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<https://www.smh.com.au/business/small-business/the-six-traps-robbing-you-of-spare-time-20201210-p56mcp.html>

The Six Traps Robbing You of Spare Time

There's an 80 per cent chance you're experiencing "time poverty" so severe it's likely having, at best, some negative impact in your life and, at worst, a number of debilitating consequences.

That's among a series of findings published in *Time Smart*, a new book by Assistant Professor Ashley Whillans, a behavioural scientist at Harvard Business School who combined her latest research with the most recent global studies to conclude "time poverty is at an all-time high".

Let's look at a few of those empirically proven consequences that emerge when people are "always rushed" with "too many things to do and not enough time to do them", beginning with happiness which markedly falls in tandem with productivity. People end up feeling so stressed and so pressed for time they sacrifice exercise and consume easy-to-access (i.e. fattier) food, leading to higher rates of disease and other health complications that predictably ensue.

Without listing every statistic the scholar has detailed, there's merit drawing attention to one that truly encapsulates this phenomenon which is that one in every five employees calls in sick not because they're genuinely sick (and not because they're faking it) but because they're too overwhelmed with everything they have to do.

Or, rather, everything they "feel" they have to do, which leads to the six most common "time traps" from which no one is immune ... If you're worried this is some kind of first-world problem and that you should just suck it up and deal with it, don't.

The first is technology. The devices meant to save us time by granting us greater control over when we work have had the opposite effect, compelling us to work more than ever since "we carry the office in our back pockets". The leisure periods we used to enjoy are now frequently interrupted by what's known as "time confetti" – lots of little interruptions that appear harmless but cumulatively scatter us, leaving us feeling "even more time impoverished than we actually are".

The second time trap is our cultural obsession with money. We associate the accumulation of wealth with an investment of time when that's "the wrong solution". Scientific evidence conclusively reveals "as wealth increases, so do our feelings of time poverty", which is linked to **the third trap – we undervalue time** – since the hours we spend looking for a bargain are hours that may have been better spent on activities that don't induce "fatigue and stress".

Busyness is the fourth culprit. For many of us, our career is fundamental to our identity. It's our purpose, generally more so than hobbies, passions, family and friends. Being busy has become a status symbol. It makes us "feel good about ourselves" and so we flaunt our excessive (though not necessarily productive) workhours to our social circle expecting our busyness to impress.

The fifth time trap is we simply dislike doing nothing. In one study, participants preferred to give themselves electric shocks than sit quietly with their thoughts. Out of desperation to combat such idleness, we resort to our smartphones, scrolling mindlessly to avoid sitting mindfully.

Over-optimism is to blame for the sixth trap. "We believe, dumbly, that we will have more time tomorrow than we do today," writes Dr Whillans, resulting in an addiction to saying yes even though meeting these unsustainable commitments is usually achievable only by forgoing rest and relaxation.

To resolve the issue of time poverty, the Harvard researcher recommends initially identifying which of the six traps make you most unhappy. That's the easy part. The challenging part is catching yourself before stepping into the trap which is especially tough because time traps by design are "extremely appealing". We habitually want to get caught.