Gender and working-time: national models and policy debates in the European Union

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Structure of presentation

- Introduction

- Overview of gender differences in working-time practices
  - Volume, schedule, autonomy

- Working-time preferences + work-family compatibility

- Working-time policies to promote gender equality + ‘work-life balance’
  - Policy objectives and elements
  - Resonance with wider EU/OECD debates about working time over the life course – ‘active ageing’

- Conclusions

Background paper

Introduction...working-time arrangements in industrialised countries are changing along a number of dimensions

- Expansion of part-time work over several decades

- Historical reduction in full-time hours stalled in 1990s
  - Lengthening of full-time hours in some countries /some parts of the economy

- Erosion of the ‘standard’ daytime, Monday-Friday schedule
  - More jobs involve evening, night or week-end work, and/or annualised hours...

- Major driving force are firms’ operational requirements for more flexible forms of work organization
  - Matching labour to variable workloads – regular and unpredictable variation
  - Extension of operating hours – emergence 24/7 service economy

- Subsidiary labour supply pressure
  - Some seek out part-time or other non-standard hours to accommodate other time-consuming activities (mothers, students)
  - Others take jobs where very long full-time hours are the norm
Introduction…gender implications of these working-time developments

- Restructuring of working-time practices occurred in parallel with restructuring of gender roles
  - Growing involvement of women in employment while raising children
  - Erosion of ‘male breadwinner’…emergence of ‘dual-earner’ couples and lone-parent households
  - Housework and care work is still mainly women’s responsibility, although men’s involvement has increased in some households

- Care responsibilities tend to channel women into part-time/reduced hours
  - also evening/week-end schedules in countries where mothers rely on informal childcare (e.g. UK, US) – including ‘split-shift parenting’

- Gender segregated employment – associated with different working-time schedules
  - Part-time concentrated in female-dominated job areas
  - ‘over-working’ mostly found in male-dominated occupations & sectors
Introduction...trends producing new challenges for defining + establishing working-time standards

- Diversification of working-time practices – and perhaps workers’ working-time preferences
  - Different household situations and ‘out-of-work’ activities; situations change over life course

- Decentralisation of bargaining and declining union coverage in most countries
  - (But still high in Nordic countries and many other parts of Europe)

- How to define and establish working-time standards?
  - ‘Overtime’ and ‘unsocial’ defined and compensated in relation to FT, year-round, standard
  - Pension & other social protection schemes – still largely premised on full-time, lifetime employment
  - Equal treatment and pro rata principles for part-time work
    - Established in EU law, but implementation uneven and concept needs development e.g. in relation to overtime
Volume - The incidence of long weekly working hours in selected industrialised countries (usual working hours)
Part-time work

- Most part-timers are women in most countries (US closer to ~ 50:50)

- Marked national variation in rates of PT work
  - Highest rates in EU: NL + UK (short hours), S + DK (longer hours)
  - For women 34% in EU15: NL (74%), UK (44%) 33-39% in Sweden, Denmark, Austria, Germany, Belgium…<10% in 5 of the 25 member states
  - Australia high rate (47% of female employees) + prevalence of ‘marginal’ part-time hours; particular issue of ‘casual’ status

- In EU most women working part-time and 1/3 of the minority of men working part-time have children or other domestic commitments
  - Preferred choice for some vs constrained ‘choice’ for others if alternative childcare costly/unavailable

- PT also chosen by people who are students, older workers, in poor health

- PT as involuntary
  - In EU Sweden + France have high rates (also Greece, Portugal + Spain where rate of part-time work much lower).
Weekly schedules

- Around 1/3 of EU-15 workforce have a standard schedule of daytime, weekday working
  - Week-end work, long days (10+ hours) and shifts are prevalent
  - Similar magnitude in Australia

- Key gender difference is women avoid long days
  - Mostly via part-time schedules, but also shorter full-time day schedules
  - Not all part-time schedules are ‘family friendly’
    - Negative impacts of ‘split-shift parenting’

- Schedule – ‘Fixed structure’, ‘unstructured’ or ‘autonomy’?
  - Fixed (predictable) hours set by employer ~ 45%
  - Has selected fixed hours ~ 21%
  - Unstructured (variable hours set by employer) ~ 11%
  - Autonomy – individual time-management (e.g. flexitime, time banking) ~ 1 in 4

- Key gender difference is women’s hours are more fixed
  - Managers and professionals - & men within these categories - have more autonomy
  - Production/assembly – and men in these jobs – have highest risk of unstructured schedules
Working-time preferences and work-family compatibility – what analytic value do preference data have?

