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Abstract: Recent rapid economic growth in Ireland has been accompanied by a strong surge in the number of women in employment, and this has led to a significant increase in the proportion of dual-earner families. These changes have brought the issue of reconciliation between work and care commitments to the fore. Flexible working arrangements in firms have been identified as one important means of balancing work and other commitments (Evans 2001). In this paper we investigate the relationship between four flexible working arrangements – flexi-time, part-time hours, working from home and job-share – and two key employee outcomes – work pressure and work-life conflict, using data from the first national survey of employees in Ireland in 2003. Our results show that while part-time work and flexi-time tend to reduce work pressure and work-life conflict, working from home is associated with greater levels of both work pressure and work-life conflict. We conclude that it is important to distinguish between flexible working arrangements to discover their potential for reducing work pressure and work-life conflict.

KEYWORDS: work-life balance; flexible working arrangements; gender; work stress; work pressure.

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Introduction

The past decade has witnessed major changes in the Irish workforce and in Irish society. Rapid economic growth was accompanied by a strong surge in the number of women in employment, and led to a significant increase in the proportion of families where both parents are at work. The number of households headed by a working single parent has also increased (Russell et al., 2004). Moreover a recent study of those caring for ill, disabled or elderly dependants, found that the proportion of carers combining their care commitments with employment has grown significantly (Cullen et al 2004). These changes have brought the issue of reconciliation between work and care commitments to the fore in Ireland, as in other countries (Hochschild, 1997; OECD, 2001; Jacobs and Gerson, 2004). Work-life conflicts are seen to have a potentially detrimental impact on productivity, personal effectiveness, marital relations, child-parent relationships and even child development (Gornick and Meyers, 2003). Much of the focus of comparative research has been on national policies to facilitate work-life balance, but increasingly interest has turned to strategies at the firm level. Flexible working arrangements have been identified as one important means of balancing work and other commitments (Evans 2001; Glass and Estes, 1997: Dex and Smith, 2002).

In this paper we investigate the relationship between flexible working arrangements and two key employee outcomes – work pressure and work-life conflict. Our work pressure measure taps into the general intensity of work (both physical and mental) and time pressures. The measure of work-life conflict used in the study captures tensions between work and family commitments. In this paper we investigate whether flexible working arrangements facilitate work-life balance and reduce work pressure.

As firm-level policies are embedded in the national context, we first briefly review both the changing nature of employment in Ireland and state policies to facilitate work-life reconciliation. We then consider work-life balance arrangements by firms, discussing Ireland in comparative context. We examine some previous evidence on the effects of flexible working arrangements for employers and employees. After describing the data used in the study, from the first national survey of over 5000 employees in Ireland in 2003, we present results on the effects of flexible working arrangements on work pressure and work-life conflict. We conclude by summarising the results and reflect on their implications for policy.

The changing nature of employment in Ireland

The past decade has witnessed major changes in the size and composition of the workforce in Ireland. Rapid growth in economic output and in employment have been accompanied by a strong surge in the number of women at work. Over the same period there has been a growth of inward migration, and the working population has begun to age.

Total employment in Ireland grew by a remarkable 50% in the nine years from 1993 to 2002, and, during the same period, unemployment plummeted from almost 16% of the labour force to just over 4%. One of the striking features of recent developments in the Irish labour market has been the sharp and sustained increase in women's labour force participation and employment. Women's share of total employment increased from 37% in 1993 to 42% in 2004. This represents a continuation of a trend from the 1980s: the female share of total employment was only 29% in 1981 and less than 33% in 1988 (O'Connell, 2000; O'Connell & Russell forthcoming). The trend is, moreover, expected to continue, so that women are expected to account for about 45% of total employment by the year 2015 (Sexton, Hughes, and Finn, 2002). The rate of part-time employment increased sharply from the mid 1980's to the mid 1990's and accounted for most of the employment growth in that period, however since then the rate of growth in part-time has been similar to that of full-time work so the part-time share has been relatively stable since 1997. For example, among women the rate of part-time work in 2004 was 32% compared to 30% in 1997.

Among women, part-time jobs are skewed towards the routine and lower skilled occupations: personal services, sales, clerical/secretarial each account for about 20% of female part-timers and other unskilled occupations for another 15%. Only 23% are in managerial, professional and associate professional occupations compared to almost twice that proportion (43%) among women working full-time (O'Connell & Russell, forthcoming).[1]

These changes in female employment together with the ageing of the population have brought the issue of reconciliation between work and care commitments to the fore in Ireland, in a policy climate where state support for caring is low, and government policy is predicated on there being one female carer in the home to care.

State policies to facilitate working and caring in Ireland

State policies to facilitate working and caring – the institutional context in which firm-level policies take place - are taken to include policies to support working-time flexibility, childcare, maternity, parental and carer's leave. There is no legal right to work part-time in Ireland, in contrast to many European countries. These countries introduced a guaranteed right to work part-time for all employees (Germany, Holland, Finland, Belgium) or for parents (France) while implementing the European Directive on Part-time work of 1997 (Gornick and Meyers, 2003). The Irish response to this directive, the Protection of Employees (Part-time) Act 2001, laid emphasis on improving the quality of part-time work in terms of conditions of work and remuneration (O'Connell et al, 2003). Part-time work, along with job-sharing, flexitime and teleworking are all work arrangements which are at the discretion of individual employers.

