not having kids – that was my hugest fear, are they ever going to move out of the house? Are they going to be able to? Are they going to have the opportunities to be able to do that? I have no idea where the economy in general is going to go in the next 10-20 years.”

Hours of Work

Interviewees were asked on average, how many hours would they work in a typical week, including weekends, evenings. Four interviewees worked 60 to 70 hours per week; two worked 50 to 60 hours per week; and four worked 40 hours or less per week (*see Table 3*).

On average, interviewees worked between 46 and 52.3 hours per week, 27.5% to 31% more than the average hourly-paid Ontario worker (30.5 hours)⁹, and 51 % to 71% more than a traditional full time job of 35-40 hours.

Table 3: Participants average hours of work

Weekly Hours	Participants
Less than 40 hours	3
40-50 hours	1
51+ hours	6

10-Year Outlook on Career

Despite the growing pains and challenges of self-employment, participants were somewhat optimistic about their futures. All 10 participants indicated they want to stay in Hamilton for a variety of reasons. All of the participants have expectations of growing their businesses, having larger “physical” quarters for their business, and being more financially secure than they are now.

While their optimism and positive outlook seems to be real on the “surface,” the restructuring of the economy and work itself over the past decades may have lowered their overall expectations for life and work — compared to previous generations.

In terms of having “supports” in place to help them achieve their aspirations, few identified having any financial supports, and indicated their success and well-being are dependent on the economy continuing to grow and businesses continuing to require their services. Only one of the participants spoke about having savings for future growth. Most participants, however, responded positively.

One participant hopes to have her skin care products selling across Canada and eventually internationally. One entrepreneur sees his business growing to include a downtown Hamilton office, perhaps five employees working across Canada, while another is hoping to leave self-employment and seek out a public service job at the municipal, provincial or federal level. One participant hopes to build his business but remain independent without any employees. Another participant hopes to expand her business to 10 people, with medium-sized clients, preferably on longer-term retainers rather than one-off, short-term contracts, and hopefully their own physical “bricks and mortar” location.

C. Life Outside of Work

Family Life

Three of the 10 participants live at home (i.e., with parents); four own their own home and three rent. The participants that own a home have an established business with more

⁹ Statistics Canada, “Weekly hours of hourly paid employees, average, by province and territory” <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/101/cst01/labr82-eng.htm>

consistent income or have a spouse that works full time, making the housing market more accessible and affordable.

Several participants indicated some major life decisions have been put on hold, i.e., having children, buying a car or home. As any income they earn is often reinvested into their businesses, having children come into the picture would be chaotic. The cost of purchasing and maintaining a house is not only beyond the capacity of the majority of participants, but even if they had the required down payment, securing a mortgage was also cited as another hurdle. Several participants have student loans outstanding, which also restricts their ability to make these types of large purchases.

One participant wants to move back in with her parents to save money and help her business grow and develop. She believes the purchase of a house is not going to happen for 10 years. Another female participant signed a partnership agreement with her business partner — the two women committed to not get pregnant in the coming year because neither could afford it. Only one participant has a home life that reflects a more traditional situation, similar to their parents' generation – sufficient and more stable income, home ownership, an income rental property and two kids.

Ruth runs her own public relations business in Hamilton. She talked about the challenges she faces as a self-employed person, particularly her health and well-being.

“We had a nasty virus that was going around that lasted for 3 weeks. So my son got it, and then my daughter got it and I got it. So for 2 ½ weeks, the three of us were sick. Somehow my husband avoided it. So he is going to work trying to stay away from us and I had to take 2 ½ weeks off of work and one week – because I was taking so much care of my kids that I wasn't taking good care of myself, so they had a virus which they just had to get over, and that's what I had, but then because I was focused on them and not myself, my turned into a bacterial infection and I ended up on antibiotics and I was so sick.”

Stress and the Temporary Nature of Work

Participants acknowledged that they do experience stress with their parents, spouses, partners and/or friends because of their self-employment (insecurity) and uncertainty of income. Participants who live at home with their parents stated they would prefer to be on their own and indicated they have experienced additional stress associated with being an adult living with parents.

One participant talked about his mother often feeling anxious about the career choice of self-employment – having monthly bills to pay, the need to invest money in the business, but still working with uncertainty in terms of any regular, consistent income. Another participant spoke about arguments over finances and how his partner often challenged his “self-employment” and that perhaps he should get a “real job.”

