

# PART-TIME WORK FOR WOMEN: DOES IT REALLY HELP BALANCE WORK AND FAMILY?

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*Results of this study suggest that the differential response of women to part-time work as opposed to a career may be a function of motivational and work-context differences between career and non-career women. Part-time work was associated with lower work-to-family interference, better time management ability, and greater life satisfaction for women in both career and earner-type positions. Role overload, family-to-work interference, and family time management, however, were dependent on job type with beneficial effects for earners but not for career women. Job type also played a role: Career women reported higher life satisfaction and lower depressed mood than did women in earner positions. © 2000 John Wiley & Sons, Inc.*

## Introduction

In Canada, growth in part-time employment over the past 20 years has outpaced growth in the full-time workforce by a ratio of three to one (Statistics Canada, 1997). In 1997, 2.6 million Canadians worked part time, accounting for 19% of total employment (Statistics Canada, 1997). Data from the United States (Tilly, 1996) and the European Union (McRae & Kohler, 1995) suggest that the expansion of part-time work is a phenomenon evident in most Western nations as organizations strive to find new ways of distributing work in the face of globalization, deregulation, and increased competitive pressures.

The continuing proliferation of part-time work has sparked concern about the advantages and disadvantages of this work arrangement for the employees who hold these jobs, the large majority of whom are women (Duffy & Pupo, 1992; Krahn, 1992; McRae & Kohler,

1995). Over the past two decades, women have consistently represented 70% of part-time workers (McRae & Kohler, 1995; Statistics Canada, 1995; Tilly, 1996). Since women retain responsibility for home and child care regardless of their employment status (Higgins, Duxbury, & Lee, 1992; Kahne, 1985; Lero, Brockman, Pence, Goelman, & Johnson, 1993), it has been suggested that part-time work offers the “best of both worlds”, enabling women to pursue career interests while still affording time to spend with their families (Duffy, Mandell, & Pupo, 1989; Kahne, 1992). On the other hand, it has been argued that the low pay, routine tasks, and limited advancement opportunities that characterize so many part-time jobs make it more difficult to balance family demands and threatens to “ghettoize” the women who work these schedules (White, 1983).

Research suggests that both of these views may be accurate. All part-time jobs are not the

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same. Kahne (1985) and Tilly (1992; 1996) argue that the part-time work world offers both good jobs and bad jobs: good jobs are characterized by high levels of skill, compensation, and responsibility; bad jobs are characterized by low pay, training, and status. Canadian labor force data support this contention. Although women part-timers remain concentrated in the service industries with which women traditionally have been associated (85% of women work in service occupations; Statistics Canada, 1995), the service sector is itself diverse, comprised of industries ranging from retail to health care, teaching, government, and financial institutions (Grenon, 1996). Such diversity implies vast differences between part-time job-holders in terms of work environment, education, skill level, and remuneration.

There are two reasons why these job-related differences may differentially affect women's ability to balance work and family. First, research suggests that work plays a more central role in the lives of career employees than it does among those in non-career tracks. Employees working in career (professional and managerial) occupations have been found to be more highly involved in their work and more satisfied with their jobs than are employees in earner occupations (i.e., technical, clerical, administrative, retail, or production work; Barker, 1993; Duxbury & Higgins, 1994; Higgins et al., 1992). These data suggest that career women (good jobs) may turn to part-time work as a source of personal and professional fulfillment when family demands preclude a full-time work commitment. On the other hand, women in part-time earner positions (bad jobs) may be seeking quite different rewards through their employment, such as increased income (Higgins et al., 1992) or social stimulation (Levanoni & Sales, 1988).

Second, there is some evidence of job-specific differences in the work demands encountered by career versus earner employees. As compared to earners, career women have been found to have a greater level of responsibility on the job, more supervisory duties, and a higher level of work-related conflict (Higgins et al., 1992; Duxbury & Higgins, 1994). These findings suggest that heavy work demands may make it more difficult for ca-

reer women to leave the job at the office.

The good job/bad job distinction, therefore, implies differences in both the role that part-time work may play in the lives of women, and the level of demands and responsibility that they encounter in the work domain. Job type (i.e., career versus earner) may account for as much variability in the ability to control the work-family interface as does job status (i.e., full- versus part-time). Most literature on part-time employment has not recognized this diversity within the part-time pool (Tilly, 1996). Studies designed expressly to examine relationships between job type and outcomes in women's personal and family lives have been exceedingly rare (for a notable exception, see Barker, 1993).

