

Effects of Non-standard Work on the Work-family Balance: A Literature Review

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This paper reviews the literature on the effects of non-standard employment on the balance between work and the family. While some of the workers benefit from the positive effects of flexibility and good job quality, others are trapped in forms of employment where flexibility is required of them, rather than for them. There are positive associations between non-standard work and a good balance between family and work. For example, the literature showed a positive balance between family and work for part-timers. On the other hand, the literature has also shown that non-standard work hours and working long hours have negative effects on families. Different strategies to balance work and family life can be identified at the individual and organisational levels. Flex-time is the most widespread alternative work schedule arrangement in Canada. The literature on the effects of non-standard work on the work-family balance is uneven. There exists a fair amount of data on the effects of part-time work and shift work, but no studies on the effects of temporary employment, multiple job holdings and self-employment. Another subject that has not been touched on is the impact of the changing family on the careers of parents.

Life satisfaction is the overall assessment of an individual's state of well-being (Beutell 2006). One could argue that a good balance between the different role demands of an individual (being a spouse, a parent, a worker, etc.) contributes to life satisfaction. When the demands from a domain of life become incompatible with the demands of another domain, conflict occurs (Greenhaus and Beutell 1985; Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek and Rosenthal 1964, in Hammer and Thompson 2003). Because of the major recent transformations in the family and the workplace, the loss of balance between the demands from the workplace and the demands from the family has become problematic (Lowe 2000).

Hochschild (1997) defines the term "time bind" as when the desired division of time between work and family is different from the existing division. Regardless of the work arrangements, the possible negative effects of the time bind are numerous. Hill, Märtinson, Ferris and Baker (2004) summarise these negative effects: withdrawal from family interaction (Paden and Buehler 1995; Reppetti and Wood 1997), increased conflict in marriage (Bolger, DeLongis, Kessler and Schilling 1989; Crouter, Perry-Jenkins, Huston and Crawford 1989; Hosking and Western 2008), less knowledge of children's experiences (Bumpus, Crouter, and McHale 1999; Crouter et al. 1989), less involvement in housework (Aldous,

Mulligan, and Bjarnason 1998; Crouter et al. 1989), shorter period of breast-feeding for mothers with full-time employment (Lindberg 1996), greater likelihood of abusing alcohol (Frone, Russell, and Cooper 1993), and an overall decrease in the quality of life (Rice, Frone, and McFarlin 1992).

The multiplication of living arrangements of Canadian families challenge how individuals balance their life between work and family, and have implications for family-friendly workplaces. Intact families (couples with biological or adopted children living in the same household) have not, since the early 1990s, formed the main living arrangement of Canadian families (Statistics Canada, 2002a). The number of one-parent families has increased (Juby, Marcil-Gratton and Le Bourdais 2001), and so has the number of step families (Statistics Canada, 2002a). The 2006 Canadian Census also revealed a growing number of young adults remaining or returning to the parental home (Statistics Canada, 2007). As a result of the increase in life expectancy, and an “increasing number of children returning home after divorce or job loss” (Lynn 2000: 32), some adults are raising their children as well as taking care of their parents. The “sandwich generation” represents 3 out of 10 people aged 45 to 64 with unmarried children under 25 in the home (Statistics Canada, 2004a).

The male breadwinner model, which puts an emphasis on the household as the woman’s sphere and the workplace as the man’s sphere, no longer defines how most families divide labour between men and women (Crompton 2006). The increased participation of women in the labour market, along with technological change and globalization, have dramatically changed the structure of the labour market, and have most likely changed how workers balance their life between work and family.

The marked increase in female participation in the labour force over the past few decades is one of the most important changes in the social and economic development of the 20th century. Moreover, not only have they “entered the labour force in unprecedented numbers, they also have stayed there” (Dubeck 1998: 3). Economic need and a desire to establish a career have increased their participation rate from 42% in 1976 to 63% in 2008 (Statistics Canada, 2004b; Statistics Canada, 2009). The labour market outcomes of women improved in the 1990s (Picot and Heisz 2000) and, even though men continue to earn more (Drolet 2002), the earning gap has narrowed in the last decade (Heisz, Jackson, and Picot 2002). Although childbearing is one of the most important reasons for why women exit the labour market, the effect of childbirth on the exit rates has decreased significantly since the 1970s. Then, having a child increased a married woman’s chance of exiting the labour market by 26.7%; in the 1990s, the exit rate fell to 10.4% (Even and Macpherson 2001).