One participant moved back with his father to save money with the hope of eventually securing a place to live in the downtown core close to his work, and with the intent to eventually phase out his car. One participant whose partner is also self-employed

and living at home, felt their personal relationship (e.g., engagement, marriage) would be farther along if they were not both living at home.

Only one of the 10 participants has children and her self-employment has caused conflict with family (children) events. Saturdays are a busy day for both her business and for her children's extracurricular activities. She often can only drop off her kids to the activities and is not able to stay with them like other parents, which makes her feel like a "bad parent." This participant indicated that all the money she makes from one of her two businesses goes into a business savings account and is there for emergencies, as well as to provide for the high cost of daycare.

Friends and the Community

What the participants do to have fun outside of their households varies but overall, seems somewhat limited. Few are able to attend expensive concerts and other similar events. Several participants strive to balance their time between work and their personal lives (i.e., friends, social and community activities); however, work often takes precedent, despite acknowledging that they have greater flexibility and control of their time. One participant talked about seeing her closest friends very couple months, although she would like to see them more often.

Ruth is the only participant with kids. When asked how her work affects her home life, she responded:

"Now that I have kids, if I am working too much and not spending as much time with them as I normally do, if I have a really busy week, especially filling wholesale orders for my skin care, then I am feeling really guilty that I am not spending enough time with my kids, whereas if I take some time off to spend time with them and I am not working, then I am feeling guilty that I am not working and – so yeah, depending on the week, how I feel about it, kind of is back and forth."

Fun Outside the Household

Outdoor activities were cited overwhelmingly by all 10 participants — hiking, walking trails and waterfalls in the Hamilton area, the waterfront, running, cycling, ultimate Frisbee, yoga, walking Hamilton neighbourhoods, gardening, being part of a baseball team, going to the gym, bowling and basketball. Non-outdoor activities included watching movies and podcasts, simply hanging out with friends. Keeping physical active is important to participants.

Some participants go to listen to local music at Hamilton bars and clubs, attend Hamilton's World Film Festival. While some participants liked spending time with friends, the frequency was only every few months. One of the main reasons for their participation in these types of activities is that they do not cost money or the costs are minimal.

Socializing With Friends

The lack of consistent, regular income does affect the participants, i.e., limiting what they can do for fun and entertainment, as well as affecting their participation in the community. Some participants talked about the challenge to do more expensive activities and events like music concerts/festivals and going to clubs/bars. Their friends with more traditional full time jobs also have much more disposable income. One participant, despite working on weekends, still likes the flexibility that allows her to take a day off during the week or whenever she needs to.

While few actually feel “isolated” from their community and friends, being self-employed with limited funds does require better time management, and places greater emphasis on deciding between “wants” and “needs.”

Overall, there does seem to be a greater challenge when it comes to balancing time between the demands of self-employment, their family and friends, and time for themselves. Moreover, most participants indicated they have to be conscious of how they spend their money outside of basic needs (food, housing, etc.) and apply greater scrutiny over where money will be spent on “non-work” social or cultural activities.

Collin works under contract as an events manager. When asked about how his self-employment affects his ability to socialize and have fun, he shared his thoughts on going out with friends:

“I certainly have to be very stringent on what I spend my money on. You talk about having a night out on the town with friends. Ok, well let’s slow down here because we can go to a pub or we can go to a bar or something like that ... I will have a basket of French fries or a burger or something, a bit of food. Maybe we’ll get a pitcher for the table, maybe we are going to hang out here for a couple of hours. All of a sudden, you are talking about an \$80, \$100 bar bill with tax and tip because I refuse to tip less than what is acceptable because I work in that industry. Well that’s 25 per cent of my pay week gone in a single day. And that is something that you have to really be mindful of.”

Allison expressed her frustration about not being able to all the social things that her friends do because of her financial limitations.

“We are not making a lot of money and I am trying to save so that I can feel more secure. I really limit myself to how many social things I do because a lot of my friends, even if it’s a part-time job in retail, they are making a consistent income, so they know and they can budget for whatever they want to do. I really can’t. So there’s a lot of times that I just say sorry, I can’t afford to go out tonight.”

Socializing With Co-workers

Overall, participants seemed split on socializing with co-workers. Some participants, however, indicated they do socialize with co-workers. Two participants said their clients are now their friends. One participant said she only has one friend in her circle from her

high school days. The participants who use “co-sharing” workplace arrangements (e.g., Co-motion, Co-motion 302) socialize with many of their peers who share their facilities. Another participant explained that while she and her co-workers don’t socialize regularly, they consider their co-workers good friends.

