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7 Employees' preferences for longer or shorter working hours

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INTRODUCTION

The desire to work shorter hours on the job is a logical response to a potential solution to time pressure. To what extent can governance structures within the household as well as organisational characteristics of the workplace explain the varying desire for shorter working hours? Will revised working time regimes facilitate better solutions for the household's time allocation problems? This chapter analyses working time preferences from household as well as workplace characteristics.

Working time preferences have been investigated recently. In the United States, such research was stimulated by Juliet Schor's (1991) study on the overworked American. Jacobs and Gerson (1998) ask what overworked Americans want, using 1992 CPS data. Nearly half of American workers indicated that their usual working week was longer than their ideal hours. Approximately one-third was satisfied with their hours and the remaining group preferred longer hours. The overworked European has not been addressed to the extent the overworked American has. Nevertheless, the percentages of workers in the European Union preferring other hours are almost identical to those in the USA, according to the 1998 Employment Options of the Future Survey, covering 15 EU member states plus Norway (Bielenski et al. 2002:43). Exactly half of the workforce surveyed preferred shorter hours, slightly over one-third was satisfied with their current hours, and the remaining group preferred longer hours.

Regardless of the high percentages of workers whose ideal working hours do not match their usual hours, few studies have addressed the factors that may determine individual working time preferences. The present contribution aims to expand this knowledge by modelling individual working time preferences from current working hours, household and family characteristics, and job characteristics, using Dutch employee survey data. A review of the literature is followed by the model, methodology and data. Next, the hypotheses for three clusters of variables explaining preferences for longer or shorter working hours are tested.

EXPLANATIONS OF WORKING TIME PREFERENCES

Working time preferences may address the standard working week at the workplace, the usual working hours or the contractual working hours. It is important to distinguish between these three categories. Preferences for a reduction of the standard working week are realised in collective bargaining or in legal settings, and may lead to an increase in hourly wages. Preferences for a reduction of the usual working hours primarily refer to overtime and may or may not affect wages, depending whether the overtime is paid or unpaid. Preferences for a reduction of the contractual working hours may be difficult to realise in countries where it is very common to work full-time and where the full-time working week is equal to the standard working week. In countries such as the Netherlands, which is characterised by high rates of part-time employment and variation in the contractual full-time working week, a preference for individual reduction of the contractual hours is a realistic option. In such cases, this reduction will affect weekly or monthly wages but not the hourly wages.

In times when the reduction of the standard working week is high on the political agenda, surveys measuring the preferences for a collective working time reduction are very sensitive to the precise wording of a question regarding reduced hours with or without full wage compensation (Nätti 1995). Similarly sensitive are survey questions that refer to individual working hours. Kahn and Lang (1995) describe how Statistics Canada in a supplement of its 1985 Labour Force Survey used a long introduction to the questions on desired hours, to ensure that respondents understood that hypothetical hour reductions would imply prorated salary changes. In the 1994 labour market surveys of the European Commission the survey question also addressed the prorated salary changes, showing that 29% of the workforce preferred shorter hours (Contensou and Vranceanu 2000). However, in surveys where the prorated salary changes are not explicitly addressed, the percentages of employees preferring shorter hours are higher – as shown for 50% of the workforce in the EU plus Norway in the Employment Options of the Future Survey (Bielenski et al. 2002). The reason is that apart from the hourly-paid workers, the group of employees with unpaid overtime hours can express their preference for shorter working hours.

For quite some time, Statistics Netherlands in their Labour Force Survey has investigated working time preferences, using a very strict survey question: 'Do you prefer to work longer or shorter hours within the next six months, taking into account that your earnings will change accordingly?' In 2003, 84% of the dependent labour force were satisfied with their working hours, whereas 6% (4% of the men and 8% of the women) expressed a desire to work longer hours and 10% of the employees (9% of the men and 12% of the women) indicated a preference to work shorter hours (Statistics Netherlands 2006). Asked in a far more general way, 'Would you like to work longer or shorter hours than you currently do?', the WageIndicator survey revealed far lower percentages of working time satisfaction for Dutch employees. In 2001 and 2002, only 56% were satisfied, whereas 7% preferred to work longer hours and 37% preferred to work shorter hours. These figures are in accordance with

findings in another large Dutch survey using a similar question (Otten and Smulders 2002).

