



## **Work to Family conflict and Family to Work conflict- who is more at risk?**

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OP18.1

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Most of my work is about work stress and its impact on health. I focus most of my work on the conditions at work, work related stressors that cause people to be unhappy at work. I have additionally looked at with my colleagues, on family related issues, how the imbalance between family and work life can cause people unhappiness and ill health. And actually from my expertise in work related stress I have found, although work stress is important, actually what really matters, the main sources of stress in people's life isn't really work, are they are family and it is financial issues. Family, housing, financial issues are a much larger proportion of stress in life than working conditions.

## The double burden of family and work demands



Concerns arose in the 90s about:

- the difficulties of reconciling work and personal life
- increases in long hours working among full-time employees

Towards the end of the 90s:

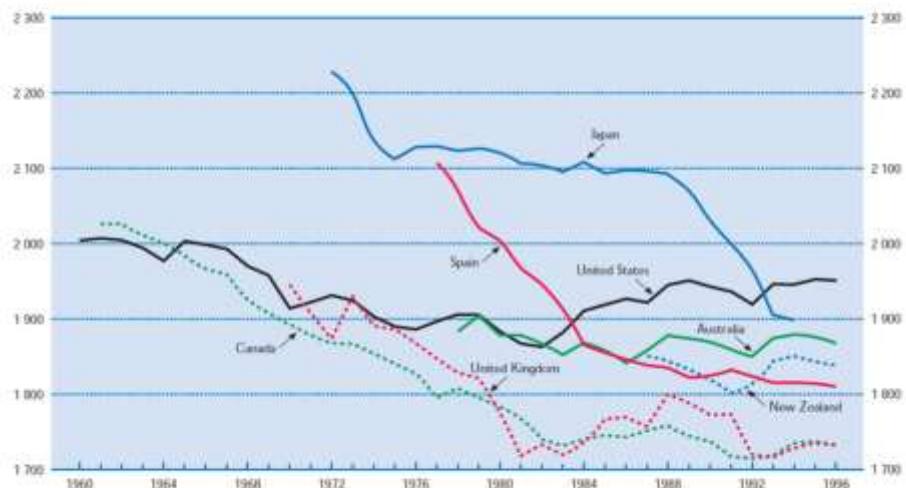
- New legal entitlements to request flexible work arrangements
- Aimed to increase employees' control over their work schedules
- Enable better management of family commitments and personal activities

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There is this notion about the double burden of family and work demands that arose from large sociological literature that wanted to count the number of hours that women worked, in not just paid employment, but all their unpaid work as well. And in the 1990s, there was a growing concern that it's becoming increasingly hard for employees to reconcile both work and family demands. This is partly because of an increase in long working hours among full-time employees, and there was concern that this was impacting both men and women.

Towards the end of the 1990s, we saw the first new legal entitlements for employees to request flexible work arrangements. I'll come on to what those mean a bit later but basically these flexible work arrangements aimed to increase the employees' control over their work schedules and enabled them to have a better management of their family commitments and personal activities. So ideally these family work arrangements were meant to reduce work and family pressures, work and family stressors.

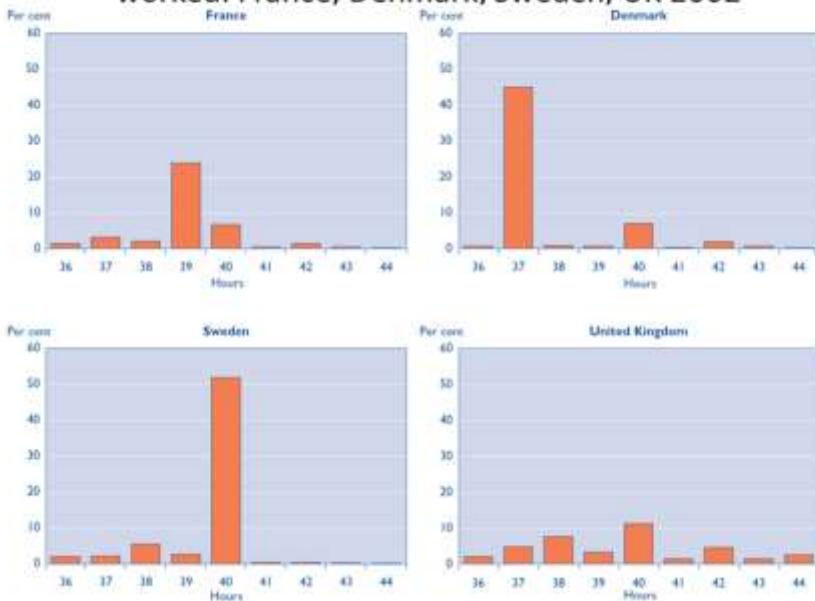
### Average annual hours actually worked per person in employment