On the other hand, the development of information technology, along with globalization, has changed today’s workplace, marked by the diffusion of mainframe computers in the 1970s and the rapid spread of personal computers in the 1980s and early 1990s. Technological change and the reduction of transportation costs have decreased the distance between people, and made it easier to do business with others around the world. Increased foreign trade and investment are generally associated with the late 20th century trend towards globalization (Feenstra 1998). These increases have resulted in a corresponding increase in the extent to which firms outsource, which has contributed towards further inequalities in the earnings of workers (Burtless 1995).

One of the major consequences of technological change and globalization for workers has been the increase in non-standard work. As a result of this new reality, Brown and Lauder (2001) argue, industrialised countries shifted from a paradigm of bureaucratic organization in the 1950s and 1960s, which was marked by the development of mass production and the expansion of the middle-class, towards a paradigm of flexibility. New work arrangements were developed that were better able to respond to the constantly changing needs of the market (Tremblay 1994). In the current era of flexibility, the chances of having a stable job are lower than during the “bureaucratic era,” and atypical, or non-standard, work arrangements are on the rise as employers now ask for more flexibility from employees. This means flexibility in their tasks, but also in their work schedule and in the duration of the employment relationship.

As we will see, it is also unlikely that the proportion of non-standard employment will decrease anytime in the near future. How are families coping with the rise of non-standard employment? In the late 1990s, about two thirds of parents between the ages of 25 and 44 who were working full-time with children reported that they were dissatisfied with the balance between their job and home life (Marshall 2001). Parents agree that their dissatisfaction came from not having enough time for family.

This paper reviews the literature on the effects of non-standard employment on the balance between work and the family. Emphasis is placed on the workplace and its role in this balance. The paper begins by presenting various statistics in order to depict the nature and extent of non-standard employment. This is then followed by a review of the literature that includes the reasons for working in a non-standard job, the effect of working shifts, working long hours and working part-time on the work-family balance, and strategies to balance work and family life. An attempt is also made to point out as of yet unstudied topics worthy of further examination within the literature.

The Prevalence of Non-standard Work

The standard employment relationship generally refers to a situation where an employee has one employer; works in a permanent, year-round full-time position; enjoys extensive statutory benefits and entitlements; and expects to be employed indefinitely (Cranford, Vosko, and Zukewich 2003). Any work arrangement that differs from this definition is referred to as “non-standard” (also known as “atypical employment”). In the definition of non-standard work, Statistics Canada includes part-time work, temporary employment, holding multiple jobs and own-account employment (self-employed without paid employees). In 1994, one third of Canadian workers between the ages of 15 and 64 were non-standard workers (Krahn 1995).

The number of people with non-standard work is increasing and there are no signs that this situation will change (Krahn 1995; Townson 2003; Vosko, Zukewich, and Cranford 2003). Krahn’s paper (1995) reveals that the prevalence of non-standard work (combining all four forms of non-standard work) increased from 1989 (28%) to 1994 (33%). The proportion of young women (aged between 15 and 24 years) working in a non-standard job is higher compared to women of other age groups, and compared to men of the same age group. The proportions of Canadians working in three of the four forms of non-standard work increased from 1989 (Krahn 1995) to 2005 (Statistics Canada, 2006):

part-time employment (from 15% in 1989 to 20% in 2005), temporary employment (8% in 1989, 13% in 2005) and own account (7% in 1989, 16% in 2005).

Other forms of non-standard work include working shifts and working long hours. If we add these to the previous four forms, the proportion of non-standard work increases considerably. Three out of ten employed Canadians did some type of shift work in 2000-2001 (Statistics Canada, 2002b). Blue-collar workers or those in sales and service occupations are more likely to work shifts than those in white-collar or clerical jobs. Also, there is a negative relationship between shift work and age: older workers are less likely to do shift work than their younger counterparts (Statistics Canada, 2002b; Presser 2003). As for marital status, unmarried workers (never married and those previously married) are more likely to have non-standard work schedules than married workers (Statistics Canada, 2002b; Presser 2003). Presser (2003) found high proportions of mothers with preschool-aged children in non-standard work schedules.