Explaining working time preferences from standard, usual and contractual hours

Differences in working hours across countries must be understood in the context of country-specific institutional arrangements (OECD 1998; Bielenski et al. 2002). According to the OECD (1998), countries with a more developed collective bargaining system have shown a faster decline in working hours. Moreover, countries with relatively low average annual hours tend to be those in which the average preference for reduced hours is relatively strong and for higher earnings relatively weak, indicating that these countries have succeeded in realising the average preferences. The impact of the standard working week – albeit for one single country – is taken into account in analysing predictors of the preferences for individual working hours.

At the individual level, according to the Employment Options of the Future Survey, the current working time exerts the greatest influence on the working hours preference, although the general preference of employees is less widely dispersed than the actual working times (Bielenski et al. 2002). Others studies also reveal a similar large impact of usual hours on preferred hours (Otten and Smulders 2002; Euwals and Van Soest 1999). The longer the individual working week, the higher the preference for shorter working hours, and vice-versa. Bivariate data from Statistics Netherlands reveals higher preferences for longer hours for employees in short part-time jobs compared to long part-time jobs and full-time jobs, and the reverse holds for the preferences for shorter hours. Multivariate analysis of data of 28 organisations in the Netherlands and 1319 employees within these organisations reveals that the relationship between current working hours and working time preferences is different for the two genders. Male full-timers are significantly more likely to have a preference for shorter hours and their preference for longer hours is insignificant, whereas female full-timers have an insignificant preference for shorter hours but they are significantly less likely to have a preference for longer hours (Baaijens et al. 2005). Overtime hours also exert a gendered pattern. Women regularly working overtime express a preference for both shorter and longer hours, whereas their male counterparts express a preference only for longer hours.

Some employees are paid on a salaried basis, thus per month or other period, rather than on an hourly basis. According to Ehrenberg and Smith (1997), the term is used this way merely for convenience and is of no consequence for most purposes. The distinction between salaried and hourly-paid employees is not meaningless when it comes to analysing working hours preferences though. Salaried employees may express preferences for shorter working hours more often and the reverse may hold for hourly-paid employees, although salaried employees would invest in their career and thus in future higher earnings by working longer hours.

In conclusion, for the current study it has to be assumed that the standard working week, the contractual working hours and the overtime hours will influence the individual working hours' preferences. It is also important to identify salaried workers and hourly-paid workers, assuming that their preferences differ. For salaried employees it may be important to take into account the employee's career orientation. Employees' educational levels and job insecurity must also be considered.

Explaining working time preferences from household characteristics

Weekly working hours reveal highly gendered patterns. In nearly all industrialised countries, women work on average shorter hours than men do, and this is mostly attributed to the domestic tasks women perform in addition to paid work. Using data of the Employment Options of the Future Survey, Bielenski et al. (2002:40-42) show that men would like to reduce their working time by about twice as much as women, but their preferred times are on average still around 6.5 hours longer than those of women. By realising these preferences, the working time differences between the genders would remain, but at a significantly lower level. Men's preferences are clustered within the 30-40 hour range, women's around the 20-, 25-, 30-, 35- and 40-hour marks.

The presence of children has a significant influence on women's usual or preferred working times – or on both – except for Belgium (Bielenski et al. 2002). For the Netherlands, children of any age have a significantly negative influence on the usual working hours, but not on the preferred hours. Presumably, this is caused by the availability of part-time jobs and the possibility of reducing hours in the job, as legally regulated. By contrast, in seven of the sixteen countries children positively influence the usual working hours of men, and in two countries children positively influence their preferred hours. An exception is Norway, where men with children up to age 5 prefer shorter hours. The authors conclude that, for women, household-related factors have the largest influence on working time preferences. According to analyses of the same dataset by Väisänen and Nätti (2002), children under the age of 10 positively influence the likelihood of women in dual-earning households preferring shorter working hours for the household in total, whereas men are more likely to prefer longer hours for the household. The effect of the life cycle may be intertwined with the effect of age. In their study of the Canadian Survey of Work Reduction, Kahn and Lang (1996) find that the desire for overtime hours declines with seniority.