Source: OECD Annual Hours Database

Now for some basic background. This data comes from the OECD annual hours database. The axis goes from 1960 to 1996. And this shows the average annual hours per person that's actually worked for those in employment. And overall you see in different countries - Spain, US, the UK, Australia, New Zealand and Canada - the broad picture is that average hours annually worked has come down in all countries. There is of course country variation. If you think that you work a lot of hours just be thankful you don't work in Japan because although they have come down a lot they are still among the highest. The United States is pretty high as well as is Australia, the green line. The dotted red line is the UK and you can see that up to the 1980s, there was a steep decline but between the 1980s and the early 90s, of course the time of the two recessions here, in between you saw an increase in the hours worked and that came down again in the 1990s. This increase in the 1980s partly gave rise to this feeling of - Are we working too much in the UK? Maybe we should be doing something about this increase in work hours? One thing I do need to caution you about is that this graph is about averages, this is a mean, and of course people work in highly different occupations with different work hours.

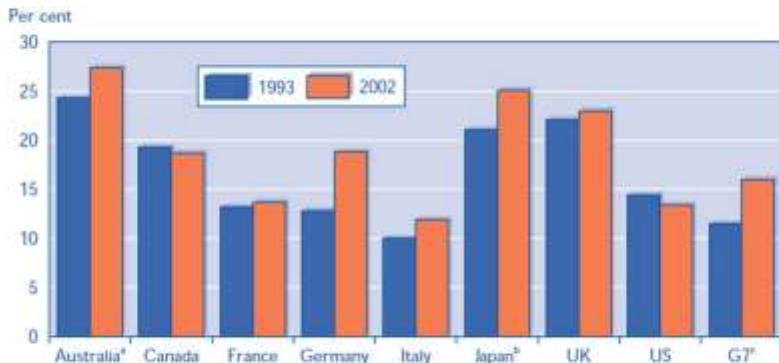
### Proportions of people in FT employment by typical weekly hours worked: France, Denmark, Sweden, UK 2002



Source: Eurostat

This graph compares the proportions of people in full-time employment who are working typical weekly hours in European countries, so France, Denmark and Sweden and the UK 2002, and this comes from Eurostats. In France there is a modal group that works on average 39 hours in Denmark that modal group is 37 hours, in Sweden that modal group is 40 hours. Basically everyone in Sweden works 40 hours per week. But if you look at this for the UK, there is no modal group, it's really very flat. We have quite a lot of people working 36 or 38 hours, quite a lot of people working 42 to 44 hours and it's really very different in the UK. So this is partly a reflection of the flexible working arrangements that exist in the UK and also the higher prevalence of part-time work compared to European countries.

### Proportions of part-time workers in selected countries: 1993 and 2002



Source: OECD

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If you look at the proportion of part-time workers in selected G7 countries we find that the UK is up there with Japan and Australia in terms of the proportion of workers that are engaged in part-time work and these proportions increase from 1993 to 2002 . This is much higher than France, Germany, Italy or the US. So the UK does have in Europe the highest proportion of part-time workers.

## Flexible Work Arrangements

Flexible working arrangements include things like:

- flexitime (flexible start and finish times)
- reduced hours
- a compressed working week
- working from home

However, who benefits from Flexible Work Arrangements (FWA)?