This study empirically examines whether part-time work helps women balance work and family for two classes of part-time workers: those in career-oriented jobs (managers and professionals) and those in earner positions (technical, clerical, administrative, retail, and production). Comparisons are drawn between the part-timers and those in comparable full-time jobs. The following research question is addressed:

1. What is the effect of job status (full-time versus part-time) and job type (career versus earner) on measures of work-family balance (i.e., overload, interference, time management) and measures of individual outcomes (i.e., perceived stress, depressed mood, life satisfaction)?

The research also investigates differences in motivational factors between the two groups of part-timers. Qualitative interview data are presented to explore the following additional questions:

2. What are the perceived home-related advantages and disadvantages of part-time work? Do mothers in career positions perceive the same home-related advantages and disadvantages as mothers in earner positions?
3. What are the perceived work-related advantages and disadvantages of part-time work? Do mothers in career

positions perceive the same work-related advantages and disadvantages as mothers in earner positions?

### Defining Work-Family Balance

Theoretical literature most often has portrayed work-family balance as a perceptual phenomenon characterized by a sense of having achieved a satisfactory resolution of the multiple demands of work and family domains (Bohen & Viveros-Long, 1981; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964). As an interface construct, the strength and consequences of the perception will be shaped by a variety of contextual factors emanating from both work and family domains, such as the type of work performed or the nature of responsibility in the home (Bowen & Pittman, 1995; Voydanoff, 1995). This characterization of work-family balance implies that, although part-time work by definition reduces time spent in the work role, the psychological experience of “balance” ultimately will be shaped by the level of demands at home and at work and the meanings individuals attach to their participation in the work-family system (Haas, 1995).

Individuals who have difficulty balancing work and family may experience problems in two major areas. First, they may experience time management difficulties and find it hard to work out the logistics of both work and family demands (Bohen and Viveros-Long, 1981). Second, they may perceive high levels of work-family conflict defined by Kahn et al. (1964), as a form of interrole conflict in which pressures from the work and family domains are in some respects mutually incompatible. Kahn et al. (1964) identify two components of work-family conflict: role overload and interference. Overload exists when the total demands on time and energy associated with the prescribed activities of multiple roles are too great to perform the roles comfortably. Interference occurs when conflicting demands make it difficult to fulfill the requirements of multiple roles, often because work and family activities must be performed during the same periods in different physical locations (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Recently, Gutek, Searle, & Kelpa (1991) expanded the

concept of role interference to include two directional components: family interference with work (e.g., a child’s illness preventing attendance at work), and work interference with family (e.g., long work hours hindering the performance of duties at home).

In this research, we focus on the psychological experience of work-family balance by operationalizing it as: (1) the perceived ability to manage individual and family time and (2) perceived work-family conflict. Consistent with the work by Kahn et al. (1964) and Gutek et al. (1991), we further define work-family conflict as having three aspects: role overload, interference from work to family, and interference from family to work.

### Literature Review

In comparison to the rather large body of part-time literature that has explored work attitudes with “bottom line” implications, such as turnover and absenteeism (Ronen, 1984; Still, 1983; Werbel, 1985); job satisfaction (Barker, 1993; Lee & Johnson, 1991; Wetzel, Soloshy, & Gallagher, 1990); and organizational commitment (Lee & Johnson, 1991; McGinnis & Morrow, 1990; Wetzel et al., 1990), empirical research on the relationships between part-time work and women’s personal and family life has been rare. The following review focuses on literature in two broad areas with relevance to the (non-work) constructs of interest in this study: outcomes at the interface of work and family such as interrole conflict, interference, and time management; and personal outcomes in psychological health.

#### *Work-Family Balance*

Few studies have directly employed a measure of work-family conflict as a dependent variable. Only one (Lero & Johnson, 1994) identified a significantly lower rate of conflict among women working part time as compared to full-timers. In contrast, Barker (1993) and Hall and Gordon (1973) found that mothers who worked part time reported more role overload than those who worked full time.

Research also indicates that while interrole conflict occurs for both part-time and full-time employees, the direction of the

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interference may differ (Hall & Gordon, 1973; Werbel, 1985). Part-timers may be more likely to experience interference from family to work, and less likely to experience interference from work to family, since the reduction in hours spent in paid employment facilitates the attainment of family goals (Hall & Gordon, 1973) but reduces acceptance into the organizational culture and lowers opportunities to pursue work-related interests (Werbel, 1985).

Research relating part-time work to time management has also yielded mixed results. Fast and Frederick (1996), in an analysis of Canadian General Social Survey data, found that women working part time were only half as likely as those working full time to report high time stress. Hall and Gordon (1973), however, found no significant difference in perceived time conflict between part- and full-time working women.

