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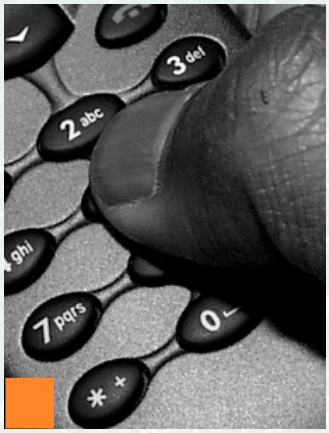
The Welfare Society in the 21st Century

Gunn Elisabeth
Birkelund



WORKING TIME

Part-time work in a welfare state

Fafo

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The Welfare Society in the 21st Century 38 • Fafo-report 308

ISBN 82-7422-279-2

Cover illustration: Jon S. Lahlum
Cover design: Kåre Haugerud
Printed in Norway by Centraltrykkeriet AS

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Preface

This report is one of the products from a project entitled *The Welfare Society in the 21st Century*. Funded by the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) and the Norwegian Labour Party in commemoration of LO's 100th anniversary in 1999. The project spans a broad range of issues, including economics and working life, everyday life and civil society, social services, social security and welfare state distributions. A number of publications show how Norwegian society has developed in recent decades, and discuss challenges and opportunities on the threshold of a new millennium.

The project is based on contributions from scholars in Norway and abroad. Some reports are based on papers delivered at seminars while others are the result of more comprehensive studies. A list of all publications resulting from the project – a total of 44 reports and the main book *Between freedom and community* (in Norwegian only) is annexed.

The project has been directed by a project group headed by Ove Langeland and otherwise composed of Torkel Bjørnskau, Hilde Lorentzen, Axel West Pedersen, and Jardar E. Flaa and subsequently Reid J. Stene. The group received useful and constructive comments from several colleagues at Fafo and from other sources. Jon S. Lahlum has ensured that the reports are published in professional form. The project group would like to express its gratitude to the sponsors for making the project possible.

Oslo, April 1999
Ove Langeland

Gunn Elisabeth Birkelund is a researcher at Institute for Social Research, Oslo. Her main areas of interest are social inequality, gender, social class, and labor market studies. Publications in English include: Women's Part-Time Work: A Cross-National Comparison. In European Sociological Review, (with Rachel A. Rosenfeld 1995); and The Latent Structure of Job Characteristics of Men and Women. In American Journal of Sociology (with Leo A. Goodman and David Rose 1996).

A previous version of this paper was presented at a panel session on «International Constructions of Part-time Work: A comparison of Practices in Europe, Canada and the United States» American Sociological Association, Toronto, Canada August 9–13, 1997.

Abstract

Post-industrial societies have generated high levels of demand for as well as supply of reduced work hours in modern labor markets. In Scandinavia, nearly half of all employed women work part-time, often within the public sector. Compared with other countries, the Scandinavian welfare states may be seen as a female friendly employment regime, offering secure part-time jobs with proportionate wages and benefits. The empirical findings are ambiguous, however. Part-time jobs may also involve work and career penalties, and recently there has been an outflow from part-time to full-time work. This paper will explore the gender profile of part-time work and the distribution of part-time work over various age groups and various sectors of the labor market. The paper will also address the relationship between authority and work hours, as well as preferences for work hour reforms in Norway. In order to describe the changes and continuities of part-time work over time, the analysis will encompass six national surveys conducted between 1973 and 1995.

1 Introduction

Work hour patterns have changed over time, and the debate on work hour arrangements has been an important topic of discussion on the political agenda since the turn of the century, when workers and employers formed their first organizations in industry (Strømsheim 1988).

Historically, the length of the work day, the work week, year and even life in work have been themes of negotiation and conflict between labor and capital. Work time reforms have been advocated as ways to achieve welfare gains such as good health, enrichment and leisure and to enhance social and political power. Rules and regulations about the length of a work week are found both in the legislation and in tariff agreements in Norway. A normal work week of 54 hours was introduced in 1915; in 1919 this was reduced to 48 hours per week. In 1959 the work week was reduced to 45 hours, and in 1968 to 42.5 hours. (*Store norske* 1978) In new legislation on workers' protection and work environment, introduced in 1997, a normal work week was set to 40 hours. In 1986, a tariff agreement set the normal work week to 37.5 hours.

The different ways in which work hour reforms have been debated throughout this century reflect deep changes in the social and economic structures of our societies. Post-industrial labor markets with a large service sector have generated increased levels of female employment as well as increased levels of part-time work within the Scandinavian welfare states.

Today, the struggle over time is still a subject of great political interest, and new lines of conflict may be emerging within modern societies related to time issues; different groups in society advocate different types of work hour reforms, for example, reduced weekly working hours (favored by many women) versus earlier retirements arrangements (favored by many men). Although the gender profile of part-time work is fairly clear-cut, whereby women are the predominant majority of part-time workers,[1] there may be good reasons to expect changes over time in the gender composition of part-time work. In post-industrial labor markets, both men and women might be increasingly interested in reduced work time through leaves, part-time work, and other modes in order to combine employment with other obligations, such as family care, over the life course. In addition, the

[1] Earlier research has demonstrated that men who work part-time primarily do so for health reasons (Birkelund 1982.)

growing concern about "mis-employment" (i.e., the overemployment of some, and the underemployment of others) has stimulated an interest in the possibilities of job-sharing, reduced work hours and part-time work (Holst and Schupp 1994).

Previous research also demonstrates that variations in attitudes towards work hour reforms are not merely a gender issue, but a reflection of occupational characteristica: a study of members of the Norwegian Federation of Unions in 1996 found that women in male-dominated occupations are more concerned with retirement reforms (usually associated with men's interests) than reduced work hours per week (Birkelund and Øverås 1997).