Gender- Women are more exposed to PT work, but what about other types of FWA?

Employment grade- Low vs High employment grades

Intersection of Gender and Employment grade?

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Now part-time work is just one aspect of flexible work arrangements. It's the one that people are most familiar with but since the late 1990s other kinds of flexible working arrangement have been legislated for. So that includes flexi-time with flexible start and finishing times, reduced hours so you can ask your employer for a reduced set of hours, compressed working week or working from home. I'm clearly interested in seeing to what extent these different kinds of flexible working arrangements, not just part-time work, how these differ between genders and social classes.

So my main research question of interest is who benefits from these flexible working arrangements? Is it women or is it men? We know that women are more exposed to part-time work but what about other types of flexible working arrangements, you know, flexi-time, working from home, who benefits? Men or women? How about the grade of employment? Do advantaged highly professional men and women benefit or do those lower social positions, occupational positions, do they benefit.

Now you might expect work family conflict to differ between the social classes in the sense that usually it's the higher social classes that experience greater demands, greater working demands. They tend to work longer working hours, so you might expect those in the high employment grades to report more work family conflict because their work is keeping them at work and so they can't go home and look after the family.

And vice versa you might expect the reverse for family to work conflict because those in the disadvantaged or lower occupational grades, they may not have enough resources to cope with family related stressors- usually they are financial stressors. So that means when there is a family crisis and they don't have the extra financial resources to cope with that and so you might expect greater family to work conflict among the disadvantaged, lower grades.

## Study Participants

The Whitehall II study of British civil servants

- 1991-1993 (phase 3) and 1997-1999 (phase 5)
- 3484 participants
- Average age 47 years
- 827 women and 2657 men
- Three employment grades
  - Higher grade: senior administrative
  - Middle grade: executive/professional
  - Lower grade: clerical/support

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What about gender and employment grades? Do women in lower employment grades, are they doubly disadvantaged? That is the kind of questions I wanted to explore. And the data that I used for that, most of it comes from the Whitehall II Study of British Civil Servants. It's a little bit old by now so I am looking at between the 1991 period to the 1999 period (two waves of this Whitehall II cohort). Towards the end I'll update this data with much more recent data from Understanding Society.

So from this study there are during this period about 3,500 participants with an average age of 47 years. There are around 830 women and 2,600 men. And because it's a civil service highly hierarchical organisation, we can split men and women into higher grades which were the senior administrator staff, and the middle grades who were the professional staff, and the lower grades who were largely clerical and support staff.

## Family to Work Interference (FWI)

Do your family life and family responsibilities **interfere** with your performance on your job in any of the following ways?

Would you say:-

- |  | Not at all | To some extent | A great deal | Not applicable |
|--|------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|
| a) Family matters reduce the time you can devote to your job                           | =          | =              | =            | =              |
| b) Family worries or problems distract you from your work                              | =          | XFAMINT2       | =            | =              |
| c) Family activities stop you getting the amount of sleep you need to do your job well | ***        | =              | =            | =              |
| d) Family obligations reduce the time you need to relax or be by yourself              | XFAMINT4=  | =              | =            | =              |

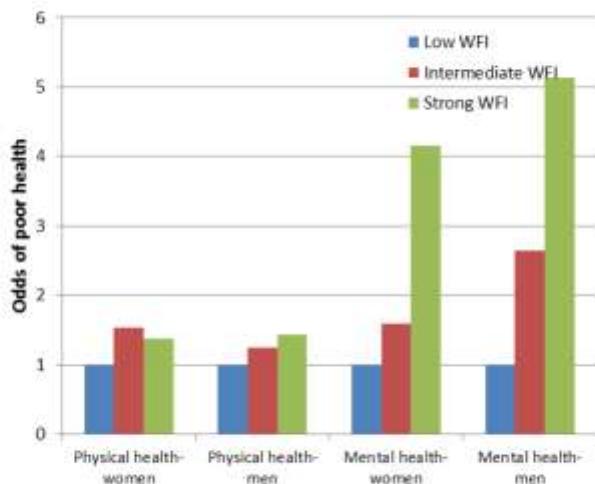
## Work to Family Interference (WFI)