Compared to most European countries, childcare provision for pre-school children in Ireland is uncoordinated, variable in quality and in short supply (OECD, 2004). Ireland also boasts the highest childcare costs as a proportion of average earnings in the EU15 (Expert Working Group on Childcare, 1999).[2] Compared to other Northern European Countries and continental Europe where there is more emphasis on state provision, state support in Ireland is indirectly provided in the form of grants to encourage private and community sector provision.[3]

The extent of maternity and parental leave in Ireland is also low compared to other European countries, though recent legislation, partly in response to an EU Directive, has improved provision. In 2001 paid maternity leave was increased from 14 to 18 weeks, and unpaid leave was raised from four to eight weeks. The 1998 Parental Leave Act introduced a statutory entitlement for both parents to 14 weeks of unpaid leave. The EU Directive on which the Parental Leave Act is based allowed individual countries to decide whether this should be paid or unpaid: Ireland chose to have unpaid parental leave. This lack of payment means many parents cannot afford to avail of it. The Parental Leave Act also gives all employees limited paid leave for family emergencies (force majeure leave) – 3 days in 12 months.

Care of elderly and disabled people in Ireland was traditionally undertaken in the home or community by a female relative. In general, state provision for the elderly and disabled, which comprises home help services, care assistance and respite care, is characterized by under provision, inequitable access and lack of appreciation of the needs of carers (Timony, 2004; O'Hagan, 2005). Carer's leave, which allows employees to take a break of up to 65 weeks to provide full-time care for an elderly or disabled person, is unpaid, and some argue it is an attempt to encourage female family

members to continue to provide care in the home or community (O'Hagan, 2005). However, increasingly carers are combining paid work and caring, or would like to (Cullen et al 2004).

Irish public policy on caring has much in common with liberal welfare states like the US and the UK. Here there is a strong emphasis on market forces and individual freedom, with relatively little intervention by the State in the economic arrangements of the family, and it is not seen as the government's role to provide childcare. Notably much of the extension of parental leave rights in Ireland has been initiated in response to EU legislation. In addition, the Irish government is fearful of undermining the traditional gender roles within the family in a country where attitudes are very traditional (O'Hagan, 2005). Rather than tackling childcare, which might be interpreted as favouring working women over women in the home, the government has instead followed 'safer', more 'neutral' policy options, such as increasing child benefit and individualising taxation. This has led to clear tensions in Irish government policy. Employment policy explicitly aims to increase participation rates for all women, yet health/welfare policy is predicated on there being an unpaid, female adult in the home who does the caring work (O'Hagan, 2005; Cullen et al, 2004). This raises the question about the social costs of economic growth and increased labour market participation, which is related to the central concern in this paper about the experience of work pressure and work-life conflict among Irish workers.

The adoption and incidence of family-friendly work arrangements by firms
While state policies may play an important role in easing the reconciliation of work and family life, family-friendly arrangements in firms are also important. Detailed aspects of work-life reconciliation are worked out at the level of the workplace, and a rigid adherence to working hours legislation may deny employees the flexibility needed to deal with the day-to-day pressures of family life. Since legislative provision for leave and flexible working arrangements in Ireland are minimal, the degree of flexibility provided by employers is likely to be crucial to employees' abilities to balance work and other commitments. Failure to take account of these may miss important aspects of the environment in which work/family reconciliation occurs.

The literature on flexible working arrangements covers a wide range of policies only some of which might be deemed to support work-life balance. For example temporary employment is often considered alongside part-time work. However, while temporary employment provides employers with a form of numerical flexibility, it is generally not a measure that facilitates work-life balance for employees. We are concerned here with arrangements introduced voluntarily by firms which facilitate the combination of work and family or other responsibilities.

There are a number of factors which may encourage employers to adopt polices to promote work-life balance. These include the business case for such polices (such as lower staff turnover, reduced absence, improved productivity), as well as changes in human resource management and changes in technology that enhances opportunities for working from home (Drew et al., 2003). Another key factor is increasing demand for greater flexibility from employees.[4]

International evidence on the incidence of flexible working arrangements is limited and tends to come from national surveys, which, because they are not harmonized, may not be directly comparable. However, Evans (2001) reports comparative data in relation to non-statutory leave provided by employers, employer provided/subsidised childcare, the percentage of employees working flexi-time and the percentage of women working part-time on a voluntary basis. On these comparisons Ireland ranks second last (of the EU15) in relation to extra-statutory sick-child leave and parental leave despite the fact that statutory provision is also low. Ireland ranks somewhat higher on employer additions to maternity leave (fifth from bottom), but is also low on employer-provided day-care.[5] However three of the countries below Ireland, i.e. Denmark, Finland and Sweden, have very generous state maternity leave systems which reduce the need for employer provision (Evans, 2001). The rate of flexi-time reported for employees in Ireland is 19% compared to an unweighted average for the EU15 of 25%.[6] Similarly, the rate of voluntary part-time work among women in Ireland is reported to be slightly lower than the EU average.