During the last thirty years, profound changes have taken place both within the labor markets and the families. Female labor force participation is higher in Scandinavia than in other OECD countries. Yet it has been only thirty years or so since Norway experienced one of the lowest female participation rates within the OECD area. This rapid change in women's – in particular married women's – labor market rates has been called a "female revolution' (Tornes and Skrede 1987).

During the same period, the institution of the family has undergone profound changes too. There has been an increase in single households and single providers, as well as an increase in dual earner families. Thus, the traditional one-income family, based on the idea of a breadwinner-wage to support a whole family, has been replaced by the two-income families of today's societies. Still, whereas most married men work full-time, nearly half of all married women in the Scandinavian labor markets work part-time – of some form or other. It is important to bear this in mind when we focus on new forms of family and work patterns. A part-time worker cannot live on her income alone.

The growth of women's employment in Scandinavia has been possible because of increased demand for female labor in particular related to the expansion of the welfare state. Employment within the public sector (most noticeable within the municipalities) has expanded rapidly after the 1960s and through the end of the 1980s. Today, however, Scandinavian politicians seem to agree that welfare states ought to stabilize their personnel budgets (Norway) or reduce them (Sweden).[2]

The welfare state is an important institution for women in Scandinavia in two ways. It provides some vital conditions for women's labor market participation (such as rules of taxation, child care arrangements, etc.) at the same time the

[2] See Gonas and Spant (1996) for a study of some possible effects of the Swedish recession (1990-95) and cutbacks in public sector on women's labor market possibilities.

public sector offers the most important labor markets for women. The employment regimes associated with various welfare states (as described by Gosta Esping Andersen and Jon Eivind Kolberg, 1992) have provided women with different job opportunities and obstacles, resulting in cross-national variation in female employment patterns.

This paper will describe various work time arrangements in Norway, with a special focus on the gender profile of part-time work and the relation between full-time and part-time work over time. Today, women's employment patterns are fairly homogeneous across Scandinavia, yet we ought to bear in mind that this is in part the outcome of different historical processes (Ellingsæter 1992). The increase in women's employment started earlier in Sweden than in Norway; and the availability of public day care institutions in Sweden and Denmark has always been better than in Norway (Norwegian women found private solutions, such as "day-mothers" for their children) (Leira 1992).

2 Theoretical background: Is part-time work "good" or "bad"?

Part-time work is a cross-national trend of growing significance, and it may be constructed in negative, exploitative modes or positively as a form of pluralistic, equitable work and career arrangements (Raabe 1997). In the United States, for example, much part-time work is associated with work and career penalties such as subordinate work and, inadequate benefits (Barker 1995).

Part-time work is often associated with low wages, lack of career opportunities and job security, and a high proportion of low-skilled workers with a low work commitment (Barron and Norris 1976). As argued by Fagan and Rubery (1996:227), sociologists have contributed to the notion that part-time work and part-time workers can be regarded as a potentially coherent or homogeneous labor market segment; i.e., part-time work is often described as "secondary work", and part-time workers as "a new subclass of workers" (Zalusky 1986, referred in Tilly 1992). Recently we have seen this perspective on part-time work in publications of Cathrine Hakim (1991), who argues that women in the labor market in Western Europe are either "grateful slaves" or "self-made women", depending on their work commitments: "Grateful slaves" work part-time in female dominated occupations with a low and non-financial work commitment and a more traditional

"marriage career"; whereas "self-made women" have a high work commitment and pursue a full-time, continuous life cycle work pattern similar to that of men.

However, recent research has questioned the notion of part-time work as homogeneous disadvantaged work. This description may be questioned within a particular country or labor market, and it may be even less accurate for cross national research. Part-time work can also be in "good" formulations, for example when voluntary, with proportionate wages and benefits, and with the inclusion in viable career paths (Tilly 1992; McRae 1995). Part-time work may be a form of the growing trend of contingent work – or it may be integrated within workplace or public policy definitions of standard work (Rosenfeld, Kalleberg and Hodson 1997). Compared with the United States, many European countries supply part-time jobs as standard work, involving reduced working hours, yet employment protection and proportionate wages and benefits. Thus there are cross-national variations in the construction of part-time work with regard to its incorporation within standard "core" employment, career progression opportunities, equitable remuneration, benefit coverage and other forms of social protection (BEST 1995; Barker 1995; McRae 1995). Fagan and Rubery (1996) summarize previous research on European labor markets:

Part-time work is specific to each member state/nation (although some nations may clearly share characteristics). Choices to work part-time, full-time, or not to participate are embedded in the whole set of social and economic institutions, including the availability and form of employment, the system of household organization and social reproduction, and social and cultural attitudes and norms (Fagan and Rubery 1996:229).

In a study comparing part-time employment in Europe and Japan, Houseman argues that "government policies toward part-time employment may significantly affect employees' decisions to work part-time and employers' decisions to hire part-time labor" (Houseman 1995:249).

Thus, there are national differences in the extent to which motherhood is associated with full-time work, part-time work or with withdrawal from the labor market. There are also differences in the extent to which jobs are offered as part-time jobs, both between countries and within similar sectors and professional groups. And there are differences in the terms and conditions offered to part-time workers, including hours of work (short versus long part-time), access to benefits, and degree of job security (Fagan and Rubery 1996).

In a study for the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Wedderburn summarizes the controversies around part-time work, arguing that part-time work is either seen "as the road to hope or the road to ruin" (Wedderburn 1995:65). Either one emphasizes the possibilities of a reorganization of the working life, with more time to leisure and family; or one emphasizes the disadvantages of part-time work.