The Netherlands is known for its high part-time rates. Studying desired and usual working hours for unmarried individuals based on the Dutch Socio-Economic Panel, Euwals and Van Soest (1999) reveal that women easily adapt their working time to their preferences, in contrast to men. Compared to other EU member states, in the Netherlands the gender roles regime is the best predictor of a woman's likelihood of holding a part-time job (Tijdens 2002). Moreover, her wage rate is the best predictor that she considers outsourcing her domestic tasks as a means to increase her working hours while holding leisure time constant (Tijdens et al. 2001). This chapter takes

into account the impact of the life cycle and the wage rate in determining working time preferences.

Explaining working time preferences from job-related factors

Job-related factors may influence employee preferences. According to Otten and Smulders (2002), job commitment increases the preference for longer hours significantly, while a high workload and an orientation towards leisure time increase the preference for shorter hours. Bielenski et al. (2002) also included job-related characteristics in their analyses, but these variables turned out to be significant only in a limited number of countries. (Note that their study aimed at predicting preferred hours and not the preference for shorter or longer hours.) In eight of the sixteen countries, higher job satisfaction increases the number of preferred working hours. In three countries, (perceived) good job prospects influence preferred hours, which is reflected in a preference to work fewer hours. Surprisingly, the attitude 'working to earn money' influences preferred hours only in two countries: in France, employees showing this attitude prefer longer hours, and their Danish peers prefer shorter hours. Job-related characteristics as perceived by the employee are thus assumed to have an impact on the preferences for working hours. These characteristics relate to factors such as job satisfaction, commitment, prospects and workload.

MODEL AND DATASET

Hypotheses and methodology

The overview in the previous section, where current working time is assumed to be influential, leads to hypothesis 1:

Preferences for shorter working hours are expected for employees with long working hours, long overtime hours and a long standard working week as well as for salaried employees, whereas preferences for longer working hours are expected for employees with short working hours, no overtime hours and a short standard working week as well as for hourly-paid employees. These analyses need to be controlled for education and job security.

A second cluster of explanatory variables relates to household and family characteristics, leading to hypothesis 2:

Preferences for shorter working hours are expected for female employees with children at home, employees whose partners have long working hours and employees with high wage rates. Preferences for longer working hours are expected for male employees with children at home, employees whose children have left home, employees whose partners have short working hours and employees with low wage rates.

Table 7.1 Distribution of the explanatory clusters over the three working time preference categories

		working hours preferences				
		shorter hrs	longer hrs	satisfied	total	% distr*
<i>Working time characteristics</i>						
standard working week in the firm	≤ 35	21.4	20.6	58.1	100	3.2
(hours)	36-37	31.2	8.4	60.3	100	30.0
	38-39	36.6	7.3	56.1	100	23.1
	≥ 40	41.6	6.0	52.5	100	43.7
usual working hours	≤ 20	16.4	22.9	60.6	100	5.5
	20-29	15.0	17.5	67.5	100	8.9
	30-39	34.4	6.4	59.2	100	30.1
	≥ 40	43.4	4.9	51.7	100	54.8
overtime hours	no	35.1	6.6	58.3	100	70.8
	yes	40.2	9.6	50.2	100	29.1
Payment	hourly	34.4	8.2	57.4	100	62.7
	salaried	42.1	6.2	51.7	100	29.6
<i>Family phase and household characteristics</i>						
Gender	female	35.1	8.6	56.3	100	44.5
	male	38.0	6.5	55.5	100	55.5
female + no children		41.5	6.8	51.7	100	21.8
male + no children		32.8	9.0	58.2	100	23.3
female + youngest child ≤ 12 yr		26.9	13.4	59.7	100	9.9
male + youngest child ≤ 12 yr		39.8	4.6	55.6	100	16.2
female + youngest child at home		28.8	10.1	61.1	100	7.0
>12 yr						
male + youngest child at home		39.2	5.2	55.6	100	7.7
>12 yr						
female + children left home		32.9	4.7	62.4	100	5.5
male + children left home		48.0	4.5	47.5	100	7.7
working hours partner	no p.	35.1	10.2	54.7	100	30.1
	≤ 25	40.6	4.8	54.6	100	28.2
	> 25	34.9	7.5	57.6	100	40.8
hourly gross wage	≤ € 10	39.1	5.7	55.3	100	78.2
	> € 10	27.5	14.1	58.4	100	20.9
<i>Job challenge or burden</i>						
job became more interesting last	no	41.7	7.6	50.7	100	40.0
year						