- |  | Not at all | To some extent | A great deal | Not applicable |
|--|------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|
| a) Your job reduces the amount of time you can spend with the family                           | =          | XJOBINT1       | =            | =              |
| b) Problems at work make you irritable at home   | =          | XJOBINT2       | =            | =              |
| c) Your job involves a lot of travel away from home  | =          | XJOBINT3       | =            | =              |
| d) Your job takes so much energy you don't feel up to doing things that need attention at home | =          | XJOBINT4       | ***          | =              |

These types of questions that we asked them in this Whitehall II study- family to work conflict or family to work interference. We asked them "does family life and responsibility interfere with your performance of your job in any of the following ways". And then we asked them specifics about family matters, reduced time you can devote to your job, or they distract you from your work, or they stop you from getting the amount of sleep that you need to do your job well, or they reduce the ability to relax or be by yourself.

And then we also asked about how the working conditions that could affect their family life by asking them whether the job reduces the amount of time they spend with the family, whether problems at work make them irritable at home, whether the job involves a lot of travel, or it takes up so much energy you don't feel you have enough to do the things that need attention at home.

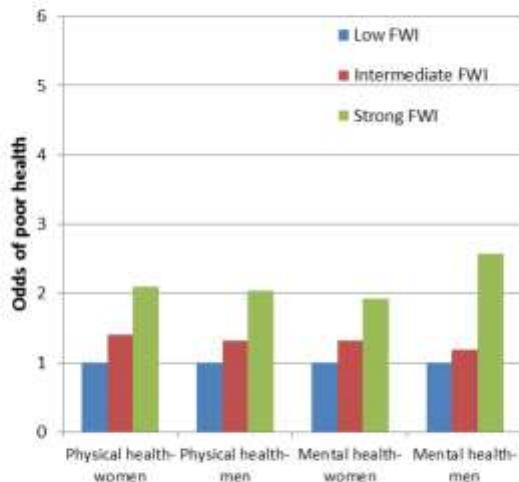
### Odds of poor health by Work-Family Interference (WFI)



Sekine et al. Social Science & Medicine  
Volume 63, Issue 2, July 2006, Pages 430–445

This is some of the early publications that came out from that about the impact of this family to work and work to family conflict on poor health. And we see that for both men and women, in relation to mental health- work to family conflict has a strong impact on poor health. Basically if you are a man or a woman with strong work to family conflict, your risk of poor health increases really dramatically. Your risk of mental poor health. In terms of physical poor health, there is an increased risk - it's not as dramatic as for mental health - but there is still an increased risk for both men and women if you have high levels of work to family conflict.