More research is needed to understand why and how part-time work is established, yet it does seem fruitful to consider labor markets as products of an interplay of economic, social and political factors (Ellingsæter 1992:6). As Beechey and Perkins have argued (1987), the more critical explanatory factors are likely to be state policies (such as child care provision, state benefits and employment legislation), trade union practices, ideological assumptions, cultural norms and changing industrial structure.

Thus, state policies and family relations may shape women's decisions to work part-time, full-time or not at all; and state policies and industrial relations systems (such as the Scandinavian system of central bargaining) may contribute to secure arrangements that avoid marginalization of part-time jobs. Sociologists (and others) conducting empirical cross-national research ought to be aware of this heterogeneity in order to understand the different meaning of part-time work in various contexts.

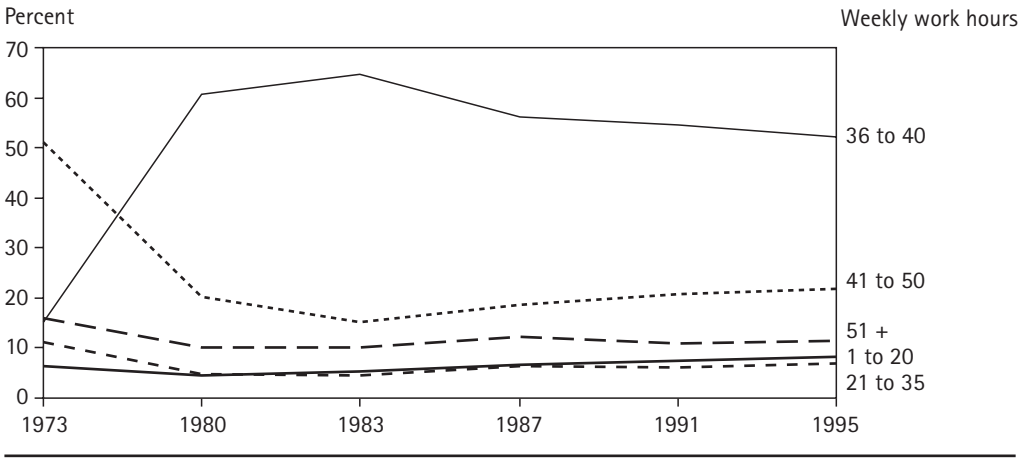
3 The integration of part-time work

Overall, Scandinavian women's employment rates are higher than in most other countries. From a rather modest start after WWII, women, and in particular married women, have entered the labor market, starting in the 1960s, continuing through the 1970s, and stabilizing at a rather high level in the 1980s and 1990s. There is no reason to expect any reversal in women's employment patterns, women have entered the labor markets and, as we say "we are here to stay". The increasing integration of women into the labor markets of Western societies has often coincided with the growth of part-time work. Yet earlier as well as recent research have argued that part-time work is not the only way to mobilize women, as can be seen in southern Europe, where women's employment rates have increased rapidly, mainly in full-time jobs. In a cross national study of nine countries, no

clear pattern was found relating women's employment rates and the ratio of part-time work (Rosenfeld and Birkelund 1995).

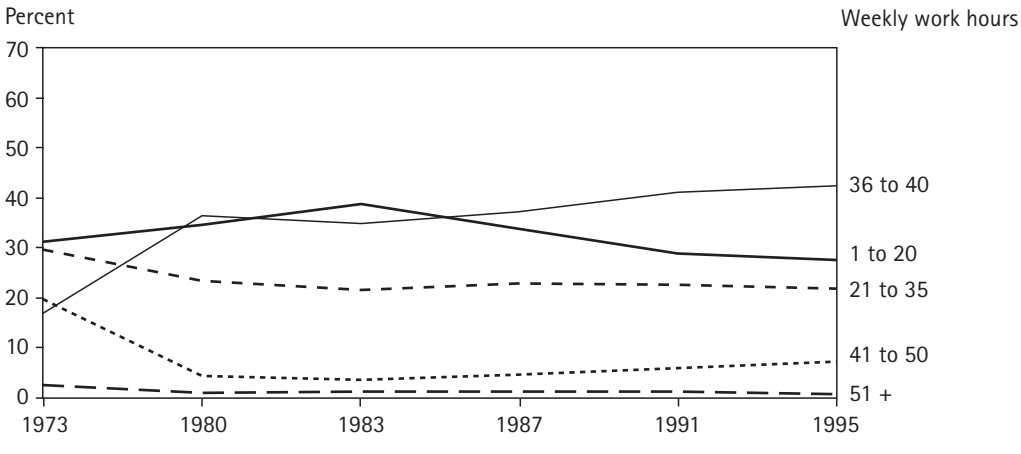
In order to describe changes in the distribution of full-time and part-time work over time, let us take a closer look at six national surveys conducted by Statistics Norway, called "Surveys on Living Conditions'. These studies were conducted in 1973, 1980, 1983, 1987, 1991 and 1995, and the questionnaires in part cover the

Figure 1 Percentage of Norwegian male working population in various work time categories. Selected years, 1973–1995



Data: 'Surveys on Living Conditions' 1973, 1980, 1983, 1987, 1991, 1995.