Although few conclusions can be drawn from such a small number of studies, a more consistent pattern of results is evident when the occupational makeup (job type) of the samples is taken into account. For example, Hall and Gordon found that part-time work increased overload, whereas Lero and Johnson and Fast and Frederick reported that part-time work reduced conflict. Hall and Gordon's study, however, sampled female university graduates (i.e., career women). The latter two studies relied on national labour force survey data, which captured the experiences of both career and earner women. Since only 25% of women part-timers in Canada are in career occupations (Logan, 1994), labour force analyses largely reflect the perceptions of non-career women. In other words, in spite of apparently contradictory results, studies that have relied on samples consisting primarily of women in earner positions have consistently found part-time work to enhance work-family balance.

#### *Individual Outcomes*

Literature suggests that variations in a number of mental health outcomes might be expected if part-time work helps women achieve a better balance between work and family. Duxbury, Higgins, Lee, and Mills (1991) and Higgins et al. (1992), for ex-

ample, found that men and women who were satisfied with their work, their family, and the balance between the two, tended to have higher levels of life satisfaction. Barker (1993) found that women who worked part time reported greater happiness at home and greater satisfaction with their children than women who worked full time. Lero and Johnson (1994) reported that mothers who worked part time were twice as likely as their full-time counterparts to claim that they were very satisfied with the balance between their work and family lives. Finally, work by Brown and Bifulco (1990) indicates that part-time employment may be associated with a lower rate of depression among working class women, when contrasted with either full-time employees or full-time homemakers.

#### **Method**

Two different data sources were used in this study. Research question 1 (work-family balance) was addressed using survey data collected by Duxbury et al. (1991) and Higgins et al. (1992) as part of a national study of work and family. This 21-page instrument was divided into nine sections including demographics, work outcomes, use of technology, child-care arrangements, time management, balancing work and family, work arrangements, family outcomes, and stress and coping. Research questions 2 and 3 were examined through interview data collected specifically to explore the advantages and disadvantages of part-time work.

#### *Survey Study*

*Sample:* The survey data presented in this article come from a national study of the issues associated with balancing work and family in Canada (Duxbury et al., 1991; Higgins et al., 1992). Questionnaires were returned by 22,836 respondents (a response rate of 56%). Respondents were from two sources: a random sample of all Canadian federal public sector employees working in the National Capital Region ( $n = 6,287$ ) and a cross-section of private sector employees from large, geographically diverse organizations ( $n = 16,549$ ).

Part-time workers were identified by examining the response to two questions: (1) Is your job considered to be (a) Full time, or (b) Part time?, and (2) Approximately how many hours a week do you work on your job? Part-time workers were identified as those who indicated part-time employment and worked less than 30 hours per week. To minimize the effects of other confounds, the sample was further restricted to women who had child-care responsibilities.

The employment status of the respondent was then used to categorize the sample according to job type. Career employees were defined as those in managerial or professional positions. Earner employees were those in clerical, administrative, retail, or production jobs. The final study sample consisted of 712 mothers in part-time earner positions and 117 mothers in part-time career positions. Given the size of the original database, the extremely small number of part-time career women available for inclusion in the sample was noteworthy. This finding validates claims that managerial and professional work is seldom available on a part-time basis (Callaghan & Hartmann, 1992; Barker, 1993; Rotchford & Roberts, 1982).

For comparison purposes, a sample of full-time women employees with child-care responsibilities was obtained from the database. The comparison sample consisted of 4,371 mothers who worked full time in earner positions and 1,521 mothers who worked full time in career positions.

Table I presents demographic characteristics of the survey respondents. Other than the expected differences in education and income associated with job type, the four study groups were similar in most respects.

*Measures:* Measures used in the operationalization of the constructs in the survey study are described in Table II. Cronbach's coefficient alpha (a measure of internal consistency) and examples of the scale items are provided for each measure.

*Data Analysis:* To test for main effects (i.e., career vs. earner; part-time vs. full-time) and interactions in the five work and family outcomes (i.e., role overload, work interferes with family, family interferes with work, individual time management, family time management), a 2 x 2 MANOVA design was used. The first

step in the analysis was a test for interaction effects. If a significant MANOVA was obtained, indicating an interaction effect, univariate Fs with a Bonferroni adjustment (i.e., dividing .05 by the number of dependent variables to control for alpha) were used to determine for which dependent variables the interaction existed. For those variables, no further analysis was undertaken. For the variables without a significant interaction, MANOVA was used to test for main effects. The same procedure was used for the three individual outcomes (i.e., perceived stress, depressed mood, life satisfaction).

### *Interview Study*

*Sample:* Many respondents to our national survey provided their first name and telephone number in response to a question about participation in a follow-up study. From a volunteer list of 258 women in part-time earner positions, and 52 women in part-time career positions, 30 from each group were selected at random. Unfortunately, due to attrition (e.g., leaving the work force, returning to full-time employment) only 15 career part-time employees were interviewed. Obviously, caution should be exercised in generalizing the results from these interviews to part-time workers in general.