Previous research on flexible working in Ireland has found these arrangements are more common in the public sector than in the private sector and that they are more frequently availed of by women (Fynes et al., 1996; Drew et al., 2003). Gender and the public/private sector distinction are two key factors in our analysis of the effects of flexible working.

**The effects of flexible working arrangements for employers and employees:
previous research**
While the incidence of family-friendly working arrangements is important information in itself, the key question for this paper is: do they facilitate work-life reconciliation? Most previous research on the effect of flexible work arrangements for employers has concentrated on the business case for such measures. In their summary of mostly US research on this question, Glass and Estes (1997) note clear positive effects of reduced work hours and flexible working on employers, by increasing employee productivity and decreasing staff turnover. In Britain Dex and Smith (2001) found that the provision of family-friendly policies relating to child care and working

at home were associated with greater employee commitment in the private sector in a multivariate analysis of data from the 1998 Workplace Employee Relations Survey in Britain. Dex and Smith (2002) found that 90% of managers with experience of family-friendly working arrangements considered that they were cost effective.

While there is discussion about the business case for flexible working arrangements, and potential problems for employers, the assumption is often that such policies are invariably beneficial for employees. This is also reflected in the recommendations of social partnership bodies promoting work-life balance such as the National Framework Committee for Work-Life balance policies in Ireland. Yet some flexible working arrangements may actually exacerbate work-life conflict (e.g. flexibility in timing of work may result in employees being asked to work unsocial hours). Thus it is very important to consider the *effects* of such practices as experienced by employees, as is the focus of this paper. Indeed there is surprisingly little research on the impact of flexible working on respondents' ability to balance work and other demands, despite this being a major rationale for such practices. The effects we consider in this paper are both work demands and pressure while at work, following from Green's (2001) research on work concentration and intensification, but also work-life conflict – how work spills over into family time. The notion of spillover was epitomised by Hochschild (1997) in her book '*The Time Bind*'.[7] In this paper we are concerned with both 'tangible' extensions into family life such as work taking up family time and 'intangible' incursions from work such as exhaustion (Hyman et al. 2003).

Our general hypothesis is that flexible working arrangements will reduce work-life conflict by increasing employee choice and flexibility over work demands. Such arrangements are also expected to reduce work pressure by easing time pressures generally. However, we argue that it is important to consider the effect of each of these practices separately, as the effects of different practices may vary, and in the following we review some previous evidence with a view to developing individual hypotheses to qualify our general assumption that these measures reduce work pressure and work-life conflict. The practices we consider are: flexitime or flexible working hours; part-time work; job share and home-working. The hypotheses are summarised in Table 1.

Regarding flexible working hours, evidence from the United States suggests that flexible working time reduces work-family conflict (Glass and Estes, 1997). In Britain, White et al (2003) test the impact of a number of measures which allow employee discretion in starting and finishing times. They find that while flexible working hours in general reduce work-life conflict, there is some evidence that men

may use flexible starting times to increase working hours, exacerbating work-life conflict. Similarly, in their investigation of call centre workers and software developers, Hyman et al., (2003) caution against viewing temporal flexibility as always reducing work-life conflict. Temporal flexibility can lead to intermittent working patterns and greater intrusion into family life. Thus while we expect that in general flexible working times will reduce work-life conflict, an alternative hypothesis is that flexible working hours will increase work-life conflict (see Table 1). There is little evidence on the effect of flexible working times on work pressure but, as noted above, we expect that by easing time pressures, flexible working times will reduce work pressure.

While working from home may reduce time pressures by cutting commuting time and leaving more time for family life and other activities, it can also have a negative impact on work-life balance. In their analysis of home working, Hyman et al (2003) find that with respect to software developers, working at home in high-stress jobs can lead to greater intrusion into family life because of it's constant omnipresence, i.e. employees finding it more difficult to 'leave work at work'. Thus working at home may increase work-life conflict. We do however expect that working at home will reduce work pressure by allowing employees to manage their individual workload more flexibly.

Most research in the field argues that part-time work should reduce work-life conflict (Glass and Estes, 1997; Gornick and Meyers, 2003). Certainly Bonney (2005) finds that part-time work in Britain is used as a means of reconciling work and family life. Even those more critical of part-time work like Warren (2004) concede its role in work-life balance. We therefore expect part-time work to reduce work-life conflict. However, this applies chiefly to those who choose to work part-time: it is conceivable that for the small minority of involuntary part-time workers, this may not be the case.[8]

Concerning work pressure, where organisations use part-time work to improve the management of work demands within an organisation, like introducing part-time staff to cope with peaks in demand at certain times, part-time work may reduce work pressure more generally within the organisation. However more ad hoc arrangements may have the opposite effect, for example those on reduced hours may find that their workload is not reduced proportionately (see Table 1).

There is very little evidence on the effect of job sharing on work pressure and work-life conflict, partly because it is much less common. As job sharing is another means of reducing hours, we expect the effects will be similar to those for part-time work. With job sharing we might also expect that the exact conditions of how the job is

shared may influence its effects, but this is expected to vary by individual jobs. Table 1 summarises the possible effects of flexible working arrangements, drawing on previous evidence and the rationale for such practices.