		working hours preferences				
		shorter hrs	longer hrs	satisfied	total	% distr*
eager to have a career	yes	33.2	7.4	59.4	100	56.5
	no	39.7	5.4	54.9	100	35.7
most of the work can be done routinely	yes	34.9	8.8	56.3	100	59.5
	no	37.1	6.2	56.7	100	51.0
conflicts occur regularly at work	yes	36.3	8.9	54.8	100	44.8
	no	33.5	7.3	59.2	100	67.1
staffing	yes	45.0	7.7	47.2	100	26.3
	insufficient	39.7	7.2	53.1	100	55.6
	sufficient	32.5	7.7	59.8	100	38.0
Control variables						
Education	low	33.6	10.8	55.6	100	15.2
	middle low	32.9	8.6	58.5	100	14.3
	middle high	37.5	7.1	55.4	100	41.1
	high	38.7	5.8	55.4	100	29.2
job will become redundant next year	no	36.5	7.3	56.2	100	88.6
	yes	40.7	9.2	50.1	100	6.6
Total		36.6	7.5	55.9	100	

* Percentages may not count to 100 because of missing values.

Source: Data WageIndicator 2001/2002 (Tijdens 2004), weighted data, N=21,265

A third cluster of explanatory variables relates to job characteristics, leading to hypothesis 3:

Preferences for shorter working hours are expected for employees who aim at minimising working hours because they perceive their job as a burden, and preferences for longer working hours are expected for employees who aim at maximising working hours because they perceive their job as a challenge.

Employee preferences for longer or shorter working hours will be modelled according to the hypotheses, using multinomial logit analyses. This analysis tests the likelihood of being in either category of working time preferences. Its odds ratios tell us for a particular characteristic how many times greater or smaller chances are that the employee will fall into the preference category 'longer hours' as against 'shorter hours', holding all other variables constant.

Survey and data

The data for this paper stem from the WageIndicator project, which was initiated in 1999 and still continues today (www.WageIndicator.org). This project consists of a website; a crowd-pulling salary check on the website, where visitors specify their age, tenure and other relevant factors and then receive instantly calculated information on the hourly and monthly wages in their occupation, using coefficients of wage equations for almost 350 occupations; and a web-based survey about wages and working conditions which visitors are asked to complete. The data from this questionnaire are used for the salary check as well as for academic research. This is the largest website in the Netherlands providing information about wages, with two million visitors a month and about 1,000 of them completing the questionnaire. The website is a joint effort of the main Dutch trade union federation FNV, a large publishing and Internet company, and the University of Amsterdam/AIAS.

The questionnaire asks about profession, industry, job, employment record, working hours, earnings and household characteristics. The dataset used in this study was collected between May 2001 and October 2002 (see for a detailed methodological exploration Tijdens 2004). To ascertain representativeness of the WageIndicator 2001/02 data, distributions by age and gender for individuals in waged employment for at least 12 hours per week have been matched against the comparable group in the Labour Force Survey (LFS) conducted by Statistics Netherlands. The comparison reveals that the 25-34 age group and females are over-represented. The latter is due to the fact that before 2001 the survey addressed women only. The data set is weighted by age and gender to approach the LFS distributions. The weighted dataset counts 21,265 observations (Table 7.1).