Community Participation | Volunteering

This group of millennials shows a deep commitment to their communities and are actively involved in a variety of business, cultural and community causes and organizations, despite time restraints and money challenges.

All of the participants have been involved in Hamilton-based professional organizations, particularly Hamilton HIVE and Young Entrepreneurs and Professionals (YEP) Hamilton, both through the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce. Some referenced the Hamilton Media Guild, a local organization of media, creative and design professionals. Networking for young professionals was cited by a majority of participants as an important function of their work lives, and that Hamilton’s young professionals are embracing, inclusive and welcoming.

The community organizations are as diverse as the individuals themselves, and ranges from environmental organizations to the arts and local cultural community. The impressive list of community organizations include:

- Hamilton HIVE;
- Young Entrepreneurs and Professionals (YEP) Hamilton;
- Neighbour to Neighbour tutoring program;
- Church group;
- McMaster Alumni Association board;
- Wildlife Preservation Canada Board;
- Team Up to Clean Up/Hamilton Earthy Day event;
- Victory Gardens planting, weeding (community garden);
- Hamilton Naturalist Club Board;
- Art Gallery of Hamilton World Film Festival;
- Hamilton Media Guild;
- Hamilton arts scene;
- Harvest Greenbelt Picnic festival;
- Living Rock; and
- Counselling at-risk youth who were out of school.

The study participants indicated that community volunteering is simply a natural extension of their personal and working lives, and that it was important that the organizations, events or causes they support reflect their values. And many research studies support their views.

A 2015 Environics Analytics study on Millennials, (Millennials Environics), confirms that millennials have a very strong sense of belonging to the local community and all

involved in the study had done volunteer work in the last two years (2013-2014).¹⁰ The Millennial Impact Project study reported that: “77% of millennials said they’re more likely to volunteer when they can use their specific skills or expertise to benefit a cause.”¹¹

“Millennials are more likely to volunteer include things like enriching their personal life by meeting new friends, finding a romantic partner, or finding interesting activities. Millennials are also drawn into opportunities to aid their career trajectory by diversifying their experiences, practice new skills, and building their professional network.”¹²

Research by Statistics Canada identifies that “younger Canadians are more likely to volunteer than older Canadians. More than one-half of people aged 15 to 24 (58%) and 35 to 44 (54%), and close to one-half of those aged 25 to 34 (46%), reported doing volunteer work in 2010, compared to pre-retirees aged 55 to 64 who had a volunteer rate of 41% in 2010 and seniors recorded a rate of 36%.”¹³

Allison believes her self-employment does impose certain time restrictions:

“Yes. I think that if I had a more consistent job, I would have more free time to get myself involved in a number of things in the city. I get emails during the day to do all these things that need to be done by the end of the day, but it’s three o’clock or whatever. So I find that’s difficult and if I were at a job that is paying salary, I wouldn’t even look at that stuff, I would come home and get involved with something.”

Jeff expressed the importance of looking at the values associated with community events and community work.

“That kind of dictates what I go to as well. I won’t go to something – that’s what I wanted to say – I wouldn’t be going to the Harvest Greenbelt Picnic and promoting it if I actually didn’t believe in the event; believe in the Greenbelt and what they were standing for.”

Rachel also explained how she finds time to volunteer and has targeted her efforts to food needs affected by low income and poverty.

“I would rather give all this food to someone who actually appreciates it. So I do the two food drives. I started doing a summer food drive two years ago. It was actually St. Matthew’s House that had put out a blog post and someone shared it on Facebook saying that summertime is when they need food the most. Everyone is always generous at Christmas time – they always have so much food at Christmas then come the summer and all of the food is gone. Most people don’t think to donate food in the summer, but there’s actually a higher need for food from the

¹⁰ Doug Norris, Environics Analytics, “Millennials: The Newest, Biggest and Most Diverse Target Market,” 9th Annual User Conference, 2015.

¹¹ Derrick Feldman, et al. The Millennial Impact Project (The Case Foundation, 2015), 11.

¹² http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mark-horoszowski/purpose-is-the-key-to-eng_b_9824326.html

¹³ <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-008-x/2012001/article/11638-eng.htm#a3>

lower income housing in the summer. School is out. All of a sudden you have to pay for daycare. For people who are already on a very low income, their food budget is now going toward daycare, and so they have a much higher number of people coming into the food bank during the summer months. But then no one donates in the summer so they have an increased need for it and decreased donations. So I started doing a summer time food drive – I collect food in June and July and I will drop the food off at the end of this month and then I drop it off at the end of July. I do the food drive through my business. So for every two food donations that come in, they get \$5 off their service.”