Working long hours is more common among men than among women. In the mid-1990s, 50% of men reported working 41 or more hours per week, whereas 28% of women did. Among those who worked long hours, 32% of men and 19% of women reported working 60 hours or more (Shields 2000). Approximately one out of five full-time employees worked weekends (Silver and Compton 2002).

All of these non-standard work arrangements are not exclusive. For example, those working long hours are more likely to have non-standard schedules (Statistics Canada, 2002b). As well, people working on weekends are more likely to be shift workers. Relatively few self-employed individuals have an evening, night or rotating schedule, but a high proportion of those who are self-employed work irregular hours (Statistics Canada, 2002b). Among the self-employed, almost half of the women work part-time, compared to only 18% of their male counterparts (Cranford et al. 2003).

Reasons for Non-standard Work

Do workers specifically choose non-standard work in order to better balance their lives between work and family, or are they trapped in these forms of employment? As Vosko, Zukewich and Cranford (2003) point out, many non-standard jobs correspond to life-cycle needs: full-time students who work part-time or mothers who work part-time in order to have more time to look after their children.

The amount of part-time labour has increased from about 4% of the total employment in the 1950s to almost 19% in the second half of the 1990s (Smith 1999; Marshall 2001). Three part-timers out of four voluntarily chose this work arrangement in 1999 (Statistics Canada, 2007). Marshall (2001) identified the reasons for choosing to work part-time, using data from the Labour Force Survey. The reasons given vary by age and gender. Not surprisingly, younger workers said attending school was their main reason for working part-time. As for those voluntary part-timers of prime working age (25 to 54 year old), personal preference was the main reason (44% of men; 45% for women). For women of this age group, family responsibilities were also very important (44% of women). The second most important reason for men was attending school (26% of men). For older workers, personal preference was also the main reason for choosing to work part-time. Older workers also expressed preference to work part-time as it allowed them to ease into

their retirement.

However, the decision to work non-standard schedules and do shift work is often not made due to the personal preference of the employee, but rather as a result of job requirements. In Canada and in the U.S., “job requirement” is the most frequent reason for working non-standard schedules (Presser 1995; Statistics Canada, 2002b). “Caring for family” is not the most frequent reason given for working shifts, but, women are more likely than men to cite family-related reasons. In the U.S., about half of the women and one-third of the men cite family-related reasons (Presser 1995).

Non-standard Work Schedules, Working Long Hours and the Work-family Balance

The effects of non-standard work schedules on the family are not very positive. Studies conducted in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, in Canada and the U.S., all reveal the negative effects of shift work on marital stability and marital satisfaction, on the child-parent interaction, on family time and on psychological well-being (Presser 2003; Staines and Pleck 1983; Statistics Canada, 2002b; White and Keith 1990).

In “Working in a 24/7 economy – Challenges for American families”, Harriet Presser (2003) looked at the interaction between children and parents, and suggests that working non-standard hours has both positive and negative effects on parent-child interaction, depending on how it is measured. With regard to parental presence at meal, which Presser considers to be the most important daily ritual, non-standard schedule workers are less likely to eat dinner with their children, but are most likely to eat breakfast with their children.

Another major work on the effects of non-standard schedules was done by Staines and Pleck (1983) in the late 1970s. They found that for all married couples, shift work was associated with: 1) Difficulties in scheduling family activities, 2) Increased level of family-work conflict, 3) Reduced levels of marital satisfaction, marital happiness and family satisfaction, and 4) Higher levels of work-family conflict and family adjustment.

In Canada, a report from Statistics Canada (2002b) that examined the effects of shift work on health revealed many negative effects. For both men and women, an evening shift in 1994/1995 was associated with an increase in psychological distress over the following two years. Men who were evening shift workers were more likely to experience psycho-social difficulties and to perceive a lack of control in their lives than daytime workers. The effects of evening shifts varied according to marital status. Married male workers who worked evening shifts were more likely than regular daytime workers to report problems with their relationship. Single males working evening shifts reported having difficulty finding a partner.