The WageIndicator survey has seven questions that address employee working times. These questions include the standard weekly working hours at the firm, the working weekly hours agreed in the labour contract, the usual working hours per week, whether overtime hours are paid, a self-classification as full-timer or part-timer, and yes/no questions on preferences for longer and shorter working hours. The last question has no explanation about prorated wage changes, as reduction of the standard working week with full wage compensation has not been discussed in recent years in the Netherlands and because it is well known from the high part-time rates that working shorter hours implies a prorated decrease in income. Overtime hours are defined as the difference between usual and contractual hours, under the condition that the usual hours exceed the contractual hours. The dependent variable in the analysis is the preference for shorter or longer hours. Respondents with no preference are classified as satisfied with their working hours.

Some employees will have unmet preferences for a longer period of time than others, hence the unsatisfied group will be biased. In the current study the duration of the unmet preferences is not known, so the analysis cannot be controlled for this bias. A second bias may be due to recent changes in family life, leading to new working hours preferences, or to recent changes in employment status, leading to a

better job match, including working hours. Initial analysis showed that employees with less than one year of experience in the labour market are indeed satisfied more often. Recent changes in family life did not influence working-hours satisfaction; recent labour market entrants have therefore been excluded from this analysis, and now the dataset counts 17,116 observations (Table 7.2).

Descriptive findings

Table 7.1 shows the distribution of the explanatory variables over the preference categories as well as their frequencies. It shows that 56% of the respondents are satisfied with their current working hours, 37% prefer to work shorter hours and only 7% prefer to work longer hours. The highest satisfaction with working hours is found among employees working 20-29 hours, followed by females whose children have left home. Lowest satisfaction is found for employees with conflicts in their department, followed by males whose children have left home, employees working overtime and employees whose job will become redundant in the foreseeable future.

Before turning to the analysis, a few features of average working hours not included in the table will be described. On average, male employees work 3.9 hours a week more than contractually agreed; the figure for female employees is 2.8 hours. In contrast to female employees, for male employees the usual working hours rise with contractual hours. On average, male employees with 37 contractual hours report 6 or more extra hours, while those with labour contracts for 36.2 hours a week report 0 extra hours. It matters whether the extra hours are paid, be it directly or by time-compensated overtime. Employees whose extra hours are paid work on average fewer extra hours (3.1 extra hours and 33.9 contractual hours) compared to employees whose extra hours are unpaid (4.9 extra hours and 36.1 contractual hours). It is thus obvious that overtime payment reduces working time.

Statistical analysis

In the next section, the focus of the analysis will be on the preference for shorter or longer working hours. From analyses not presented here, it can be concluded that having a routine job does not influence working-hours satisfaction, so this will be excluded. Regarding family phase, analyses have shown large gender differences. This leads to the conclusion that one analysis will do, provided that the variable of family phase is split into male and female dummies. There is no need to continue with separate analyses for females and males.

To analyse the preference for longer or shorter working hours in greater detail, a multinomial logit analysis was performed to predict the likelihood of an employee having a preference for either longer or shorter hours, when taking satisfaction with working hours as reference category. Three clusters of explanatory variables are used, as proposed in hypotheses 1-3. The family phase variable has been split into male and

Table 7.2 Marginal effects and t-values of a multinomial logit analysis predicting preferences for shorter or longer working hours (satisfied with hours is the reference category) from four clusters of indicators. Recent labour market entrants are excluded (N=17,116).