The demographics of the interview sample are markedly different from the survey sample (see Table III). The respondents were younger, had younger children, and more children. The part-time career employees from the interview sample worked longer hours than those from the survey sample. These inter-sample differences suggest that interview volunteers were women for whom work-family balance might have been particularly challenging (i.e., those with younger families and longer work hours). This admittedly introduced the potential for bias in the interview sample. Since the goal of the interviews was to explore differences between career and earner employees, however, that may have contributed to their response to part-time work, it was believed that women with heavy work and family demands might provide a rich source of information about potential sources of stress at work and at home.

*Measures:* Interviews were conducted by telephone and took approximately 45 minutes.

**TABLE I** Demographic Characteristics of Survey Sample.

<b>Means and Standard Deviations</b>					
<b>Variables</b>		<b>PT Earner</b>	<b>FT Earner</b>	<b>PT Career</b>	<b>FT Career</b>
Sample Size	N	712	4371	117	1521
Age (Years)	Mean	38.98	39.79	38.70	40.62
	Std. Dev.	8.73	8.78	7.38	7.74
Number of Children	Mean	2.16	2.00	2.09	1.87
	Std. Dev.	1.01	1.20	0.94	0.98
Average Age of Children	Mean	12.31	13.90	10.07	13.55
	Std. Dev.	8.76	8.97	8.17	8.86
Hours/Weeks in Paid Employment	Mean	18.63	38.94	18.43	41.97
	Std. Dev.	7.89	4.00	8.79	6.06
<b>Percent in Category</b>					
<b>Variables</b>		<b>PT Earner</b>	<b>FT Earner</b>	<b>PT Career</b>	<b>FT Career</b>
Education:					
High School		60.8	57.5	15.3	26.5
Community College		31.2	34.9	31.4	35.2
Undergraduate		6.5	6.1	39.0	26.1
Graduate		1.5	1.5	14.4	12.2
Family Income:					
Less than \$20,000		4.7	1.7	3.4	0.1
\$20,000 to \$39,999		25.3	21.6	4.3	8.4
\$40,000 to \$59,999		23.8	9.6	13.8	12.9
\$60,000 to \$79,999		23.2	32.3	12.9	18.3
\$80,000 to \$99,999		15.2	22.5	17.2	17.8
\$100,000 or more		7.9	12.1	48.3	42.4
Annual Salary/Wage:					
Less than \$20,000		59.2	8.9	15.5	1.0
\$20,000 to \$39,999		36.4	80.8	31.1	37.0
\$40,000 to \$59,999		4.1	9.7	40.5	45.9
\$60,000 or more		0.3	0.6	12.9	16.1

Data on the following interview questions are presented in this article:

1. What motivated your decision to work part time?
2. What were you doing before you worked part time?
3. Have you experienced any challenges at home since you started working part time? Have you experienced any benefits at home since

- you started working part time?
4. Have you experienced any difficulties at work since you started working part time? Have you experienced any advantages at work since you started working part time?

*Data Analysis:* The interview results are reported as the percent of interview respondents per response category. Since sample sizes are small, statistical analyses were not run

**TABLE II** Measures Used in the Survey Study.

Measure	Source	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Examples of Scale Items
<i>Work-family conflict</i>			
1. Role overload	Bohen & Viveros-Long, 1981	.85	I feel physically drained when I get home; I have more to do than I can comfortably handle
2. Work to family interference	Bohen & Viveros-Long, 1981	.69	My job keeps me away from my family too much; I wish I had more time to do things for the family
3. Family to work interference	Bohen & Viveros-Long, 1981	.68	I worry about my children when working; My family life interferes with work
<i>Time management</i>			
1. Individual time	Bohen & Viveros-Long, 1981	.87	Ease or difficulty in: spending time by myself; visiting neighbors or friends
2. Family time	Bohen & Viveros-Long, 1981	.80	Ease or difficulty in: having meals with the family; being home when children get home from school
<i>Individual outcomes</i>			
1. Perceived stress	Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983	.87	How often in last month respondents had: been upset because something happened unexpectedly; felt "nervous or stressed"
2. Depressed mood	Moos, Cronkite, Billings, & Finney, 1988	.84	How often in last 12 months respondents had: felt that they just couldn't get going; wondered if anything was worthwhile anymore
3. Life satisfaction	Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985	.88	Agreement or disagreement with: In most ways my life is close to ideal; The conditions of my life are excellent

Note: Due to space limitations in the work-family survey, the Bohlen and Viveros-Long scales were modified to reduce the number of items. Cronbach's alphas reported in this table reflect the modified versions. Full descriptions of the measures are available from the first author on request.

on the data. Only large, substantive differences are discussed.