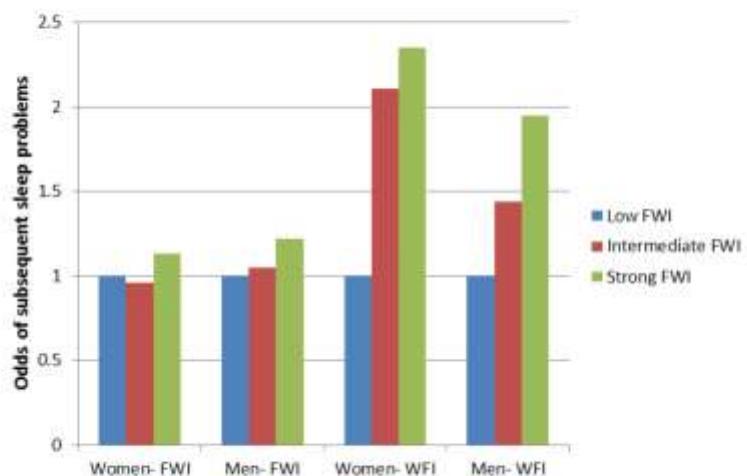
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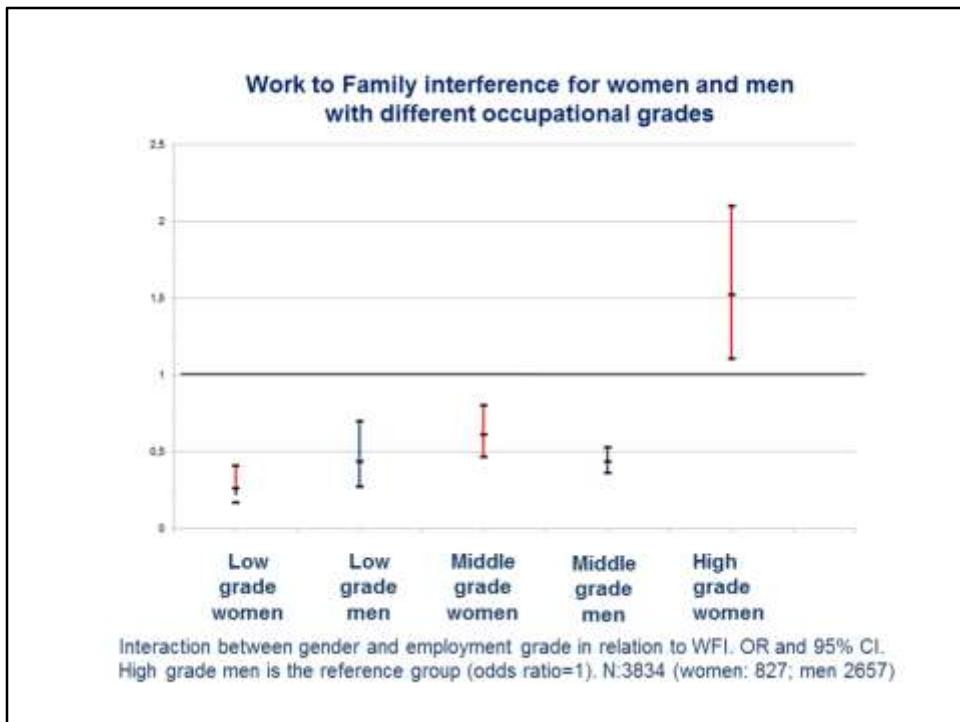
What about family to work conflict? It's also a similar pattern whereby in both men and women - so there is no gender difference here basically - in both men and women if they experience family to work conflict, both their mental health and their physical health suffers. The reference group is those without any family to work interference and the green reference is those with high levels of either family to work interference or work to family interference.

### Odds of subsequent sleep problems by Family to Work Interference (FWI) and Work to Family Interference (WFI)



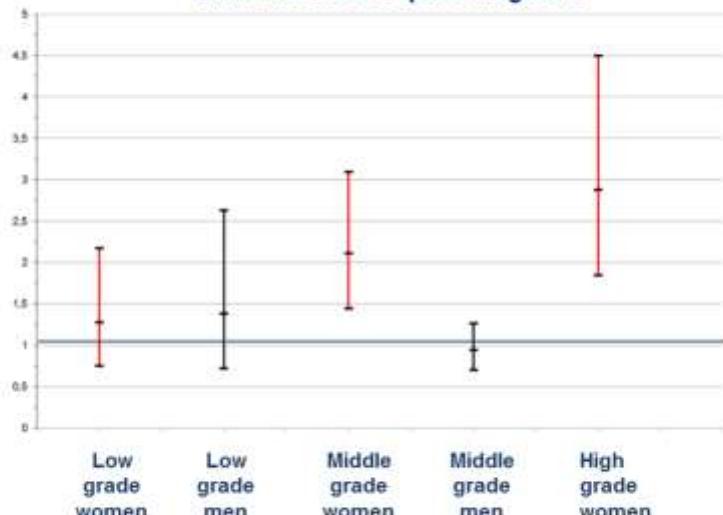
Lalluka et al. Int.J. Behav. Med. (2014) 21:310–318

We also looked at sleep problems longitudinally, and here there is a difference between work to family conflict and family to work conflict. Basically family to work conflict or family to work interference doesn't have much of an influence on sleep problems but work to family conflict that's conflict or interference originating from work conditions impacts on the sleep of both women and men.