	prefers shorter hours		prefers longer hours	
	Exp (B)	T-values	Exp (B)	T-values
Intercept	0.219 (B)	[1.760]	-3.131 (B)	[9.524] ***
<i>Working time characteristics</i>				
standard work week in firm (≥ 40 hrs is ref.)				
≤ 35	-0.549	[4.910] ***	2.585	[7.284] ***
36-37	-0.667	[9.211] ***	1.460	[4.749] ***
38-39	-0.813	[4.737] ***	1.146	[1.604]
usual working hours (≥ 40 hrs pw is ref.)				
≤ 20	-0.286	[12.501] ***	5.358	[14.946] ***
20-29	-0.246	[17.021] ***	4.201	[13.424] ***
30-39	-0.679	[8.758] ***	1.658	[5.560] ***
Overtime and pay (no overtime and salaried empl. is ref.)				
no overtime and hourly-paid employee	-0.858	[3.328] ***	1.027	[0.278]
overtime and hourly-paid employee	-0.773	[4.281] ***	2.844	[9.557] ***
overtime and salaried employee	-0.961	[0.652]	1.844	[4.651] ***
<i>Family phase and household characteristics</i>				
female (male is ref.)	-0.762	[1.972]	-0.427	[2.602] ***
family phase (children left home is ref.)				
female + no children	1.463	[3.886] ***	1.990	[2.933] ***
male + no children	-0.670	[3.625] ***	1.065	[0.254]
female + youngest child ≤ 12 yr	1.200	[1.713]	2.479	[3.847] ***
male + youngest child ≤ 12 yr	-0.721	[2.896] ***	-0.898	[0.415]
female + youngest child at home > 12 yr	1.090	[0.735]	2.093	[2.943] ***
male + youngest child at home > 12 yr	-0.692	[2.742] ***	-0.962	[0.126]
working hours partner (> 25 hrs is ref.)				
no partner	-0.942	[1.448]	1.712	[7.072] ***
partner ≤ 25 hrs	-0.986	[0.252]	1.253	[1.994]
hourly gross wage $> \text{€ } 10$ ($\leq \text{€ } 10$ is ref.)	1.503	[9.152] ***	-0.563	[8.265] ***
<i>Job challenge or burden</i>				
job became more interesting last year	-0.656	[11.853] ***	-0.882	[1.924]
eager to have a career	-0.728	[8.432] ***	1.708	[7.270] ***
Conflicts occur regularly at work	1.455	[9.873] ***	1.134	[1.782]
staffing sufficient	-1.310	[7.619] ***	0.949	[0.814]

2Log likelihood 15769.605, $\text{Chi}^2=2574.49$ (df=46) sign=.000; Sign levels ***p<.001.

Source: Data WageIndicator 2001/2002 (Tijdens 2004).

female dummies. The results are shown in Table 7.2, presenting the odds ratios and the T-values.

PREDICTING A PREFERENCE FOR LONGER OR SHORTER WORKING HOURS

The impact of working time characteristics

Working time characteristics affect working time satisfaction, as has been shown in the previous section. In hypothesis 1 it is assumed that working time characteristics will also influence the likelihood of an employee's preference for shorter or longer working hours. The bivariate results in Table 7.1 reveal that employees with short usual working hours are more frequently found in the category that prefers longer hours, while the reverse holds for employees with long usual hours. A similar pattern occurs for employees in workplaces with short versus long standard working weeks. Table 7.1 also shows that employees with long overtime hours more frequently prefer shorter working hours, as do salaried employees.

Table 7.2 reveals that the bivariate findings from Table 7.1 are confirmed in the multinomial logit analysis. The longer the standard working week at the firm, the more likely the employee will prefer shorter hours and the less likely the preference for longer hours. For example, an employee in a firm with a 36-37 hour standard week is 0.7 times less likely to prefer shorter hours compared to an employee in a firm with a standard working week of 40 hours or more. A similar pattern can be seen for the usual working hours per week. The longer the usual working week, the more likely the employee will prefer shorter hours, and the less likely longer hours will be preferred. For example, an employee with a usual 20-29 hour working week is 4.2 times more likely to prefer longer hours compared to an employee who usually works 40 hours per week or more.

For purposes of the analysis, overtime and overtime payment have been put together, as the two jointly may affect the preference for fewer or longer hours. Table 7.2 shows that, in comparison to the salaried employee, the hourly-paid employee, whether currently working overtime or not, is 0.8 times less likely to prefer shorter hours. When it comes to the preference for longer hours, the findings are not so clear. Compared to employees not working overtime, employees working overtime are more likely to prefer longer hours. Particularly the hourly-paid employee working overtime is more likely to prefer longer hours, as is the salaried employee working overtime. At first glance this is a puzzling finding. An explanation may be that these employees already work overtime as an expression of their preference to work longer hours, for example because they work short hours according to their contract. Indeed, compared to other employees the average contractual working week in this particular group is lowest, notably 27.5 hours compared to 36.0 hours in the group that also has overtime but expressed a preference for shorter working hours.