## Results

### Survey Study

*Work and Family Outcomes:* Table IV shows the means and standard deviations for the

study's variables. The analysis of these means identified a significant interaction effect for role overload. Part-time work was associated with significantly lower role overload among earners, but there was no relationship between job status and role overload for career women. An identical pattern is seen for family to work interference. Career employees, regardless of part- or full-time status, have

*Part-time work was associated with significantly lower role overload among earners, but there was no relationship between job status and role overload for career women.*

**TABLE III** Demographic Characteristics of Interview Sample.

<b>Means and Standard Deviations</b>			
<b>Variables</b>		<b>PT Earner</b>	<b>PT Career</b>
Sample Size	N	30	15
Age (Years)	Mean	34.14	31.67
	Std. Dev.	4.53	6.18
Number of Children	Mean	2.26	2.40
	Std. Dev.	.74	.50
Average Age of Children	Mean	6.64	5.67
	Std. Dev.	3.95	4.86
Hours/Weeks in Paid Employment	Mean	19.06	24.22
	Std. Dev.	8.11	7.24
<b>Percent in Category</b>			
<b>Variables</b>		<b>PT Earner</b>	<b>PT Career</b>
Education:			
High School		69.7	—
Community College		30.3	11.1
Undergraduate		—	88.9
Graduate		—	—
Family Income:			
Less than \$20,000		2.9	—
\$20,000 to \$39,999		28.6	—
\$40,000 to \$59,999		34.3	—
\$60,000 to \$79,999		22.9	33.3
\$80,000 to \$99,999		8.6	33.3
\$100,000 or more		2.9	33.3
Annual Salary/Wage:			
Less than \$20,000		94.3	44.4
\$20,000 to \$39,999		2.9	33.3
\$40,000 to \$59,999		2.9	22.2
\$60,000 or more		—	—

similar levels of interference from family to work. In contrast, part-time earners have much lower levels of interference than do their full-time counterparts.

A significant job-type interaction for family time management was also identified. This interaction suggests that, although part-time work facilitates time management for both earners and career women (i.e., the effect is in the same direction), the magnitude of the effect is much greater for earners. Mean scores indicate that full-time earner and ca-

reer employees report very similar levels of difficulty in managing their family time. Part-time work, however, is associated with a much greater reduction in time management difficulty for earners.

A job status main effect was found for work to family interference. Part-time workers had significantly lower levels of work-to-family interference than their full-time counterparts. A similar finding was noted for individual time management where part-timers perceived less difficulty managing their time than did their full-time



counterparts. The analysis of individual time management also identified a significant main effect of job type. Individual time management was more problematic for career employees than it was for earners (as reflected in the higher scores).

*Individual Outcomes:* Employees in earner occupations had significantly higher depressed mood and significantly lower life satisfaction than those in career positions. Part-time work was associated with higher life satisfaction. Perceived stress was unrelated to job type or job status. The results are shown in Table V.

*Interview Study*

*Reasons for Part-Time Work:* Table VI shows the relationship between job type and activity prior to working part time. These data suggest that career women and earners may take up part-time work to serve different needs at different life cycle stages: the large majority of career women (86%) had been employed full time prior to opting for part-time employment. In contrast, less than half of part-time earners (47%) had been employed full time. Part-time earners were much more likely than their career counterparts to have been at home with children before beginning

their part-time schedules.

The motivations cited for choosing a part-time schedule directly reflect these prior activities: career women were more likely than earners to claim they chose to work part time because family was a priority. Earners were more likely than career employees to claim that they needed the stimulation of employment (i.e., since part-time work represented a return to the workplace after child rearing).

*Home-Related Advantages and Disadvantages of Part-Time Work:* Table VII shows the home-related advantages and disadvantages of part-time work. Advantages appeared to be dependent on job type and, accordingly, reflected the respondents' prior activity. In the home domain, career part-timers were substantively more likely to say that part-time work gave them more time for their kids: "I have time now to do all the little things that my mother did for me". They also reported having more time for children's activities and functions: "Now I don't have to explain to my kids why I can't volunteer for field trips". Personal fulfillment was also an important consideration for part-time career employees. Earners, on the other hand, were substantively more likely to cite improved mood as an advantage at home: "Part-time work gives my