Table 1 Summary of expected effects of flexible working arrangements on work pressure and work-life conflict

Measure	Work Pressure	Work-life conflict
Flexi-time/ flexible working	Reduce	Reduce (increase in some circumstances)
Working from home	Reduce	Reduce (may increase for some groups)
Part-time work	Reduce (increase if workload not adjusted)	Reduce
Job share	Reduce (increase if workload not adjusted)	Reduce

Table 1 reflects the primary concern of this paper, i.e. the effect of participation in flexible working arrangements on individual employees. Not covered by the table is the effect of having flexible working arrangements in place in a company on other employees. Previous evidence suggests that company supportiveness and flexibility towards home demands will tend to reduce stress for all employees (Clark, 2001). In our analysis we examine the effect of the number of flexible work practices available in the workplace irrespective of personal involvement. The informal culture of the workplace may also be as important as the presence of formal policies in the workplace (Lewis and Lewis, 1996). The way in which policies are implemented by managers has been found to be important in other studies (Glass and Estes, 1997; Yeandle et al 2002). The current data do not allow us to tap into this informal aspect of employing organisations.

There are a number of relevant issues which a focus on work pressure and work-life balance among employees precludes. Firstly, we do not consider whether participation in these flexible working arrangement effects working conditions such as pay, promotion opportunities or job satisfaction and employee commitment (see O'Connell & Russell, 2005, for further analysis). Regarding the conditions experienced by part-time workers, recent research on the gender pay gap shows a relatively small difference in the *mean* pay levels of part-time and full-time female workers in Ireland (Russell & Gannon, 2002). However, the evidence suggests there is considerable variability in the pay levels of part-timers, and there may be a well-paid group of part-time professionals that are raising the average pay level. Secondly, the focus on employees, i.e. only people who are currently working, means that we do not consider work-life balance among those who are not currently working, like stay-at-home

mothers. It also means that we do not analyse other flexible measures like career breaks or term-time working.

'The Changing Workplace' Survey of Employees

This paper draws on the data collected in a recent nation-wide survey of employees in the Republic of Ireland commissioned by the National Centre for Partnership and Performance and conducted by the ESRI (O'Connell et al 2004). The survey consists of a nationally representative sample of over 5000 employees and therefore offers a unique and comprehensive picture of the experiences of Irish workers.

Fieldwork for the survey was carried out between June and early September 2003 using a telephone methodology. The sample is of individuals living in private households. Three hundred sampling points were selected at random throughout the country and telephone numbers were randomly generated within each area code. Respondents not working as employees were excluded from the sample. A total of 5,198 interviews were completed. This represented a response rate of 46.5 per cent. The data are re-weighted by national population parameters to render them representative of the national population of employees at work in Summer 2003.

The survey is of employees rather than workplaces, so the estimate of the incidence of flexible working arrangements will not be the same as one based on a sample of employers/firms. Asking employees about firm level policies is also likely to produce some error, insofar as employees do not have full information on these issues. The questions on flexible working arrangements in the survey were asked both in relation to the organisational use of the practice and personal involvement. It is expected that the error surrounding responses on personal involvement will be lower than for organisational use: the former is the main focus of this paper.

The incidence of Flexible Working Arrangements

The survey collected information on several non-traditional flexible-working arrangements that could contribute to a more favourable work-life balance. These included: Working from home; Flexible hours or Flexitime; Job-sharing or "Week-on-week-off"; and Part-time hours. In relation to each of these the respondent was asked: (a) whether the working arrangement was available in their workplace; and (b) whether or not the respondent was personally involved in or covered by the practice.

Table 2 presents the extent of these arrangements. Part-time working is reported most frequently. It is available in 53% of respondents' workplaces and actually availed of by 20% of all employees. "Flexible hours" is also a common working arrangement, available to 43% of respondents and used by 23% of all employees.

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Table 2 The Extent of Flexible Working Arrangements among Employees

	Male	Female	Public	Private	Total
Used in workplace					
Home working	16.0	10.9	15.0	13.3	13.6
Flexible hours/ Flexitime	38.5	48.0	47.7	41.8	42.9
Job sharing	21.7	38.4	58.0	22.7	29.5
Part-time	39.0	69.6	61.3	51.5	53.4
Personally Involved					
Home working	10.3	5.3	9.0	7.8	8.0
Flexible hours/ Flexitime	20.2	25.9	26.8	22.2	22.8
Job sharing	3.3	9.2	12.8	4.6	6.1
Part-time	8.8	32.8	22.6	19.6	20.0
N (unweighted)	*2396*	*2760*	*1629*	*3532*	*5161*

Source: *The Changing Workplace* Employee Survey 2003

About 30% of respondents report that job-sharing is available at their workplace and only 6% are involved in the practice. Working from home is least common, available in 14% of respondents' workplaces and used by 8%. To capture the extent of flexible provision at the organisational level we combine responses on availability – this produces a scale ranging from zero, where none of the four options are available, to four when all options are available within the organisation.