Figure 2 Percentage of Norwegian female working population in various work time categories. Selected years, 1973–1995

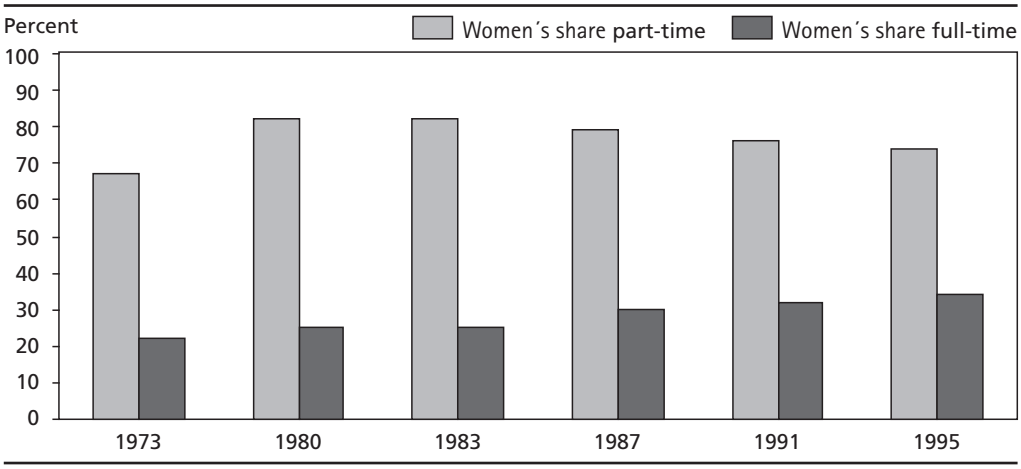


Data: 'Surveys on Living Conditions' 1973, 1980, 1983, 1987, 1991, 1995.

same questions. Each of the surveys questioned a representative sample of the Norwegian population aged 17-74 at the time – i.e., the data shown represent different samples and are not panel data.

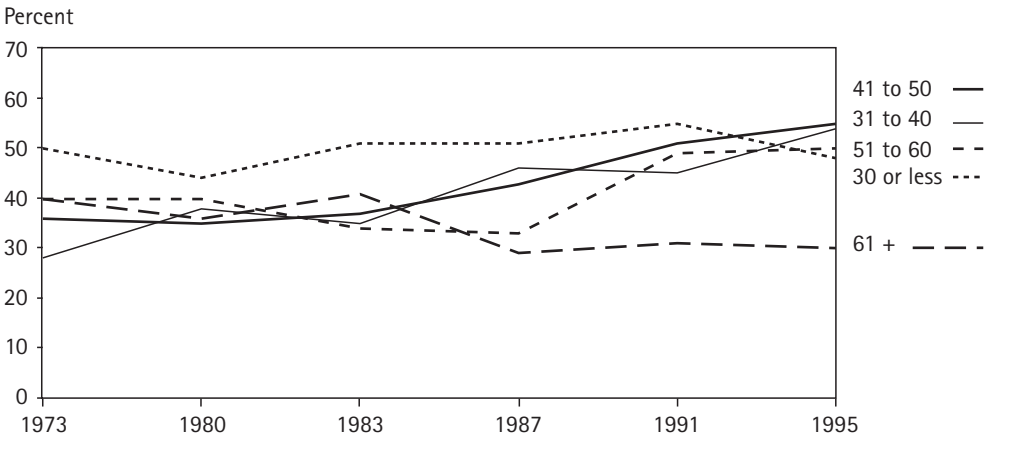
We will start by focusing on the gender profile of work hour arrangements. Have the employment patterns of men and women changed over time? As can be seen in Figure 1, since 1983 there has been a small increase of men working 41 to

Figure 3 Women's share of full-time and part-time work force in Norway. Selected years, 1973-1995. Percent



Data: "Surveys on Living Conditions" 1973, 1980, 1983, 1987, 1991, 1995.

Figure 4 Percentage of Norwegian women working full-time, by age groups. Selected years, 1973-1995.



Data: "Surveys on Living Conditions" 1973, 1980, 1983, 1987, 1991, 1995.

50 hours per week, and a slightly sharper decline of men working 36 to 40 hours weekly.[3]

Figure 2 shows a growth in full-time employment among Norwegian women since 1983. For the rest of the analysis in this paper, I will define full-time work as

Figure 5 Percentage of men in Norway working full-time and part-time. Selected years, 1973-1995

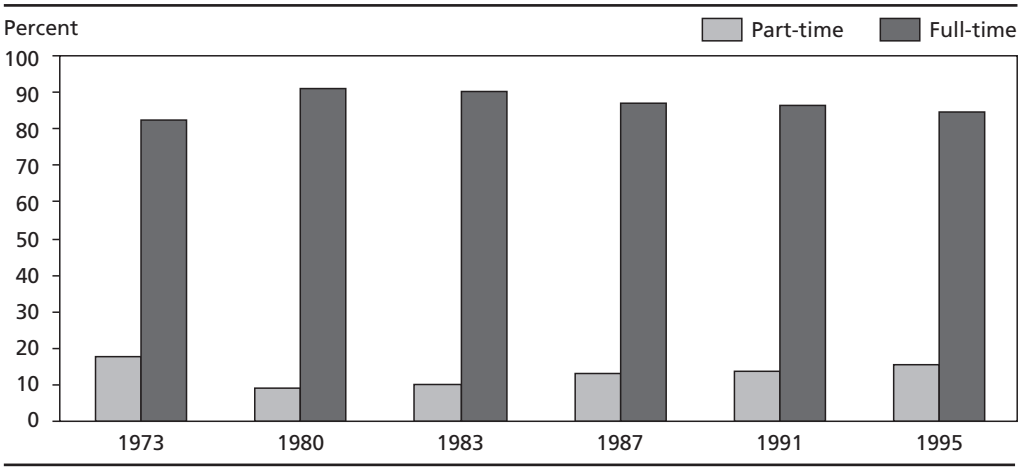
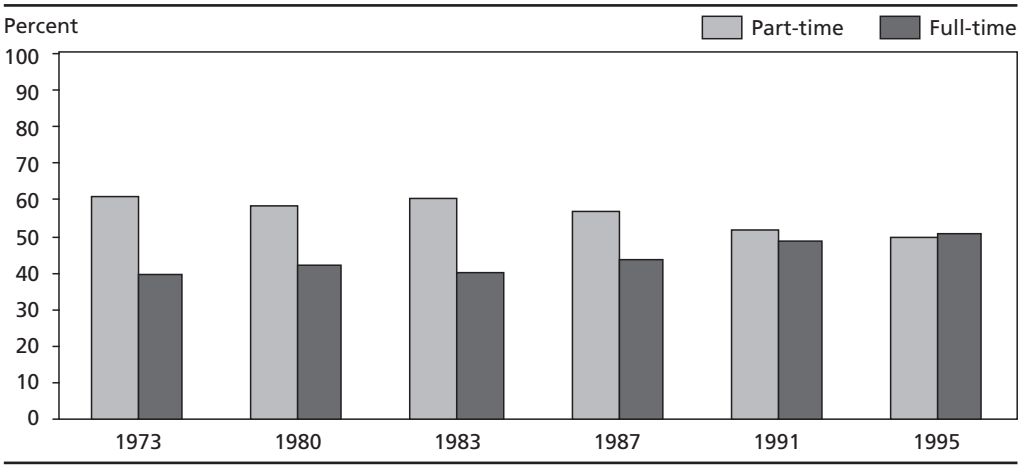