**TABLE IV** Survey Results from 2 x 2 MANOVA (Work-Family Outcomes).

Variables		PT Earner	FT Earner	PT Career	FT Career	Significant Results
Role Overload	Mean	3.37	3.66	3.68	3.74	Interaction
	Std. Dev.	0.92	0.87	0.79	0.83	
Work-to-family interference	Mean	2.71	3.12	2.81	3.14	Job status main effect
	Std. Dev.	0.90	0.84	0.80	0.81	
Family-to-work interference	Mean	2.46	2.73	2.72	2.74	Interaction
	Std. Dev.	0.87	0.86	0.80	0.84	
Time Management: Individual	Mean	2.96	3.30	3.22	3.42	Job status main effect; Job type main effect
	Std. Dev.	0.87	0.79	0.78	0.76	
Time Management: Family	Mean	2.73	3.33	3.07	3.40	Interaction
	Std. Dev.	0.87	0.79	0.78	0.74	

Note: High scores indicate more problems on the variable.

**TABLE V** Survey Results from 2 x 2 MANOVA (Individual Outcomes).

Variables		PT Earner	FT Earner	PT Career	FT Career	Significant Results
Perceived Stress	Mean	2.63	2.69	2.68	2.61	None
	Std. Dev.	0.56	0.59	0.54	0.58	
Depressed Mood	Mean	2.39	2.48	2.31	2.29	Job type main effect
	Std. Dev.	0.79	0.82	0.73	0.79	
Life Satisfaction	Mean	3.37	3.17	3.46	3.38	Job type main effect; Job status main effect
	Std. Dev.	0.91	0.91	0.87	0.85	

child and me just enough time away from each other . . . it's a little time for sanity".

Disadvantages at home were less subject to the effect of job type. Women who worked part time in careers were as likely as earners to cite the hectic pace involved in balancing work and family: "Since I work fewer hours, I figure I can do everything"; "You are never not working". Both groups also tended to note difficulties arranging part-time child care and seeing to housework that "waits for you to come home".

*Work-Related Advantages and Disadvantages of Part-Time Work:* Work-related advantages and disadvantages are shown in Table VIII. Earners

were more likely than career women to indicate that part-time hours allowed them to be more relaxed on the job: "My job is stressful . . . it's much better not to have to be here all the time"; "I have fewer responsibilities at work . . . which makes me more able to cope both at work and at home". Earners enjoyed the social aspects (talking with customers, clients, and coworkers) and were happy to avoid office politics: "You just work the rush hours and then you're gone . . . you don't see all the grumbling that's going on". The focus on the social aspect of work reflects many earners' motivation for part-time work (i.e., as an alternative to being at home full time).

**TABLE VI** Interview Results: Reasons for Part-Time Work.

	Total (%)	Earner (%)	Career (%)
What were you doing before you started to work part-time?			
Employed full time	64.1	47.2	85.7
Home with children	31.3	47.2	10.7
What motivated your decision to work part-time?			
Family was my priority	60.3	42.9	82.1
Needed the stimulation	23.8	40.0	3.6
Full-time too stressful	11.1	5.7	17.9
Liked the hours offered	7.9	14.3	0.0
For the money	7.3	11.4	3.3
Desire to keep current	6.3	0.0	14.3

Note: Multiple responses were accepted for motivation items.

**TABLE VII** Interview Results: Home-Related Advantages and Disadvantages of Part-Time Work.

	Total (%)	Earners (%)	Career (%)
<b>Advantages at Home</b>			
More time for kids	50.0	35.3	67.9
My mood is improved	35.5	47.1	21.4
More time for kids' activities	30.6	20.6	42.9
Less hectic, less stressed	24.2	20.6	28.6
More time for planning	22.6	23.5	21.4
Personal fulfillment	21.0	11.8	32.1
More time for self	19.4	17.6	21.4
More time for spouse	14.5	14.7	14.3
More time for errands	11.3	8.8	14.3
More time on weekends	11.3	8.8	14.3
<b>Disadvantages at Home</b>			
Hectic, stressful	33.3	31.8	35.7
Part-time child care arrangements	27.8	27.3	28.6
Housework waits for me	22.2	22.7	21.4
Family's expectations too high	13.9	9.1	21.4
Weekend work	13.9	18.2	7.1
Self expectations too high	8.3	4.5	14.3

Note:

1. 33% of sample reported no disadvantages at home.
2. 2% of sample reported no advantages at home.
3. Multiple responses were accepted.

Career part-timers were substantively more likely than earners to focus on productivity gains associated with part-time work: "I have only a few hours and I make them all count"; "Job sharing has doubled the resources available to me and to my colleagues . . . we have two different bases of experience and knowledge to draw on".

Communication was the number one challenge cited by both groups with earners being more likely to note problems in this area: "I miss training"; "I'm not there enough to keep up with all of the changes". It is possible that communication was a greater issue for earners due to the interactive nature of their work (i.e., earners tended to be in front line, service-oriented positions, rather than self-directed work). Both career and earner part-timers perceived that their workloads were too great. "Part-time hours, full-time job" was one typical comment.