Participation in flexible working arrangements is gendered. Women are more likely than men to be involved in working arrangements that entail temporal flexibility and reduced earnings: so 33% of women are involved in part-time working, compared to only 9% of men, and 9% of women are involved in job-sharing or working on a "week-on-week-off" basis, compared to only 3% of men. Men, however, are more likely than women to report that they are involved in working from home. This is in keeping with earlier findings about participation in flexible working arrangements in Ireland (Drew et al., 2003).

Flexible working arrangements are more common in the public than in the private sector. This is particularly the case in respect of job-sharing, available to 58% of public sector employees but only 23% of private sector employees. The mean number of flexible practices available in public sector workplaces is 1.8 compared to 1.3 in the private sector. Looking across industries the number of flexible work practices is

highest in the health sector, public administration and financial/business services, and is lowest in the construction, manufacturing and 'other services' sectors.

Measures of Work Pressure and Work-life Conflict

Work pressure refers to the intensity of work demands, both physical and mental, experienced by workers, and degree of work effort demanded in employment. Four questions are included in the survey which tap into this experience. Two questions address the general level of work pressure, which can capture both mental and physical pressures. Respondents were asked to signal their level of agreement or disagreement with the statements - 'My job requires that I work very hard' and 'I work under a great deal of pressure'. A further two items address the issue of *time pressure*: whether or not people felt they had enough time to get everything done on the job and whether they had to work extra time in order to complete their work. These indicators have been used widely in British and European surveys (e.g. *Employment in Britain 1992*, *Employment in Europe 1996*, *Eurobarometer 56.1 2001*, *European Social Survey, 2004/5*). The responses to these four questions are outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Measures of Work Pressure
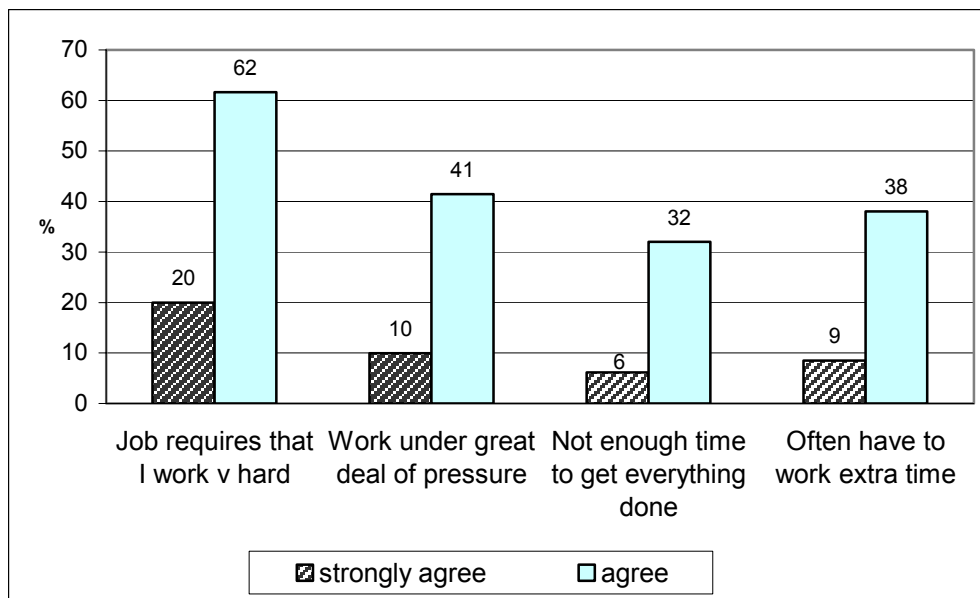
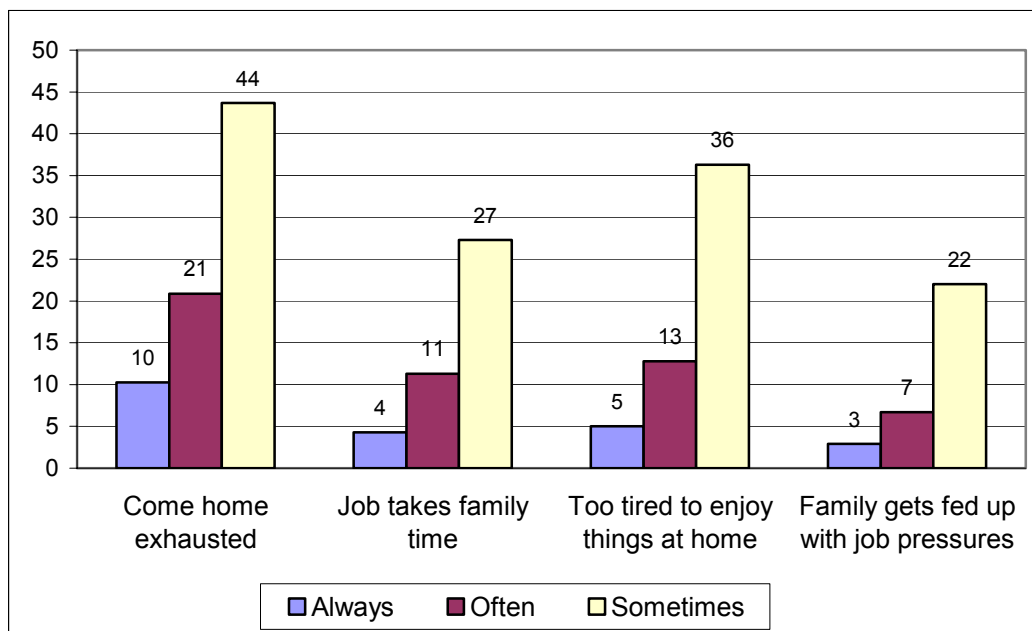Source: O'Connell, Russell, Williams and Blackwell (2004)