Participation Levels

All participants are involved in the Hamilton community either through a work-related organization or with social, cultural and not-for-profit organizations. All participants indicated that it is important to them to be involved, but balancing that time/effort is also as critical and challenging. Being involved in professional and community organizations has been a key part of their professional development (Hamilton HIVE, YEP Hamilton, Canadian Public Relations Society, Hamilton Media Guild). One participant feels being self-employed actually challenges you to get involved in the community, for both personal reasons and to do some networking that may eventually lead to new business.

Being self-employed requires allocating a lot more time to networking and going out with clients to build and maintain relationships, and develop new work opportunities. This time is not “billable” hours. For many, business and personal relationships increasingly seem to overlap.

One participant spoke about the necessity to be highly self-driven to be able to run your own business. At the same time, meeting new people and making new friends seems to be more challenging for a self-employed person than for someone working in traditional full time job in a larger organization, where you are exposed to many more people on a day-to-day basis.

D. Health and Well-Being

Physical Health

Several participants indicated their work situation has led to some physical and mental health issues. Being run down, tired or overwhelmed are among the common responses.

One participant explained how his health improved greatly after quitting a full time job, losing 10 pounds and feeling far less stressed. Another participant spoke about the importance of sleep as a self-employed person, but sleep is often challenging as she always has things on the mind related to her business. Moreover, she had developed poor eating habits, partially because of less money to buy better quality food. Others said that eating properly and making time for exercise have been a challenge and requires you to

be organized to ensure the time is set aside. Two participants mentioned that they gained weight since starting their businesses.

Rhonda shared her experiences related to her employment relationship affecting her physical health.

“I gained just over 15 pounds in the last year, since I started my business. Also, my sleep – my sleep is more disturbed. Yeah, ‘cause I always have things on my mind, and my eating habits because I don’t have money to always buy great food. So I’m eating ramen noodles. I’m back on to like a college diet. But luckily I found a way to combat this. I’m now doing work semi-in-exchange with a gym; so I get to exercise and they get some communications.”

Mental Health

Mental health issues seem common among the millennials interviewed, whether working full time or self-employed. Anxiety and depression were the most commonly cited mental health issues. Participants cited experiencing anxiety, increasing amounts of stress from having to balance time and juggle numerous tasks, as well as having a limited amount of disposable income.

One participant talked about having bouts of depression where he was unable to eat and felt tired all the time despite getting a lot of sleep. One participant called his situation a sort of “detachment” from day-to-day life. Another participant spoke about a five-month bout of depression where she didn’t even want to get out of bed, partially the result of business finances (i.e., a slow work period, no income), and that she had to seek counselling and medical support. Another participant sought out counselling for mental health issues (i.e., exhaustion, fatigue).

Another participant explained that being self-employed alone is stressful because it is more difficult to determine revenue as each project and client is different, unlike someone who is selling “widgets” at a common price and can determine exactly how many widgets need to be sold to earn so much income. Some participants also mentioned reading a variety of self-help literature to help reduce stress and restructure their lives.

Rhonda talked about the depression she experienced as a result of the pressures and challenges of self-employment.

“So I actually for about four or five months – maybe from about October to March, I suffered from depression and I was seeking counselling, and had to go see my doctor, and I took a lot of time off of work because I just – I didn’t want to get up out of bed. But also business was really slow at that time and so finances were even tougher.”

Jeff’s consulting business focuses on helping companies with their web technology. When asked about his mental health in terms of his employment, he explains he feels better working for himself.

“I had way more anxiety over working for someone else than I’ve had working for myself because I know that the worst day of my life now relies on me and it doesn’t rely on someone else’s mood or whatever happened to them, which makes me feel a lot more secure in a weird way.”

Ruth shares here experience of being tired often because of trying to balance family life and the demands of self-employment.

“I can’t do anything. I have been feeling really stressed out the past few weeks because I literally cannot stay awake at night. So I have all this stuff to do and it’s like I will do that tonight after the kids go to bed and then I lay down with my son to fall asleep and then I fall asleep. I had stuff to do the other night and my husband came into my son’s room and I had fallen asleep in there with him and he woke me up and he’s like I guess you are not doing any of that work that you were supposed to do eh? I am like what time is it? And he [says] quarter after 11. I am like, why did you let me sleep this long? He is like well you obviously needed it. But I really need to get this work done. So it’s impossible to fit everything in a day and that stresses me out because I am a perfectionist. So the fact that I am having trouble keeping up stresses me out.”