Career women were substantively more likely to note that part-time work was stigmatized at their organization: "I am considered uncommitted by my peers"; "People see that I'm there only half of the time". Women in careers

also reported that their advancement opportunities were reduced: "Because my children do not hold a clear second place in my life, I lose out at work"; "Senior management is dominated by workaholic men with stay-at-home wives . . . Part-time is death to your career".

The stigma and advancement barriers cited by career women may reflect the fact that these women were one of few part-timers in their workplace. Separate analyses of interview data revealed that part-time arrangements often had been negotiated individually by career women. In contrast, earners tended to be among a pool of part-timers whose schedules were accepted in the corporate culture. As a result of this acceptance, earners tended not to feel like "black sheep": "My coworkers and I are all in the same boat . . . Everybody understands we have other obligations". These findings are consistent with work by Tilly (1992; 1996), which indicates that for career part-timers, part-time work represents a special arrangement offered to attract or retain valued employees, whereas part-time earner positions tend to be offered across the board to employees in designated job classifications.

*Communication was the number one challenge cited by both groups with earners being more likely to note problems in this area.*

**TABLE VIII** Interview Results: Work-Related Advantages and Disadvantages of Part-Time Work

	<b>Total</b> (%)	<b>Earners</b> (%)	<b>Career</b> (%)
<b>Advantages at Work</b>			
More relaxed, less stress	29.6	38.7	17.4
Avoid office politics	27.8	32.3	21.7
Enjoy social aspects	25.9	32.3	17.4
Keep foot in door	18.5	25.8	8.7
More productive	16.7	6.5	30.4
More energy	13.0	16.1	8.7
Enjoy work, more happy	13.0	19.4	4.3
Flexible hours	9.3	6.5	13.0
More motivated	9.3	3.2	17.4
<b>Disadvantages at Work</b>			
Communication problems	42.9	55.0	31.8
Workload too great	23.8	25.0	22.7
Part-time employee stigma	21.4	15.0	27.3
Reduced advancement opportunities	19.0	10.0	27.3

Note:

1. 25% of sample reported no disadvantages at work.
2. 14% of sample reported no advantages at work.
3. Multiple responses were accepted.

## Discussion

This research has provided conditional empirical support for the belief that part-time work helps women balance work and family. Consistent with the contextual effect perspective on work-family balance (Bowen & Pittman, 1995; Haas, 1995; Voydanoff, 1995), this research suggests that although part-time work may facilitate the logistics of time management for women in both career and earner positions (i.e., as evidenced in greater ease in time management<sup>1</sup> for women in both job categories, and less work to family interference), the overall perception of work-family conflict may be a function of the specific job context. Women in earner positions appeared to derive far greater benefit through part-time schedules than did women in careers. For earners, part-time work was associated with significant improvement on all five of the measures of work-family conflict. Career women, on the other hand, reported high role overload and high family to work interference, regardless of their full-time/part-time status.

Survey and interview data suggested at least two factors that may have contributed to

the differential response pattern of earner and career employees to part-time work. First, work may have played a less central role in the lives of earner employees than it did in the lives of career employees. If work itself is less central in the lives of earners, reduced hours can offer a suitable balance between child-care needs and the need for the stimulation, affiliation, and increased income sought through employment. As compared to full-time work, part-time work may prove beneficial to earners because it reduces the amount of time spent in an unrewarding work environment. Conversely, work-involved career women may find their work conditions more stimulating and satisfying than do women in clerical and administrative positions, and accordingly, are less likely to perceive positive outcomes from minimizing time spent in work. For earners, part-time work can be a relief from full-time pressures, rather than a career risk (Barker, 1993).

Second, job-specific differences in the work environment also may have contributed to career women's less favorable response to part-time hours. Although specific work demands were not included in this analysis, previous research linking professional and

managerial work to high work conflict (Higgins et al., 1992; Duxbury & Higgins, 1994) suggests that the greater work demands on career women may serve to constrain the benefits they derive from part-time schedules. Heavy work demands may at least partly account for the finding that role overload remained high among career women regardless of their job status. Interviews suggested that cultural factors also may have been in operation in the workplace, as career women tended to feel that their part-time status stigmatized them and limited their advancement opportunities. Such perceptions may explain why family to work interference remained high among career women, if home life was seen as limiting career options (i.e., “part-time is death to your career”). Unlike part-time earners who felt like “one of the crowd,” part-time career women felt “out of the loop.” Given career women’s high work involvement (Barker, 1993; Higgins et al., 1992; Duxbury and Higgins, 1994), exclusion from the organizational culture may have been a high price to pay for a few more hours a week with their families.