Figure 6 Percentage of women in Norway working full-time and part-time. Selected years, 1973-1995



Data: "Surveys on Living Conditions" 1973, 1980, 1983, 1987, 1991, 1995.

[3] The changing pattern of full-time workers between 1973 and 1980 reflects the new legislation on workers' protection and work environment, introduced in 1977, which set a normal work week to 40 hours.

more than 35 hours per week. This implies that women's share of full-time workers has increased slightly, as can be seen in Figure 3.

This shift from part-time work to full-time work is particularly pronounced among women between 30 and 60 years of age; i.e., the majority of women in the labor force. The full-time/part-time ratio among younger women and among women in their sixties fluctuates over time, with a slightly smaller ratio of part-time workers among women over 60 years of age (see Figure 4).

Sundstrøm (1993) documents fairly similar growth in women's full-time employment in Sweden, and relates this to expanded public child care facilities, and a tax reform carried out in 1983 favoring full-time work over part-time work (which Norway has not had). She also found that the prolonging of the parental leave period has significantly contributed to the growth in full-time work (Sundstrøm 1993:139), since it makes it possible for parents of young children to temporarily reduce their work time without having to give up their full-time jobs. Her analysis of panel data also reveals, that since the beginning of the 1980s (1983), more women have increased their hours from part-time to full-time than have reduced them and that non-employed women have become more inclined to enter full-time rather than part-time work (Sundstrøm 1993:139).

Women's shift from part-time to full-time work suggests a new trend in Scandinavia, yet we do not know if this development will continue. Even after this shift, nearly 40 percent (Sweden) and approximately 50 percent (Norway) of all women in the labor market work part-time. Figure 5 and 6 shows the overall pattern of work hours of gainfully employed men and women in Norway in the period 1973-1995.

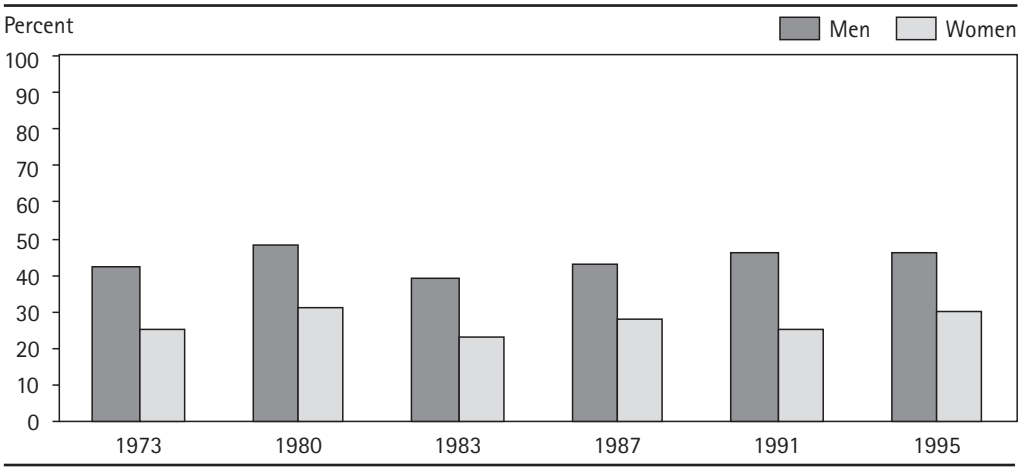
4 Authority and work hours

The surveys on living conditions also include questions about working conditions and the respondents' level of responsibility or authority at work. Starting in 1980, the respondents were asked to report whether they had a position of authority (*en overordnet stilling*) – i.e., the same question was asked in each survey. The 1973 survey asked whether their work entailed managing (*å lede*) other people's work. Overall, and consistently throughout all these surveys, women report having less authority than men, and part-time workers less than full-time workers. Figure 7

shows the percent of full-time working men and women reporting on-the-job authority.