E. Career Opportunities and the Future

Participants see future opportunities through collaboration, networking, building relationships and continued community involvement in Hamilton. Making their own opportunities happen and depending less on others was a common theme expressed.

One participant hopes to connect with people he can work on projects together and eventually expand his business to perhaps six people, all focused on digital marketing. Another participant similarly hopes to train employees to take over general manager role of her business so she can begin to have a family.

Another participant commented that the city of Hamilton itself presents great opportunities for his generation, far more than what might be available in Toronto – mainly because of perceived openness and connectedness of Hamilton’s business culture.

When asked about the opportunities in the next few years that will allow them to move ahead, Mark and Elaine, respectively, spoke about the support that exists in Hamilton’s business community for young entrepreneurs and the business culture itself.

Mark:

“I mean it’s already happening to some degree, but the connectedness of living in the city, it’s big, it’s really big. Knowing the right people, getting to talk with the right people. In a place like Toronto, if you want to sit down with a CEO, you might get laughed out of the room if you made that request. In Hamilton, you could do that. It’s something that’s feasible if you made an appointment, and explained why you want to meet, it’s something that could happen. So the city is a big factor and

how the city is developing and the opportunities that are there. So if I were still living in Toronto, I might not feel that way about Toronto. I might feel a bit more isolated. I might feel a bit more like I am not sure what the path is, but here in Hamilton, I feel like there's such a strong connectedness and a support network, that it's almost like a character in my life that I can connect with in a sense."

Elaine:

"I do feel fortunate being a young entrepreneur and starting a business now. I did feel like there was quite a bit of support and there's always room for improvement on that. The Chamber is amazing. The young professional group of the Chamber, I am pretty involved with and being in Hamilton in comparison to other cities that I have lived in, the network just is so fantastic. People are so open to collaborating and I have been able to do projects with like different companies and collaborate with architectural firms or graphic designers or developers and all these different people and it just seems like, I mean there's exceptions to this obviously, but for the most part it just seems like people are really open and eager to work together and form strategic partnerships and things like that. So I think that's a huge benefit because then you support each other – more so than in other cities. I have lived in a lot of other cities and not to say they were completely closed and horrible, but Hamilton especially seems very open. It's that sort of high tide raises all ships kind of mentality. Maybe because the economic conditions are pretty good here right now and there is a lot going on. But hopefully that stays that way because it's awesome."

One participant is hoping to get into a new career all together, but will use his networking as a means to seek out new opportunities. Being self-driven and understanding technology can provide the "right" person an opportunity to make money from home. Several participants felt there were good opportunities for people involved in digital technology more so than other types of work.

One participant believes millennials have to simply accept the fact that the days of health benefits and pensions are no longer and that they have to adjust their lives and educate themselves on financial planning. And if they want benefits, they will have to purchase a plan from an insurance company or professional association.

One participant believes the economic development currently occurring in Hamilton will have a ripple effect through the community and create greater demand for a variety of services, and opportunities to grow small and large businesses alike.

Barriers

Money was cited as a major barrier for many of the participants. Developing better administrative and organizational skills, and learning how to manage the business were two issues that could pose a challenge to their growth and success. Burnout was another

barrier cited — continuously working with little or no income for months on end can make it difficult to stay motivated.

One participant spoke of not taking certain risks or being reluctant to meet new people as self-imposed barriers that will limit opportunities or cause people to fall back. One participant talked about the fear of having to take a job in and commute to Toronto should the opportunities not materialize in Hamilton. Another participant identified the mental health issues associated with the stress of self-employment as a possible barrier. Another cited the growing level of competition for self-employed young professionals.

The Game: Easier or Tougher?

The consensus among the 10 participants is that “the game” is indeed getting much tougher for their generation, and is completely different from “work” of previous generations. Many have come to accept the fact that they work without benefits or pension opportunities. Several participants referenced when people from previous generations (i.e., baby boomers), finished their post-secondary education, they got a job for life with benefits, pensions, paid vacation, maternity leave, The current housing marketing has virtually stopped the majority of participants from being able to purchase a house, at least for the near future.

Holding on to the idea of the “traditional” job and workplace arrangements was cited as a potential setback for millennials. Self-employment means, “You have to be more creative in developing your business and very committed to making it work.” One participant pointed to the fact that many from the baby boomer generation are holding on to jobs well into their seventies, while members of the both Generation X and Generation Y (millennials) are at a backlog facing fewer and fewer traditional full time job opportunities. And increasingly they are mostly precarious work options, with no or few health or social benefits, or pensions.