With respect to women, those working an irregular shift were more likely than daytime female workers to report high personal stress. They were also more likely to perceive a lack of control in their lives than daytime workers.

The picture of workers with non-standard schedules is unenviable. They are more stressed, perceive a lack of control in their lives, do not spend as much time with their children and partners as they would like, and are thus, less satisfied with their family life and marital life. Nonetheless, Presser (2003) also found positive effects. Among dual-earner couples, husbands tend to participate more in household tasks when their wives

have different working schedules. Another positive effect is that parents who work non-standard schedules have a greater likelihood of being at home when their school-aged children leave for school and when they return.

As for working long hours, the more hours you work, the more likely you are to perceive work-life imbalance (Tausig and Fenwick 2001). By contrast, Zuzanek's analysis (2000) shows that parents working long hours (fathers working 50 hours/week or more and 45 hours/week or more for mothers) provide similar or higher amounts of child care as parents working "regular" hours. However, they cut on personal needs (sleep and meals) and free time. The average number of minutes per day spent on domestic work, personal needs and free time is lower among both mothers and fathers working long hours, than among mothers and fathers working regular hours (Zuzanek 2000).

Part-time Work and the Work-family Balance

Although the majority of full-time workers are satisfied with the balance between their job and home life (74% of men and 70% of women), the proportion is even higher among part-time workers (91% of men and 80% of women) (Marshall 2001). Part-time workers are less likely to report that work caused them stress.

Part-time work offers certain advantages for women, especially for mothers. Comfort, Johnson and Wallace (2003) showed that part-time work for women is associated with an increase in access to a flex-time schedule, whereas this association is not significant for men. Mothers who work part-time are less likely to report work-family conflict, compared with mothers working full-time (Hosking and Western 2008). Zuzanek (2000) studied the work-family balance of part-time employed mothers with children under the age of 5. She found that, compared to full-time working mothers and homemakers, part-time employed mothers: 1) Worry less about not spending enough time with family and friends; 2) Are less likely to cut back on sleep to save time; 3) Less frequently report not having time for fun or that they feel trapped in their daily routine; 4) Are more likely to report feeling "very happy"; 5) Show greater satisfaction with their use of time; 6) Have higher self assessments of their health; and 7) Report fewer sleeping problems than those working full-time or at home.

But, part-time work is also often associated with low pay, low job security, low benefits. Most obviously, there is normally a financial cost for working part-time. This cost is especially important for single earners (Tausig and Fenwick 2001). Although it is sometimes argued that the advantage of part-time work (more flexibility) may be offset by less job quality, not only do part-timers earn less, they are less likely to supervise the work of others, be promoted, and are less likely to hold permanent positions (Comfort, Johnson and Wallace 2003).

Hill, Mårtinson, Ferris and Baker (2004) distinguish what they call the "new concept of part-time work" on the work-family balance. They define this "new" concept as a part-time job that is permanent, with career potential, includes fringe benefits and where the rate of pay is prorated to that of comparable full-time work. Though costs are probable if part-time work is interpreted broadly, it has to be acknowledged that there are important positive effects on the work-family balance.

Solutions to Work-family Conflict

Different strategies to balance work and family life can be identified at the individual and organisational levels. Parents may choose to engage in what Becker and Moen (1999) call “scaling back”, that is reducing and restructuring their commitment to paid work. They may, for example, reduce working hours, leave the workforce, and turn down jobs requiring more travel or relocation. It is usually the mother who scales back when children are of preschool age, sometimes until they leave home. Some Canadians cope with work-family conflict by “seeking social support and using active coping strategies such as prioritizing, delegating and planning” (Duxbury and Higgins 2009: 53). Purchasing household services for house cleaning and childrearing is another useful strategy for middle-class, dual-earner families (Stuenkel 2005).