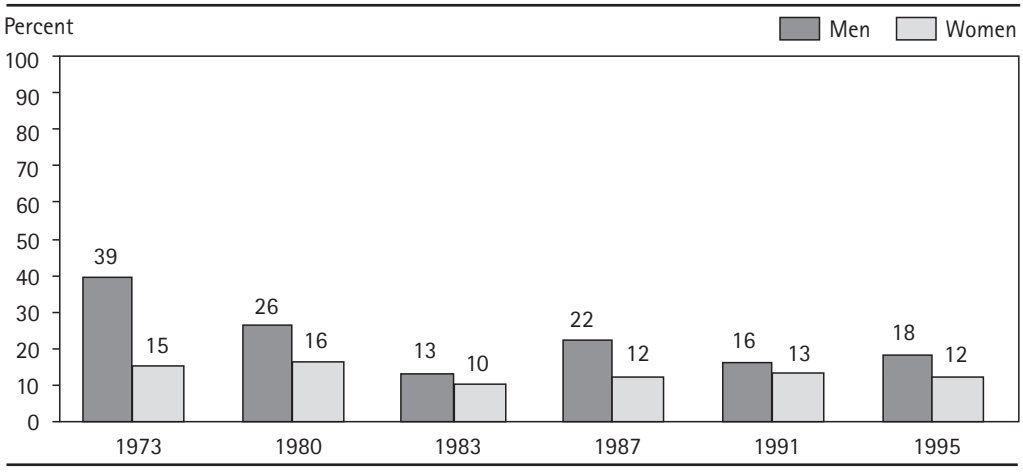
Perhaps surprisingly, the gender gap in authority among men and women working full-time has remained very stable since 1973 (approximately 17 percent more men than women are in positions of authority). Part-time work does seem to be disadvantageous in terms of authority (see Figures 8 and 9), and the difference

Figure 7 Percentage of men and women working full-time who report having high-level responsibility or authority at their workplace Selected years, 1973-1995



Data: "Surveys on Living Conditions" 1973, 1980, 1983, 1987, 1991, 1995.

Figure 8. Percentage of men and women working part-time who report having high-level responsibility or authority at their workplace. selected years, 1973-1995



Data: "Surveys on Living Conditions" 1973, 1980, 1983, 1987, 1991, 1995.

is larger for men than for women. In 1973, 42 /39 percent of full-time /part-time working men were involved in managing other people's work. Starting in 1980, the gap in authority between men working full-time and part-time (reflected in responses to the new question) has fluctuated between 22 percent (1980), 26 percent (1983), 21 percent (1987), 30 percent (1991) and 28 percent (1995). For women, these figures have been 15 percent, 13 percent, 16 percent, 12 percent and 18 percent, respectively. Thus, for each survey year, men in part-time jobs are more likely than women in part-time jobs to occupy a position of authority. However, the gender gap in authority is less pronounced among part-time workers. (From 10 to 16 percent of female part-time workers and from 13 to 39 percent of male part-time workers are in responsible positions.) These results confirm earlier studies of authority; part-time workers are less likely than full-time workers to be considered for these kinds of jobs (see, for example, Wright, Baxter, Birkelund 1995; Rosenfeld, Kalleberg and Hodson 1997). We can see that this lack of opportunity to gain on-the-job authority affects both men and women working part-time.

5 Other aspects of part-time work

If part-time work is an adaptation to child caring, one would expect women with many children and women with young children to work part-time more often than other women. Our data do indicate that women with 2 or more children tend to work part-time more often, yet this tendency is – with the exception of the 1983 survey – not strong enough to be statistically significant. Thus, the expected relationship between motherhood and work time is not found.[4]

Some part-time workers may be under-employed, i.e., they would work longer hours if they had a chance, whereas others may be over-employed, i.e., they prefer shorter working hours. Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents' desires in terms of longer versus shorter working hours, by work time and gender. (This question was only included in the 1987, 1991 and 1995 surveys.)

Overall, the majority of part-time workers as well as full-time workers seem content with their work hours. Yet approximately one fourth of all women and 11-19 percent of all men working full-time would preferred shorter work hours, in all three surveys. We also notice that there has been a slight increase in the percent of

[4] In 1983 the chi-square value is 6.0 on 2 d.f.

female part-time workers who want longer work hours, from approximately 9 percent in 1987 to almost 16 percent in 1995, whereas relatively more men than women who work part-time want longer work hours. Thus under-employment seems to be slightly more pronounced among male part-time workers.

In 1995, 30 percent of the women and 20 percent of the men working full-time wanted to change their work hours (most of these wanted to work less), whereas approximately 22 percent of both women and men working part-time wanted to change their work hours (most wanting longer work hours). This lack of satisfaction in part-time jobs as well as full-time jobs suggests that employment contracts regarding work time – be it full-time or part-time contracts – are usually not

Table 1 "Would you prefer to change your work time?" Percentage of respondents preferring each of three answers, by work time and gender. Norway, 1987, 1991 and 1995

	Men		Women	
	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time
1987				
Present amount is o.k.	79.1	84.4	85.7	71.1
Want shorter work hours	8.2	11.4	5.5	27.9
Want longer workhours	12.7	4.2	8.8	1.0
Total N	134	1027	602	498
Chi-square (d.f.2)	18.1		126.5	
Phi	0.12		0.34	
1991				
Present amount is o.k.	74.2	82.2	83.1	76.5
Want shorter work hours	4.0	14.0	4.5	21.6
Want longer work hours	21.8	3.8	12.4	1.9
Total N	124	967	490	481
Chi-square (d.f. 2)	69.7		93.9	
Phi	0.25		0.31	
1995				
Present amount is o.k.	79.3	78.6	77.6	70.2
Want shorter work hours	3.6	18.8	6.5	28.6
Want longer work hours	17.2	2.6	15.9	1.2
Total N	169	925	491	521
Chi-square (d.f. 2)	82.8		136.9	
Phi	0.28		0.37	

negotiable, at least not on short-term notice. The debate in Norway over greater flexibility in the labor market often refers to part-time jobs as an indication of increased flexibility; yet it seems to be the case that part-time jobs that are embedded in institutional arrangements are no more flexible than full-time jobs.