So coming back to my question "Who is affected more by work to family conflict or family to work conflict ?" here we are looking at the risk of family to work interference for men and women in different occupational grades. The reference here is men in high grades, so that is the value of 1. So all these groups that are below the reference point, that are below 1, actually have lower work to family interference compared to men in higher grades. And it is just the high grade women who actually have increased risk of work to family conflict compared to the high grade men. So basically the main group that is at risk here is high grade women. They are especially at risk of work to family conflict compared to all the other occupational and gender groups.

**Family to Work interference for women and men  
with different occupational grades**



Interaction between gender and employment grade in relation to FWI. OR and 95% CI.  
High grade men is the reference group (odds ratio=1). N:3834 (women: 827; men 2657)

When we look at family to work conflict, we find a similar pattern. Once again the reference is men in high grades and once again it's women in the high grades that are at the highest risk. We also find women in middle grades that have higher risk than men in high grades. So a similar picture of risk being particularly high amongst women in high grade jobs.

## Messages from results

Family to Work and Work to Family Interference is important for health, particularly mental health

High grade women have the highest risk of Family to Work Interference (contrary to expectations)

Higher grade employees are more at risk of Work to Family Interference, particularly High grade women

So the message from the results that family to work and work to family conflict or interference is important for health, especially mental health and that the high grade women have the highest risk of family to work interference. And I am saying that is contrary to expectations because I suggested maybe the low grade women don't have the resources to cope with family stressors. I was expecting that if there is a family problem, a family related stress the high grade women would have the financial resources to cope with that. Well, actually the results are contrary to my expectations, that actually it's the high grade women that have the highest risk of family to work conflict and they also have the highest risk of work to family conflict.

## Policy implications

Would greater use of Flexible Work Arrangements (FWA) reduced the Higher levels of WFI/FWI reported by High Grade women?

- 61% of High Grade women are not married vs 12% of High Grade men
- Data from the 1990's may not reflect current legal provisions on FWA
- However, many reports of women in part-time and flexible work stuck in "dead-end jobs"
- Most jobs outside of the civil service are poorer quality with less progression for those in non-full-time jobs
- Growing numbers of "self-employed" with low levels of control at work and home

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Now what are the policy implications? The key question that I wanted to address was "Would greater use of flexible work arrangements have benefited this group of high grade women"? As they report higher level of work to family interference and family to work interference.

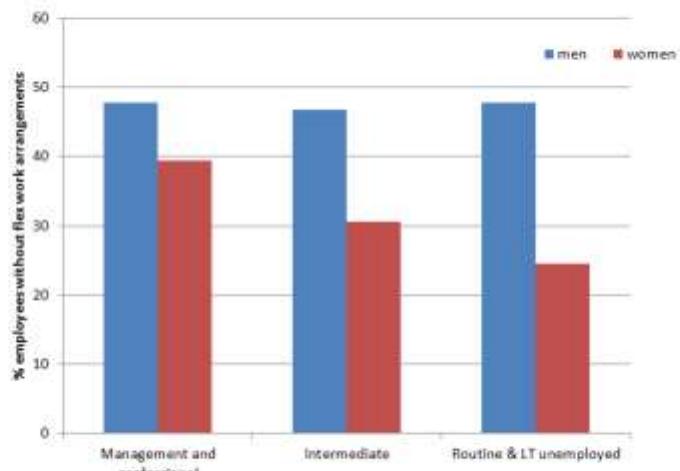
There are some peculiarities about the sample that I am looking at. These are civil servants, high grade women in the civil service are a very unusual lot. 61% of them are not married, that's really high. And also a very high proportion don't have children. That is compared to 12% of high grade men, most of the high grade men are married, most of the high grade women are not married. And that is very different compared to the reflection of general British society.