There was also mixed support for the notion that part-time work might enhance individual well-being. Consistent with work by Barker (1993) and Lero and Johnson (1994), part-time work was associated with greater life satisfaction, perhaps reflecting the “best of both worlds” perspective. Life satisfaction, however, was the only individual outcome on which a job status effect was obtained. The remainder of the analysis indicated that job type may be as great a determinant of personal well-being as job status: women in earner positions reported significantly higher depressed mood than did career women, plus significantly lower life satisfaction. This finding is consistent with previous work-family research, which has indicated that women in earner occupations often encounter unique challenges stemming from inflexible work environments, limited advancement opportunities, and financial resources that are insufficient to allow them to purchase services that might help them cope (Duxbury et al., 1991; Higgins et al., 1992; White, 1983).

Surprisingly, stress was unrelated to either job type or job status. Population norms

indicate that the means for all four study groups were in the high range (Duxbury et al., 1991; Higgins et al., 1992). Given the job type and job status differences on other variables, the consistently high scores on perceived stress were noteworthy. Although speculative, one explanation for this finding may be that, regardless of the nature of paid work, domestic work remained a common source of stress for women in this study. Interview data indicated that both career and non-career women reported challenges seeing to chores and child care, and commented on housework that “waited for them to come home.” This explanation would be consistent with research which has shown that women retain primary responsibility for family coordination regardless of the extent or nature of their participation in the paid labor force (Duxbury et al., 1991; Higgins et al., 1992; Lero et al. 1993). Whereas women may be breaking new ground at the office, it appears that housework and child care remain “female-dominated professions.”

#### Implications for HR Managers

The differential response pattern of earners and career women to part-time work has implications for organizations. This study suggests that part-time schedules may enable women to better manage a persistently demanding home domain simply by making more time available to spend there (i.e., improved time management ability, and reduced interference from work to the family domain). The finding that perceptions of overload and family to work interference were a function of job type, however, suggests that the work domain may be playing a role in offsetting the benefits women obtain through part-time work.

It may not be enough simply to make part-time work available. *In order to truly make a difference in the quality of life for women with children, part-time work must also be made desirable and rewarding.* Motivation theorists have long recognized that an outcome is rewarding only in so far as it is perceived as valuable by the individual (Vroom, 1964). This research points to a need for organizations to pay greater attention to some of the individual differences between career and earner employees in terms of

*Heavy work demands may at least partly account for the finding that role overload remained high among career women regardless of their job status.*

*the role that work plays in their lives and the rewards they are seeking through employment.*

Organizations that employ career women on a part-time basis might be guided by an awareness that the high level of work involvement in this group of employees may sensitize them to the career penalties associated with part-time hours. Practitioners may want to ensure that these women are sent the message that they are valued members of the organization and ensure access to stimulating assignments and continued connection with promotional paths. *On an organizational level, reduced work schedules should be given credibility by having them written into policy.* HR programs might include sensitivity training in work-family issues that may help to address the misconception that part-timers are “uncommitted” and reduce the sense of perceived stigmatization.

In spite of the observed beneficial effects of part-time work for earners in this research, *organizations that employ a large contingent of non-career women might also have a role to play in improving the quality of work life for these employees.* The analysis of individual outcomes suggested that work in earner occupations was associated with higher depressed mood and lower life satisfaction than career work, regardless of full- or part-time status. *The challenge to employers may be to*

*review characteristics of the work environment that may contribute to dissatisfaction among both their full-time and part-time earners.* For example, research suggests that earners often hold jobs that are low in autonomy and flexibility (Duxbury et al., 1991; Duxbury & Higgins, 1994; Higgins et al., 1992). These conditions have been connected to low control over the work-family interface and corresponding increases in conflict and stress (Thomas & Ganster, 1995). More research is needed that directly explores these variables as a function of job type.

Finally, although our data strongly suggest that job type differentially affects women's ability to balance work and family, our interpretation of the motivational dynamics underlying this effect remains to be validated. Our ability to provide qualitative support for our survey conclusions was limited by the small size of our interview sample, particularly the part-time career group. More research is needed that can directly investigate work involvement, motivation for part-time work, and specific features of the work environment as a function of job type. The contribution of part-time work to women's ability to balance work and family will likely make sense only in the context of the overall role that part-time work plays in women's lives.

*In order to truly make a difference in the quality of life for women with children, part-time work must also be made desirable and rewarding.*

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#### ENDNOTE

1. Although the interaction in family time management precluded analysis of main effects, means on this measure indicated that part-time work was associated with a considerable reduction in time management difficulty for both earner and career women (see Table IV).