Labor force surveys show the distribution of full-time versus part-time workers across various sectors of the labor market, and they tell us that women work part-time within all sectors of the labor market. Part-time work is especially high within the primary sector (agriculture, fishing, forestry) and within social work and welfare. Within these sectors, we also find the highest ratio of part-time workers among men.

Although the Scandinavian national unions were originally negative towards part-time work, it seems fair to say that they have gradually included part-time work in their negotiating strategies with the employers' associations. Thus, whereas part-time work in other countries may be regarded by full-time workers as a threat to their job security and wages (since part-time work often is contingent and lower paid, with less job security, etc.[5]), Scandinavian unions have adopted a strategy of inclusion of part-time work in order to normalize it. This has been effective, if not completely successful: today, nearly 45 percent of the women working part-time are unionized, compared to approximately 24 percent in 1973.[6]

Thus, today, most part-time jobs in Scandinavia cannot be regarded as marginalized jobs, and part-time workers are protected legally in the same manner as full-time workers (Bjurstrøm 1993).

Bjurstrøm (1993) studied the legal position and rights of part-time workers in Norway, Denmark, England and Germany. She argues that Scandinavian employment legislation does not regulate a number of central labor market issues, but leaves these issues to central bargaining between the main partners within the labor market, i.e., the unions' and the employers' associations. These so-called col-

[5] This argument of course disregards the fact that part-time work is usually even more segregated by sex than is full-time work in most Western labor markets; thus part-time workers (mostly female) will rarely be a threat to full-time workers' working conditions and wages, because they usually have different qualifications and experiences.

[6] According to the Surveys on Living Conditions, in 1973 43 percent of male part-time workers and 60 percent of male full-time workers were unionized, compared to 24 percent of female part-time workers and 45 percent of female full-time workers. Over the years, the gender gap in unionization has narrowed, so that in 1995, 40 percent of male part-time workers, 54 percent of male full-time workers, 44 percent of female part-time workers and 60 percent of female full-time workers were unionized.

lective agreements are then protected by law, and the law also specifies rules for enforcement and consequences of neglect of these agreements (Bjurstrøm 1988:23). Thus, compared with other countries, one may perhaps describe the corporate system of Scandinavia as "less law, more trust", based on general agreements by organized capital and labor.

However, some public benefits, such as sick leave, unemployment benefits and retirement pensions, are based on previous wages and length of employment, thus favoring full-time workers. State pensions, for example, consist of a basic pension paid to all after the age of 67, and a supplementary payment that varies with income and years of employment, thus favoring full-time workers and employees with a lifelong work history. Thus, although most part-time jobs are standardized in Scandinavia in such a way that it is normal – and not atypical – to work part-time (in particular for women), part-time workers do lose out in terms of lower wages and lower benefits.

The protection of part-time work is not entirely the accomplishment of the union's associations, though. Perhaps more important is the rise of women's political power associated with the so-called second feminist wave. In the 1970s and 1980s, more emphasis was put on changing work hours as a way of improving living conditions for children and their families and fostering equality between men and women (Strømsheim 1988:3). Women's organizations argued strongly for integrating the demands of parenting and the organization of people's daily lives into debates on work reforms.

The debate about a "6-hour working day for all" must be understood in this perspective. The organizations and parties advocating this work reform as a long-range political goal (many women's organizations within and outside political parties, as well as the Socialist Left Party) argued that shortening the standard work day and week for all would be the best strategy for shaping a work life where both men and women could participate on equal terms, while at the same time being able to care for their families and participate in their local communities. Perhaps to be expected, the idea of a "6-hour working day for all" was not unanimously accepted, rather it seems fair to say that today this case has been lost.

Instead, various time-sharing and time-reduction strategies have been allowed for men and women with small children, resulting in, perhaps, the possibility of statistical discrimination – in particular regarding young women's opportunities for employment. We will need more research, however, to evaluate the social and

economic consequences of some of the new time arrangements related to extended maternal and paternal leaves.

Let us briefly address some aspects of the debate on work hour reforms that has taken place within this time span (i.e., since the beginning of the 1970s). The various arguments in favor of different work time reforms, such as general reduction of the retirement age versus general reduction of the working day, are usually advocated by different groups – yet the pattern might not always be as expected (see below).

6 Work hour reforms in a welfare society[7]

In 1985, Statistics Norway carried out a national survey on behalf of the Norwegian Work Hour Committee, focusing on attitudes to work hour reforms. The survey showed that retirement reforms were favored by 51 percent of Norwegians, whereas 30 percent favored more family oriented reforms (such as shorter work week and extended parental leaves).[8] The study also addressed the priorities of reforms in different groups within society. The results showed that:

What really distinguishes groups with different (work hour) preferences are factors like age, gender and whether a person has children or not. Motherhood is more important than fatherhood in shaping political preferences regarding work hour reforms. But changes seem to be underway among men....Young fathers want reforms that make it easier to combine work and family roles far more often than middle aged and old men (Strømsheim 1988:21).

One may, of course, interpret this as a reflection of the various life stages of men, an interpretation that also gains support from the fact that the strongest adherents to retirement reforms are older men, the less educated men and men with no children. Yet the results are not as one might expect. There were no significant

[7] This section of the paper is based on Strømsheim (1988).

[8] Among respondents aged 18-74 years, 31 percent favored a more flexible retirement, 20 percent favored a general lowering of the retirement age (which is 67 years), 19 percent preferred a shortening of the work day or week, 11 percent wanted an extension of leaves in connection with childbirth and child rearing, and 11 percent preferred longer vacations; 8 percent were not able to give an opinion.

differences in attitudes to work hour reforms between people who were inside and people who were outside the labor market (see Table 2).

In fact, the similarities in priorities between those inside and those outside the labor market are more striking than the divergences.