From the graph we can see that a significant proportion of Irish employees report experiences of work pressure

- 82% agree or strongly agree that their job requires them to work very hard;

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- 51% agree or strongly agree that they work under a great deal of pressure;

- 38% agree or strongly agree that they never have enough time to get everything done in their job;

- 47% agree or strongly agree that they often have to work extra time over and above their formal hours to get through the job or help out.

While work pressure is confined to demands within working hours, the measure of work-life conflict is designed to capture the extent to which the effects of work spill over into people's home and family life. These questions have been used to examine issues of work-life conflict in the UK and across Europe (Gallie, 1996; Gallie & Paugam, 2002; White et al., 2003).

Figure 2: Measures of Work-Life Conflict

Source: O'Connell, Russell, Williams and Blackwell (2004)

The overall results on these four items are reported in Figure 2. The response set allowed was "always", "often", "sometimes", "hardly ever", "never" (scored from 4 to 0). We see that almost one-third of employees always or often come home from work exhausted, 18% are often or always too tired to enjoy things outside work which suggests there is a work/life balance problem for significant minority of workers. On the two work/family conflict items ('job takes family time' and 'family gets fed up

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with job pressures'), we see that between 7 and 11% of respondents record such problems on a regular basis, while a further 22 to 27% experience these difficulties on an occasional basis.

These results are similar to the EU wide findings from the 2001 Eurobarometer surveys. Gallie & Paugam (2002, p119) report that 31 per cent of respondents across the EU always/often found their work stressful, 25 per cent of workers regularly came home from work exhausted, 19 per cent reported that their job always/often prevented them from giving the time they want to their family, 20 per cent were often/always too tired after work to enjoy the things they would like to do at home, and 10% reported that their partner/family gets fed up with the pressure of the respondents job.

Composite scales for both work pressure and work-life conflict are constructed from the components outlined above. The four items measuring aspects of work pressure can be combined to form a single work pressure scale with higher scores indicating greater pressure. The scale ranges from –2 to +2 and the average score for all employees is 1.17. As the average composite pressure score is positive this indicates that the average worker experiences some work pressure. A composite scale was also constructed from the four items on work-life conflict. This scale calculates respondents' mean score over the five items.[9] The work-life conflict scale could range from 0 to 4, with higher scores indicating greater stress. The average composite work-life conflict score is 1.52.

Table 3 Mean Work Pressure and Work-Life Conflict Scores by Involvement in Flexible Working Arrangements

		Work Pressure	Work-life Conflict
Homework	Not involved	0.14	1.51
	Involved	0.57	1.68
Flexible hrs	Not involved	0.18	1.55
	Involved	0.15	1.46
Job-share	Not Involved	0.18	1.52
	Involved	0.11	1.52
Part-time	Not Involved	0.22	1.57
	Involved	-0.02	1.30

Source: *The Changing Workplace* Employee Survey 2003

Note: Scores range from –2 to +2 for work pressure, 0 to 4 for work-life conflict. See text for details.

Table 3 shows the simple bivariate pattern of relationships between different flexible arrangements and the work pressure and work-life conflict scales. In general, those

who are personally involved in temporal flexibility exhibit lower levels of work pressure and work-life conflict than those who are not involved. For example, those who work part-time report much lower levels of pressure and work-life conflict than those who are not involved in part-time working. The differences between those in involved and those not involved in job-sharing are much less in the case of work pressure and there is no difference with respect to work-life conflict   Home-working is different: those who are personally involved in working form home exhibit higher levels of both work pressure and work-life conflict than those who are not so involved. This may be due to the breaking down of boundaries between work and home, so that those who do work from home find that work encroaches upon family time.   It may also be that for many of those who report working from home, the practice is *in addition to*, rather than in an alternative location to, work done at their employers' place of work – they bring work home that they could not complete at the office.

Modelling Work Pressure and Work-life Conflict
 In Table 4 and Table 5 we present the results of Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) models of work pressure and work-life conflict.   We include a range of controls that reflect personal, occupational and organisational characteristics that have been shown in earlier research to affect levels of work pressure.[10]   Personal characteristics included are sex, age, family status (in the work-life conflict models only).[11] Occupational controls such as job tenure, temporary contract, class, managerial level (senior, middle, supervisor, employee), and level of autonomy were included.   These factors are controlled for not only because they have an independent effect on work pressure but because they are also linked to some forms of flexible working. For example part-time workers are less likely to be in managerial roles and have been found to have lower levels of autonomy. Organisational controls such as firm size and sector are included in order to clarify whether the effects of flexible working arrangements occur simply because they co-exist with some other influential organisational characteristic.