Employers do realise that employee stress is partially due to the challenges in balancing work and family (Bachman 2000, in Matusicky 2003). A good balance between work and family life has been said to benefit employers, as it is linked to better life satisfaction and subsequently to workers being more productive, creative and efficient (e.g., Zelenski, Murphy and Jenkins 2008, Birch and Paul 2003). Solutions offered by the employers may include flexible working hours, compressed four-day working weeks, and “time banking”.

Flex-time is the most widespread alternative work schedule arrangement in Canada, and “probably offers employees the clearest net benefit of all alternative work arrangements” (Zuzanek 2000: 21). It refers to the ability for workers to decide when to start and stop working, as long as they work the required number of hours per week (Lin 2008). Over one-third of Canadian employees report having flex-time schedules (Comfort et al. 2003). The proportion of those who reported having flex-time arrangements is higher among men than among women and is mainly found in small establishments, non-unionized settings, low-skill occupations, retail and commercial industries. All reviewed research results show positive effects of flex-time on the work-family balance. Flex-time workers with children under the age of 18 report “lower levels of time pressure”, and a “higher level of job and life satisfaction” than do their non-flex counterparts (Zuzanek 2000: 21). Flexible work hours are associated with more satisfaction with family life (Staines and Pleck 1983, in Jekielek 2003) and a reduction in perceived time stress (Fast and Frederick 1996, in Tausig and Fenwick 2001). Analysts Comfort, Johnson and Wallace (2003) also found flex-time to be related to increased job satisfaction, increased satisfaction with pay and benefits, and a reduction in paid sick days. All of these relationships appeared slightly stronger for women.

Discussion

The effects of non-standard work on the work-family balance are mixed. There are positive associations between non-standard work and a good balance between family and work. For example, the literature showed a positive balance between family and work for part-timers. On the other hand, the literature has also shown that non-standard work hours and working long hours have negative effects on families.

Non-standard work is often associated with less job security, low pay and fewer fringe benefits. However, this is not the case for all non-standard work. Cranford, Vosko and Zukewich (2003) agree that the dichotomy standard/non-standard “fails to paint an ac-

curate portrait of precarious employment” (p.8). For example, some employees working shifts have quite stable jobs and have good wages (e.g. working in a paper mill or in the steel industry). Stability and high income contribute to the well-being of families.

The literature on the effects of non-standard work on the work-family balance is uneven. There exists a fair amount of data on the effects of part-time work and shift work, but no studies on the effects of temporary employment, multiple job holdings and self-employment. Temporary workers may postpone important events in family formation (e.g. buying a first house, having a child) because of the lack of job security. We have seen that the self-employed are more likely to work long hours and irregular shifts, two characteristics associated with having negative effects on the work family balance. A study specifically on the work-family balance of the self-employed would draw a better picture of the situation and may reveal factors that have yet to be observed. Temporary employment is also associated with a lack of job security. It is, therefore, plausible to think that this form of employment affects families. Similarly, multiple job holders may work long hours and also experience the negative effects of the time bind.

Another subject that has not been touched on is the impact of the changing family on the careers of parents. Intact families do not form the main living arrangements of Canadian families. How do single-parent families and parent of step families balance their time between work and family? How do they differ from intact families, with regards to work-family balance? Less work has been done on this subject (Hill et al. 2004) than work on the effects of work arrangements on the family.

Conclusion: Non-standard Work and the Time Bind

The main conclusion that can be drawn from this literature review is that the effects of non-standard work on families are not clear-cut. Non-standard workers and non-standard employment forms are not homogeneous. While some of the workers benefit from the positive effects of flexibility and good job quality, others are trapped in forms of employment where flexibility is required *of* them, rather than *for* them.

We have to rethink the way we see families and the workplace (Presser 2003). Social policy makers need to adapt family policy to reflect the increasing proportion of non-standard workers. Policy cannot be based solely on the model of standard employment. Some policy changes to help workers in non-standard work arrangements to balance their work and personal life include guaranteeing paid sick days, and paid family and medical leave for all workers, implementing new policy guaranteeing the right to request flexibility, and offering more predictable schedules (Boushey, Moughari, Sattelmeyer and Waller 2008). Providing financial resources for empirical research on the value of workplace health and work-life programs have also been proposed (Duxbury and Higgins 2001).

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