- A (partial) indication of how people feel about their working-time conditions
  - Policy design relevance – which reforms would be popular, relevant…?

- Preferences influence plans + behaviour
  - Preferences are not always realised (constraints, trade-off with other goals)
  - Do not determine future behaviour (e.g. take up of new working time options)

- Social context influences working time behaviour + preferences
  - Economic conditions (real wage levels rising/falling, job security declining…)
  - Political conditions + debates change awareness + expectations
  - Other institutional + cultural factors influence preferences
    - E.g. childcare and norms about ‘good mothering’

- Societal context shapes situational factors faced by individuals and households
Working-time preferences and work-family compatibility – what are men and women’s preferences?

- More similarity in working-time preferences than practices across EU countries
  - And between men and women (smaller gender gap in preferences than practices)

- Gender, weekly working hours & working-time preferences
  - Long hours are unpopular… so are short (marginal) part-time hours
  - Part-time work is the preference of many women and men in the EU15
  - Australia – growing proportion FT want shorter hours, PT wanted by many women

- ‘Middle ground’ of substantial part-time/short full-time is where preferences cluster [~ 25-37 hours in EU]
  - Most pronounced for women
  - But wide range within this ‘middle ground’ for both sexes – no standard preference

- Work-family conflict is heightened by long hours (and commute time), evening/night/weekend schedules, irregular/unpredictable schedules
  - Lessened if have some control/autonomy in working hours…but this mitigating effect is smaller than the negative effect of long hours
Working-time policies, gender equality and ‘work-life balance’
- policy objectives

- **Reduce working-time barriers**
  - to labour market participation → contribute to raising women’s employment rate in countries where it is low
  - To entry and progression into management and other male-dominated activities → contribute to reducing segregation

- **Increase opportunities for good quality part-time work including transitions back to full-time hours at later stage**

- **Expand the range of working time options → improve the quality of work-family reconciliation + ‘work-life balance’ more broadly**

- **Adapt men’s working-time + increase their time-input to parenting → contribute to reforming the gender division of labour.**

  Not (just) a ‘feminist’ debate, resonates with wider EU/OECD debates about reforming working time over the life course
  - Hitting employment rate targets, active ageing (+ funding pensions), social inclusion
Policy measures

- **Collective reductions in full-time hours to tackle 'overworking' and 'long hours cultures'**
  - Less attention here in EU debates, yet critical for gender equality…
  - How to regulate ‘self-determined’ work patterns?

- **Increase the opportunities for good quality, part-time work schedules**
  - Equal treatment (pro rata) in employment and social protection systems
  - Expand ‘substantial’ (~20+) not 'marginal' part-time hours of work
  - Opportunities to work part-time in a wider range of jobs
    - Rights to adjust between FT/PT hours (Sweden, NL, and spreading in different forms → UK, Germany)

- **Improved reconciliation measures**
  - Working-time: care-related leave, flexible autonomy (flexitime, time banking, working from home)
  - Childcare + other infrastructure e.g. transport policy
  - Specific incentives targeted at men to improve their use of 'family reconciliation' measures, such as non-transferable parental leave entitlements
Conclusions

- National differences in gendered working time arrangements are associated with different policy frameworks

- **Work time regime which promotes gender equity has**
  - Low prevalence of full-time ‘overworking’
  - Infrastructure of reconciliation measures (childcare, parental leave)
  - Opportunities for good quality part-time work but does not rely on part-time work to solve all the reconciliation issues
  - Facilitates an ‘adult worker-carer’ model of gender relations rather than a ‘breadwinner/carer’ division
    - a high female employment rate

- ‘Life course’ policies are a focus of growing debate (European Employment Strategy, OECD Jobs Strategy)
  - Working time arrangements and work-family reconciliation is no longer ‘just’ a feminist issue
Conclusions…continued

- **Promoting employment, including ‘active ageing’**
  - Pensions problem, social exclusion etc.

- **Socio-economic context**
  - Growing heterogeneity and individualisation of life trajectories (employment patterns, marriage and fertility…)
  - Diversification and individualisation of working time arrangements

- **An integrated lifecourse perspective more developed in some countries than others and with different gender equality implications**
  - Sweden … NL … Germany
  - The Nordic ‘role model’ of gender equality progress

- **Financial sustainability of developing a lifecourse design into working time policy (how expensive is the Swedish model??)**
  - Savings in other areas of public expenditure
  - Productivity and macro-economic gains
  - Welfare/social equity gain
  - Gender mainstreaming of accounting models?