We test the effects of personal involvement in each of the four flexible working arrangements. We also include a measure of the number of flexible arrangements in the organisation, regardless of personal involvement. This provides a more general measure of the flexibility of the employing organisation.

Gender is a key variable in our analysis. Given the continued gendering of caring responsibilities and domestic work we expect that female employees are more likely to be exposed to the double burden of paid and unpaid work and therefore experience

higher levels of work-life conflict and also to benefit more from involvement in flexible work practices. Therefore we test the interactions between sex and the flexible work measures (Models B & E).

Location in the public or private sector is a key institutional variable in terms of human resource practices and the availability of flexible working arrangements (see above) we therefore also test whether the impact of these arrangements varies by sector (Models C & F).

Work Pressure

The base model of work pressure (Model 4) shows that involvement in flexitime or in part-time work reduces the level of work pressure experienced by employees even when other personal, job and organisational characteristics are controlled. This is consistent with our expectations (see Table 1). This relationship is stronger for part-time involvement than flexi-time. In contrast, involvement in home working is associated with increased work pressure, which suggests this form of flexible working may undermine rather than promote work-life balance. Involvement in job-sharing has no impact, either positive or negative, on work pressure when other factors are taken into account. One possible explanation for this is that job-sharing may be quite heterogeneous, with the experience varying depending on the exact nature of the job, reducing pressure for some job sharers, increasing it for others.

The number of flexible work practices available in the workplace is found to be associated with lower levels of work pressure (the relationship is only significant at the 10% level). Because the data is cross-sectional rather than longitudinal it is not possible to determine the direction of causality, a more 'family-friendly' organisation may reduce pressure among employees because it is indicative that the employer is more responsive to the needs of workers. Alternatively, high levels of work pressure within an organisation may reduce the will of senior management to introduce flexible working arrangements (Nolan, 2002).

Table 4 Predictors of Work Pressure Amongst Employees

	A. Base Model		B. Base model with sex interactions		C. Base model with Pub/private sector interactions	
	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.
(Constant)	0.229	**.000**	0.230	**.000**	0.249	**.014**
Age 55 plus	-0.173	**.000**	-0.173	**.000**	-0.169	**.000**
Female	0.092	**.001**	0.087	**.035**	0.094	**.001**
Temporary Contract	-0.059	.100	-0.062	**.088**	-0.052	.162
Tenure under 1 year	-0.087	**.023**	-0.090	**.019**	-0.098	**.013**
Tenure 1-5 years	-0.028	.305	-0.029	.294	-0.038	.182
Higher professional/Managerial	0.180	**.002**	0.176	**.003**	0.209	**.001**
Lower professional /managerial	0.256	**.000**	0.251	**.000**	0.266	**.000**
Other Non-manual	-0.051	.314	-0.054	.289	-0.036	.495
Skilled manual	0.075	.190	0.073	.204	0.095	.114
Semi-skilled manual	-0.132	**.011**	-0.136	**.009**	-0.124	**.023**
Senior Manager/Executive	0.478	**.000**	0.479	**.000**	0.449	**.000**
Middle manager	0.301	**.000**	0.301	**.000**	0.305	**.000**
Supervisor	0.190	**.000**	0.189	**.000**	0.198	**.000**
Private sector	-0.115	**.000**	-0.114	**.000**	-0.145	**.003**
Autonomy score	-0.042	**.024**	-0.041	**.027**	-0.040	**.039**
Level of consultation with workers	-0.038	**.000**	-0.038	**.000**	-0.037	**.001**
Organisational Change in last 2yrs	0.067	**.000**	0.068	**.000**	0.064	**.000**
Subject to performance reviews	0.105	**.000**	0.106	**.000**	0.094	**.000**
Flexible Working Arrangements						
No. of flex policies in workplace	-0.021	**.086**	-0.033	**.058**	-0.002	.925
Home-working	0.272	**.000**	0.282	**.000**	**0.231**	**.001**
Flexitime/ Flexible Hours	-0.055	**.075**	-0.035	.451	**-0.186**	**.001**
Job Share	0.013	.788	-0.057	.558	0.088	.197
Part-time work	-0.097	**.003**	0.000	.996	**-0.175**	**.002**
Interaction Terms						
Female*no flexible policies			0.022	.371		
Female * home-working			-0.022	.798		
Female * flexitime			-0.033	.589		
Female* job-share			0.083	.459		
Female *part-time			**-0.127**	**.074**		
Private sector * no. flex policies					-0.022	.408
Private sector * home-working					0.072	.424
Private sector * flexitime					**0.184**	**.006**
Private sector * job-share					-0.103	.305
Private sector * part-time					0.106	.120
Adjusted R^2	.154		.153		.155	
N. of cases	4320		4320		4320	

Reference categories: Under 55, male, permanent contract, tenure>5yrs, unskilled manual class, no supervisory responsibility, public sector.
Note: firm size and family status were insignificant and so were removed from model, education not included because of co-linearity with class.
Data Source: '*The Changing Workplace*' Employee Survey, 2003.

