

Research Project

Men's actual and desired duration of working hours in Switzerland, France, Germany and the UK: effects of occupation and female partnership.

Third-party funded project

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Project start 01.04.2012

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Status Completed

Aims

The focus of the research is how men's actual and desired hours of work in Switzerland relate to occupation, and, for partnered men, to their partner's earnings and hours. The secondary focus is a cross-national comparison of Switzerland, France, the United Kingdom and Germany, recognising the further the role of regional variation, e.g. by linguistic region.

Background and Significance

In recent times the length of the working week has attracted renewed attention both as a marker of social inequality and as an instrument for achieving social objectives. In terms of social inequality, long hours have become symbolic of high status jobs and are in themselves a sign of status. Employers have increasingly used long hours as a way of screening workers' commitment and productivity. In contrast workers in low status jobs would often like to work longer hours out of financial necessity, but are unable to do this because of the nature of the jobs they work in. In a policy context, interest has focussed on trying to limit workers' hours for a variety of reasons. For example, in France a reduction in the length of the working week has been used as an instrument for tackling unemployment. Efforts to facilitate dual-earner couples have seen job hours' flexibility and a reduction in hours as a means to achieve this end. Long hours not only heighten work-family conflict but also adversely affect health. Studying the duration of men's working hours not only adds to our understanding of occupational status and men's lives but it is also an endeavour to bring men back into the analysis of how societies, households, and gendered individuals manage paid work and unpaid care. The topic is of critical societal significance as is evidenced by a high proportion of working men reporting that their preferred hours of work are different from their actual hours.

Method

Employing quantitative analysis of the European Social Survey, the Swiss Household Panel and other panel survey, the aim is to assess the impact of two sociological influences. First, the extent to which occupational structure explains variation in male weekly hours of work. Linked to this is men's dissatisfaction with the duration of their weekly working hours by their occupation and education. Dissatisfaction may be illustrated if there is a 'time divide' or 'time squeeze' in which high wage rate workers are dissatisfied with their long hours of work and low wage rate worker are dissatisfied with their short hours of work. Second, a unique angle of the proposed research is to explore men's satisfaction with a female partner's hours of work, which is critical if people experience the time squeeze because of the loss of

someone to undertake the domestic work. Indeed, the rise in the proportion of dual-earner families may lead to increases in work-family conflict, which may exacerbate dissatisfaction in hours.

Keywords hours, duration of working week, hours constraints, occupations, dual-earner couples

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