We know that the data from the 1990s may not reflect the current legal provisions on flexible work arrangements. So basically if these high grade women could have benefited from greater levels of flexible working arrangements, well, it's possible that it wouldn't really have affected them because maybe their family related problems - given that most of them are not married, most of them don't have children - their sources of family to work interference do not appear to be coming from family related situations.

Now looking at the data more currently we do have many reports of women part-time work that are in the general society, not just the civil service but across all occupations currently people know that part-time work and flexible work tends to result in dead-end jobs with little change of progression. We also know that most jobs outside the civil service are poorer quality with less progression for those in non full-time jobs, non-standard work, if you are in non-standard work it's much harder to progress whereas in the civil service if you are in part-time jobs there is potentially greater ways of progression in the civil service.

And we do have growing numbers of so-called self-employed workers who have both low levels of control at work and at home. Now this is a group that seem to have high levels of flexible working arrangements because they have some choice apparently in terms of the working hours that do or how or when they do their work. But they don't necessarily have high levels of control over those working hours so actually flexible working arrangements may differently impact on this group.

### Percentage of UK employees without flexible work arrangements by gender and social class

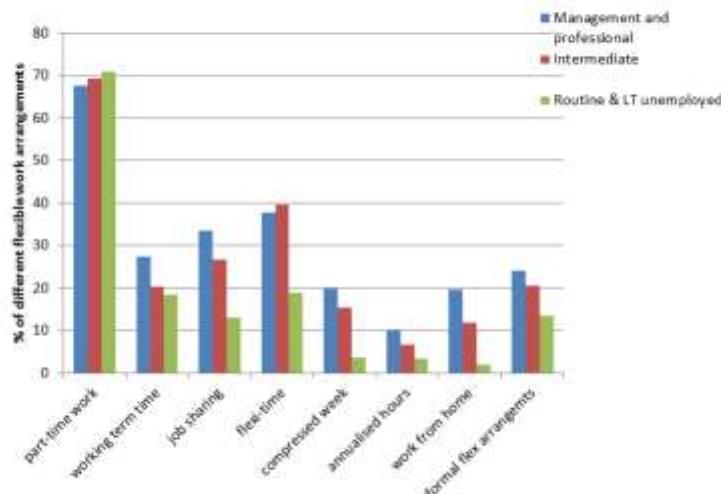


Understanding Society, wave 2 (2010-2011); Women=11,162, Men=6,781

I wanted to update these results. Remember these results come from data in the 1990s. So I am looking at data that comes from Understanding Society which is a longitudinal survey from the 2010 onwards. So this is data that comes from 2010 and 2011 looking at the general British society. This looks across not just civil service but across all occupational groups.

And here we are looking at the present picture of employees without flexible working arrangements by gender and social class. The proportion without - men in blue, women are in red - and I've got three social classes - management professional, intermediate, and routine occupations and long term unemployed. So looking at the blue bars first we see that there is no difference among men in terms of access to flexible working arrangements but quite a high proportion of about 50% don't have access to flexible working arrangements. In the red, we have women and basically we see that decreased over here so that implies women in routine occupations have the greatest access to flexible working arrangements. So that gives us some idea about the gender and social class imbalance in flexible working arrangements. It seems that women in routine occupations and long term unemployed have greatest access to flexible working arrangements

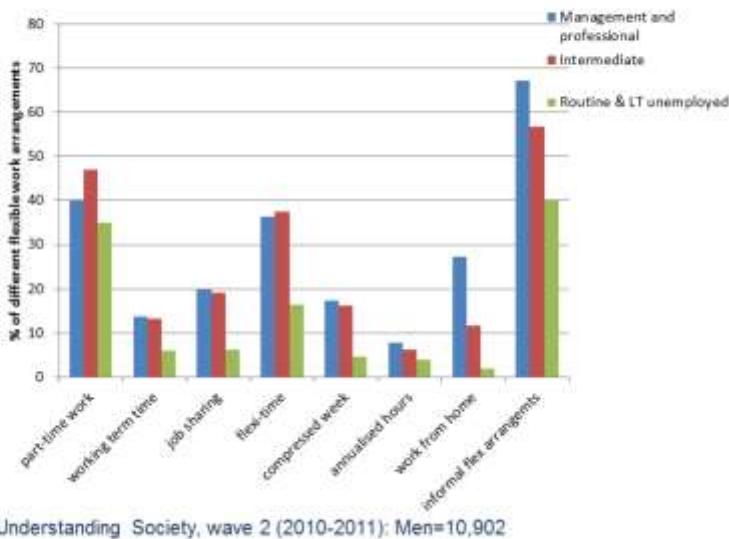
## Percentage of female UK employees with different flexible work arrangements by social class