The participating millennials seem very aware of the overall changes that have occurred in the workplace over the past decades, leaving them with fewer options than what their parents had. Participants also revealed that they have to believe in or be aligned with the values of the organizations they seek out as clients or as volunteer opportunities.

When asked whether “the game” was getting tougher, Elaine replied:

“It’s harder. I think you have to be more creative to figure out a way to be successful. I think there’s more opportunities for us in a lot of ways than there were in previous generations, which is funny because I think a lot of times people say, ‘Oh, poor us, millennials, and yeah there are some, we were dealt some kind of crappy cards too, but if you are creative about it and really committed to making something work, then the opportunities are there.”

John also expressed his views that the whole game of work and life getting tougher not easier for his generation and the one behind him, Generation Z.

“Tougher of course. I feel sorry for the kids that are in high school that are coming up after – we have it rough, but then even when I am going to mentor these kids and speak with these kids, the issues that they are going through, with Instagram, Twitter, bullying, social bullying, all this stuff, it’s suicide. It’s scary what they have to go through. So nothing is getting easier. It’s only going to get harder and they need to get prepared. Work’s going to get tougher. You can’t find any jobs. So it’s hard to get into a company and it’s also challenging when you are on your own too.”

Another participant spoke of the unrealistic requirements that some employers expect or demand for “entry-level” positions – degrees, several years of experience, low salaries. Student debt was also a recurring theme that is also making it tougher for millennials to move forward with their lives and careers. One participant believes it is also getting tougher as a result of the increase in the number of millennials entering the labour force who are freelancers and self-employed – all competing for similar business in the same market area.

Despite “the game” getting tougher, one participant commented he felt that the game is also getting more exciting. Being able to create your own life-work pathway, structuring your own life and determining how, when and where you will work, picking the type of work you’ll do and the clients you will work for – are all positive.

It seems that most of the millennials are cautiously optimistic about their work situation and their future opportunities. However, there seemed to be a common sub-surface “nervousness” associated with being self-employed and running your own business — not having a consistent, regular income and balancing their effort and time between personal life and family, work and the community.

Allison elaborated on the perception challenges that millennials face.

“It’s really upsetting because my parents’ generation – my dad got a job getting paid \$15 an hour in high school doing work at something. He got a job as soon as he graduated university and never had to look for anything. He doesn’t understand and the amount of times that I have had my parents’ generation say, “Oh you guys are just complainers and you don’t know what’s going on and back in my day, it was so much harder.”

Conclusions

While this study offers but a small sampling of the work experiences of self-employed millennials in Hamilton, the responses suggest that further study of millennials and work is worth pursuing. A more in-depth, quantitative study (i.e., online survey) targeting millennials across Hamilton could provide a more detailed analysis of how millennials are coping with work in the 21st century. This would include those working in both secure full time positions and less secure, precarious positions (part-time, temp, contract, self-employed). In addition to the questions/themes used in this brief study, there is a strategic opportunity to further explore their understanding and views of work,

as well as the issues that continue to affect work and working conditions today, as well as work-related economic and social issues of importance.

Overall, I believe our interviewees are commendable for what they are accomplishing as self-employed entrepreneurs.

The millennial interviewees were optimistic about their jobs/businesses yet they don't seem to be moving forward as previous generations did – with life in general, and with their personal and family lives in particular. They work long hours, much longer than people in traditional full time jobs and far more hours per week than the average Ontario worker. They are well educated, enthusiastic and ambitious, yet they seem to have accumulated far less material and financial wealth than previous generations (but have higher levels of student debt). Most of them lack supplemental health benefits and have no pension plans. Moreover, they are confronted with periods of physical and mental stress because of their employment status, and subsequently, because of personal finances, and the challenges associated with family and community life.

In essence, their early adulthood has been stunted or put on hold. The consequences of not developing early adult “independence” could affect career opportunities and their overall life trajectory. By having to put marriage and starting a family on hold (e.g., only two interviewees were married, two were engaged, and nine of 10 interviewees do not have children), a smaller birth cohort is sure to have some level of impact on the future labour market, which could be much smaller in size than recent and previous cohorts and may require higher levels of immigration.

All 10 participants displayed some degree of awareness of the changes in work and the workplace for their generation, as well as the impact on their lives. Whether these changes are having a greater impact on millennials who are self-employed compared to those who hold more secure full time jobs will be one of the goals of the proposed quantitative study (survey).