The impact of gender, life cycle, household and wages

With regard to household and family characteristics, hypothesis 2 assumes that working hours preferences will depend on gender, family phase, partner's working hours, and a wage rate above or below € 10. Table 7.1 reveals that female employees with children who have left home are the most satisfied (62.4%), whereas their male counterparts are the least satisfied (only 47.5%). These men overwhelmingly prefer shorter hours. In contrast to the hypothesis, female employees with children under age 12 prefer shorter working hours the least, whereas their male counterparts prefer shorter hours nearly as much as male employees whose children have left home. It is quite likely that female employees with children at home have made their decision on working hours dependent upon the fulfilment of their preferences. In all family phases, male employees are less satisfied with their working hours than females, except for the first phase of family formation, before having children. When it comes to the partner's working hours, Table 7.1 reveals that satisfaction with working hours hardly varies across the three categories. A breakdown by gender (not in the table) reveals that male employees without a partner often prefer to work longer hours, whereas male employees with a partner who works less than 25 hours often prefer shorter working hours. The female employees reveal the same pattern, though less outspoken. When it comes to hourly wages, Table 7.1 reveals a high likelihood that the hypotheses will be supported. Employees in the low-earnings category prefer shorter hours less often and longer hours more often.

Table 7.2, including results of the multinomial logit analysis, seems to confirm the interpretation of Table 7.1. Family phase appears to have a significant influence on the likelihood of both shorter and longer hours, but the effects are contrary to those expected. Compared to the category of employees whose children have left home, women who have no children are far more likely to prefer shorter hours, while men who have no children are far less likely to prefer shorter hours. Women with children at home are not significantly more likely to prefer shorter hours. This is in contrast to the hypothesis, where it was expected that female employees with children at home would be the ones eager to work shorter hours. For female employees, adaptation to working time preferences probably is a major constraint to their professional availability. Men with children at home are less likely to prefer shorter working hours. Compared to employees whose children have left home, women with no children or with children at home are more likely to prefer longer hours. The latter group probably has part-time jobs and expresses a desire for longer hours. The reference group 'employees whose children have left home' is most likely to prefer shorter working hours. In conclusion, the hypothesis is only confirmed for male employees without children.

With regard to the partner's working hours, this condition has no significant influence on working time preferences, except for employees without a partner. They are 1.7 times more likely to prefer longer hours compared to the reference group,

consisting of employees with a partner working 25 hours or more. This part of the hypothesis is thus partly confirmed.

When it comes to the impact of hourly wages on working time preferences, Table 7.2 reveals that employees with a gross hourly wage of more than € 10 are 1.5 times more likely to prefer shorter working hours than employees earning less than € 10. Employees with a gross hourly wage over € 10 are 0.5 times less likely to prefer longer working hours than employees earning less than € 10. This part of the hypothesis is thus fully confirmed.

The impact of job characteristics

In hypothesis 3, perceiving the job as a challenge or as a burden was assumed to affect working time preferences. Table 7.1 reveals that employees who have an interesting job and who are eager to have a career are satisfied with their working hours more often and prefer shorter working hours less often, as expected for employees perceiving their job as a challenge. Employees who report recurrent conflicts at the workplace are satisfied with their working hours far less often; some of them prefer shorter hours and others prefer longer hours, more than employees who do not report conflicts. Finally, those employees reporting insufficient staffing are satisfied with their working hours far less often, and overwhelmingly prefer shorter hours.