Table 3 focuses on the distribution of preferences for work hour reforms by work time (part-time vs. full-time). One might perhaps expect part-time workers to differ from full-time workers in their attitudes to work hours reforms. People who work part-time have schedules allowing them to combine work in the labor market with other activities and perhaps resulting in – or an indicator of – different priorities regarding work hour reforms. Full-time workers, on the other hand, may

Table 2 First preferences for work hour reforms among labor force participants and others. Percent. Norway, 1985

Type of reform	In the labor market	Outside the labor market
Shorter work hours	21	19
Longer parental leaves	12	11
Longer vacation	13	6
Retirement age		
for those who wish so	33	35
for all	21	27
No answer	0	1
Percent	100	100
Total N	2568	777

Table 3 First preferences for work hour reforms among part-time and full-time employees. Percent. Norway, 1985

Type of reform	Part-time	Full-time
Shorter work hours	21	20
Longer parental leaves	16	10
Longer vacation	10	15
Retirement age		
for those who wish so	31	34
for all	22	21
Percent	100	100
Total N	421	1719

be more exposed to the strains of work life, and they might thus hold other views on work hour reforms.

Yet, perhaps surprisingly, we see that there are only minor differences of preference between full-time and part-time employees. There is, however, a slight difference between the two groups regarding the priorities of parental leaves and longer vacation. Analyses not shown here reveal that women, regardless of their work time arrangements, favor maternal leaves more than men do (18 percent of all women give this reform first priority). Since most part-time workers are women, this explains the difference between part-timers and full-timers in this respect. When it comes to the question of longer vacations, though, there are no gender differences.

Since this study was done, the parental leaves have been extended. Today, in both Sweden and Norway,[9] parental leaves are now a full year off work (with wage compensation up to a certain income level), or a reduced year off work and then a time share account for up to three years, in which one of the parents work part-time. In this way, mothers and fathers may share their time between work and family obligations. As mentioned above, we still need more research to evaluate the consequences of this reform.

Table 4 First preferences for work hour reforms among daytime vs. shift and night workers. Percent. Norway, 1985

	Daytime (6 a.m.-6 p.m.)	Shift and night work
Shorter work hours	21	20
Longer parental leaves	11	12
Longer vacation	14	11
Retirement age		
for those who wish so	33	35
for all	20	23
Percent	100	100
Total N	1748	493

[9] Denmark has a shorter maternity leave (14 weeks for all mothers). In addition, parents may take up to 10 weeks' parental leave. Denmark provides higher wage compensation (90-100 percent). (Commission of the EC 1990, referred in Ellingsæter 1992).

The 1985 study also revealed, again surprisingly, no noticeable differences between people working ordinary daytime hours and people working at atypical hours (i.e., shift or night work) in their priorities for work hour reforms.

Finally, Table 5 shows the distribution of attitudes by social class.

The study also showed only minor differences in attitudes towards work hour reforms related to social class. However, the data do indicate that white-collar workers in the higher ranks are more in favor of shorter work hours than others, and also that blue-collar workers more than others favor a general reduction in retirement age. These results may perhaps be reflecting both the desire and the opportunity to carry on with paid work late in life. The higher tendency for blue-collar workers to withdraw from the labor market before retirement age (often on disability pensions) likely reflect the physical stress of manual work, as well as a lack of flexibility regarding the organization of work in manual jobs.

However, the most striking result of these and other analyses was the lack of explanatory power of the traditional dimensions that have been considered important for people's attitudes in political questions – social class, occupation, income and education. These variables had little bearing on attitudes towards work hour reforms. Rather, the major finding of this study was that gender, age group and parenthood explained variations in attitudes to work hour reforms (Strømsheim 1988).

Table 5 First preferences for work hour reforms among blue-collar and white-collar workers in full-time employment. Percent. Norway, 1985

	Blue-collar workers		White-collar workers		
	unskilled	skilled	lower	medium	high
Shorter work hours	19	22	24	19	29
Longer parental leaves	6	6	14	11	11
Longer vacation	15	12	16	15	16
Retirement age					
for those who wish so	31	29	27	34	31
for all	25	24	12	16	13
No answer	4	6	7	4	1
Total percent	100	100	100	100	100

7 Summary

The argument advanced here is that part-time work is embedded in social contexts related to a state's policies and industrial relations, and can only partly be explained by reference to individual characteristics of part-time workers or to family obligations. Thus, research ought to take a broader view in order to explain labor market processes.

Part-time work is often associated with marginal work, atypical work or secondary work. Yet in Scandinavia, the welfare states have provided many part-time jobs – in particular within the social services – that cannot be characterized as such. Nevertheless, there are penalties for part-time workers in Scandinavia too: Their hourly wage is often lower, they are less likely to reach positions of authority and they do not receive full retirement benefits. The recent growth in full-time work among Scandinavian women can perhaps also be seen as an indication of underemployment among part-time workers.

Overall, part-time jobs in Scandinavia may be better than part-time jobs in other national contexts. Yet, what can be seen as a social democratic attempt to balance work and family commitments has perhaps turned out to be a difficult project.

The concept of time-sharing, in which a full-time job is temporarily reduced to part-time and thereby prolongs parental leaves, is a family friendly policy. Yet arrangements like these are utilized more by women than men, and it may thus be argued that they help maintain a traditional gender division of labor. They may also cause statistical discrimination against women.

On the other hand, Sundstrøm argues that these arrangements have made it possible for more women to maintain their full-time jobs even after bearing children. Sweden has had time-sharing arrangements since the 1970s, and Norway only recently, yet both countries have seen a growth in full-time employment among women. Clearly, we need more research to understand the various mechanisms that generates these changes in employment patterns.

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The Welfare Society in the 21st Century 38
Fafo-report 308
ISBN 82-7422-279-2