Understanding Society, wave 2 (2010-2011); Women=13,449

But what about the types of flexible working arrangements so here I've broken the flexible working arrangements into part-time work, term-time, job-sharing, flexitime, compressed weekly hours, analysed hours, working from home or more informal arrangements. And we've got the three colour scheme. Blue is management professional, red is intermediate and green is routine/long term unemployed. And here the difference is really stark. Part-time work- basically if you are in the lowest occupational position, denoted by the green bar- there is an increase in the proportion of women who are working part-time as you go from the highest to the lowest social class. See that increase and it's around 70% of women with flexible working arrangements are engaged in part-time work. In terms of all the rest of the other flexible working arrangements, the proportions are much lower but more importantly they tend to go the other way. So the more formal ways of getting flexible working arrangements in terms of either working from home, analysed hours, working a compressed week, working flexitime, it's always the women in the lower social class that are reporting lower levels of access to these flexible working arrangements.

## Percentage of male UK employees with different flexible work arrangements by social class



Understanding Society, wave 2 (2010-2011); Men=10,902

For men the biggest group is not those men who are doing part-time work but actually men with informal flexible working arrangements. And it's very clear that the people who can get away with informal flexible working arrangements are the men in the highest social class, the management professional groups. I mean, that is not to say women aren't getting away with it, but just they are getting away with it a bit less. And as well as all the other conditions flexible working arrangements, it's always the routine and long term unemployed lowest occupational class has least access to these kinds of flexible working arrangements.

## Policy message

### Flexible work arrangements:

- Largely benefit men and women in advantaged employment classes
- Unlikely to reduce social inequalities in health and well-being

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So I just want to end with this policy message: Flexible working arrangements are a great thing. People thought wow, this will really help people with disadvantaged occupations to balance their work and family life. But as we can see it's largely benefitting men and women in advantaged social classes. So it's like the icing on the cake, they are already getting a great salary and they are benefitting from the flexible working arrangements so it's unlikely to reduce social inequalities in health and wellbeing which we know is very large.

## Acknowledgements

Lead author:

Helena Falkenberg, Stockholm University

Co-authors:

Petra Lindfors, Stockholm University

Tarani Chandola, University of Manchester

Jenny Head, University College London

Whitehall II participants and research team

I'd just like to end by acknowledging my co-authors, the lead author on the Whitehall II paper is Helena Falkenberg at Stockholm University and we wrote that with Petra Lindfors and Jenny Head and also the Whitehall II participants and research team.

Thank you.



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#### Notes:

ICLS hosted a policy seminar on Work, Family and Health at UCL in December 2015. The seminar was chaired by Richard Bartholomew, (former), Chief Research Officer, Children, Young People and Families Directorate, Department for Education and the presentations coordinated by Dr Anne McMunn, ICLS Co-investigator and UCL Graduate Tutor. Transcripts from this event, including this paper, have been made available via the ICLS Occasional Paper Series. This series allows for those who were not able to attend to read an account of the presentation. Other papers in the series include:

OP18.2 Gender attitude concordance and relationship satisfaction. Lauren Bird, UCL

OP18.3 Balancing work and family over the life course and women's health in later life. Juliet Stone CPC, University of Southampton

OP18.4 Work-family life courses and stress and inflammation in mid-life. Rebecca Lacey, UCL

**Speaker: Tarani Chandola** is a Professor of Medical Sociology, University of Manchester and is the lead researcher in the ICLS Theme: Social influences on successful ageing.