The results of the multinomial logit analysis in Table 7.2 fully confirm the descriptive findings. The two indicators for a challenging job indeed show that these employees are less likely to prefer shorter working hours. Both employees who indicated that their job became more interesting last year and employees who are eager for careering are 0.6 less likely to prefer shorter hours. The latter group is also 1.7 times more likely to prefer longer hours. With regard to the job being a challenge, the hypothesis is thus confirmed. The results are not so decisive when it comes to the preferences of employees perceiving their job as a burden. Employees reporting conflicts at the workplace and insufficient staffing are more likely to prefer shorter hours, respectively 1.4 and 1.3 times. The findings for a preference for longer working hours are insignificant. Thus, with regard to the job being a burden, the hypothesis is mostly confirmed.

CONCLUSION

As stated in the introduction, the desire to work shorter hours on the job may be a logical response to time allocation problems in the household. To this end, explanations were studied for working time preferences for both shorter and longer working hours, using cross-sectional multinomial logits for the 2001/2002 WageIndicator dataset (N=17,116). Three hypotheses have been investigated. The first hypothesis assumes that working hours characteristics determine working time preferences. It turns out that the longer the working hours – both the standard

working week at the workplace and the employee's usual working hours – the more likely the employee will express a preference for shorter hours and the less likely a preference for longer hours. This confirms earlier findings by Bielenski et al. (2002) and Baaijens et al. (2005). The analyses also show that hourly-paid employees are less likely to express a preference for shorter hours when compared to salaried employees. This applies equally to hourly-paid employees who currently have overtime and those who do not. With respect to the preference for longer hours, the hourly-paid employee working overtime is particularly likely to express a preference for longer hours. Hence, current overtime hours may very well be regarded as an expression of interest to work even longer hours. This category of employees has indeed a relatively low average working week. Almost all findings are as expected.

The second hypothesis assumes that family and household characteristics influence working hours preferences, notably household income, wage rate and family phase, whereby the effects for the latter were assumed to differ by gender. This hypothesis however is not supported. As expected, male employees who have no children or who have children at home are less likely to prefer shorter hours than employees whose children have left home. Female employees do not show a significant effect in terms of a preference for shorter hours. It may therefore be assumed that they easily have adapted their working time to their preferences, or otherwise have withdrawn from the labour market. Contrary to expectations, no significant impact of the partner's working hours on the employee's preferences was found. The hourly wage does have a large impact on the working time preferences: employees with an hourly gross wage of more than € 10 prefer shorter hours far more often and longer hours far less often than employees whose earnings fall below € 10. In conclusion, the effects of the life cycle are opposite to those expected, probably due to the fact that women adapt working hours more easily to their preferences than males do. This confirms previous findings by Euwals and Van Soest (1999). In addition, preferences for working hours seem to be an individual and not a joint household preference.

For the third hypothesis the impact of job characteristics is studied, assuming that employees who perceive their job as a burden will prefer to work fewer hours and employees perceiving their job a challenge will prefer longer hours. As for the preference for shorter hours, the hypothesis is confirmed. Employees perceiving their job as a burden, i.e. facing insufficient staffing levels or conflicts at work, indeed tend to prefer shorter hours. The latter is in contrast to the findings by Baaijens et al. (2005), indicating that insufficient staffing leads to a preference for more hours. As for the preference for longer hours, the hypothesis is only partly confirmed. Employees perceiving their job a challenge prefer longer hours when they are eager to do careering, but other indicators are insignificant.

In conclusion, working hours preferences are predominately influenced by working hours characteristics. This tendency was also found in previous studies. New is the finding that salaried employees want to reduce hours whereas hourly-paid employees prefer to work longer hours, even when controlled for overtime. The study further shows that hourly wages have a large impact on working hours preferences, as the

low-earnings category prefers longer hours far more often. New too is that employees in a challenging job prefer shorter hours less often, and vice versa, employees who perceive their job as a burden want to reduce hours. Contrary to public opinion, female employees apparently show a better fit between preferred and usual hours compared to male employees. Thus, although the desire to work shorter hours may be a logical response to time allocation problems in the household, these cases will not be found in the dataset because the survey questions ask for unmet preferences only and not for met preferences. In the Netherlands, female employees are obviously able to match their working time preferences with the job, which should not be surprising given the high rates of part-time employment, the regulations in collective labour agreements and the legislation facilitating individual requests of employees to reduce their contractual working hours.

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