The results for Model A show that women experience greater work pressure than men at a similar occupational level and within organisations with similar characteristics. When we interact the flexible work measures with sex (Model B) we find that link between part-time work and reduced pressure is only significant for women. It could be that male part-time workers are less likely to have a proportionately reduced workload. The impact of home working and flexi-time do not vary for men and women. The effect of number of flexible policies in the workplace is also constant for men and women.

The sectoral interactions in model C show that the relationship between flexi-time and reduced work pressure is only significant in the public sector. This suggests that the effectiveness of some flexible work arrangements may depend on the institutional context in which they are embedded. For example, employees in the private sector may be using flexitime to work longer hours, as White et al., (2003) find among men in Britain. The link between home-working and higher levels of work pressure persisted in both the public and private sector, as did the link between part-time work and lower levels of work pressure.

The control variables included in the model - age, tenure, occupation, managerial/ supervisory responsibility, autonomy, level of employee consultation, organisational change and performance monitoring, operate in the manner expected. We do not consider these findings here but see O'Connell & Russell (2005) for further discussion.

Work-life Conflict
In Table 5 we outline the result for three models of work-life conflict. These models include additional controls for family status as these were found to influence the level of work-life conflict: those with children under five experienced the highest levels of work-life conflict and those who were married/cohabiting reported higher levels of work-life conflict than single people. Higher levels of work-life conflict were observed for both mothers and fathers of young children.

The contrasting effect of different types of flexible working is again evident in the work-life conflict models (D, E and F). Part-time work is associated with a significant reduction in work-life conflict. Flexi-time is also associated with lower work-life conflict but this relationship is less significant.

Table 5 Models of Work-life Conflict

	D. Base Model		E. Base model with sex interactions		F. Base model with Pub/private sector interactions	
	B	Sig.	B	Sig.	B	Sig.
(Constant)	1.945	**.000**	1.957	**.000**	1.970	**.000**
Age 55 plus	-0.165	**.000**	-0.167	**.000**	-0.167	**.000**
Female	0.080	**.006**	0.043	.341	0.083	**.005**
Single	-0.080	**.012**	-0.084	**.008**	-0.080	**.012**
Child(ren) under 5 years	0.147	**.000**	0.150	**.000**	0.146	**.000**
Child(ren) 5-17 years	-0.004	.904	0.002	.951	-0.006	.858
Temporary Contract	-0.043	.278	-0.044	.266	-0.042	.287
Tenure under 1 year	-0.120	**.004**	-0.124	**.003**	-0.117	**.005**
Tenure 1-5 years	-0.001	.974	-0.002	.942	0.001	.969
Higher professional/Managerial	0.086	.179	0.089	.167	0.089	.166
Lower professional /managerial	0.191	**.001**	0.189	**.001**	0.184	**.002**
Other Non-manual	-0.032	.560	-0.031	.578	-0.031	.571
Skilled manual	0.117	.060	0.109	**.080**	0.119	**.055**
Semi-skilled manual	0.062	.272	0.061	.283	0.064	.256
Senior Manager/Executive	0.502	**.000**	0.499	**.000**	0.491	**.000**
Middle manager	0.292	**.000**	0.290	**.000**	0.291	**.000**
Supervisor	0.176	**.000**	0.173	**.000**	0.179	**.000**
Size100+ in local unit	0.087	**.004**	0.087	**.004**	0.090	**.003**
Private Sector	-0.030	.334	-0.028	.369	-0.065	.203
Autonomy score	-0.122	**.000**	-0.121	**.000**	-0.121	**.000**
Level of consultation with workers	-0.150	**.000**	-0.149	**.000**	-0.151	**.000**
Organisational Change in last 2yrs	0.078	**.000**	0.079	**.000**	0.080	**.000**
Performance Review	0.060	**.031**	0.061	**.028**	0.060	**.031**
Equality policy	-0.136	**.000**	-0.136	**.000**	-0.135	**.000**
Flexible Working Arrangements						
No of flex policies in workplace	-0.010	.471	-0.037	**.053**	0.001	.956
Home-working	0.206	**.000**	0.228	**.000**	0.071	.349
Flexitime/ Flexible Hours	-0.052	.118	-0.050	.322	-0.158	**.006**
Job Share	0.062	.225	0.273	**.008**	0.029	.690
Part-time work	-0.156	**.000**	-0.088	.196	-0.146	**.018**
Interaction Terms						
Female*no flexible policies			0.051	**.051**		
Female * home-working			-0.037	.694		
Female * flexitime			-0.012	.854		
Female* job-share			-0.294	**.013**		
Female *part-time			-0.096	.218		
Private sector * no. flex policies					-0.021	.454
Private sector * home-working					0.211	**.027**
Private sector * flexitime					0.155	**.028**
Private sector * job-share					0.090	.383
Private sector * part-time					-0.014	.841
Adjusted R^2	.123		.124		.124	
N. of cases	4445		4445		4445	

Data Source: *The Changing Workplace* Employee Survey, 2003.

However the strongest relationship between flexible working and work-life conflict occurs for home working and again the relationship is in the opposite direction. Those involved in home-working experienced significantly higher levels of work-life conflict compared to workers who share the same occupational and organisational characteristics but who do not work at home. Home working therefore appears to exacerbate tensions between work and family life rather than resolving them.

Female employees are found to experience higher levels of work-life conflict than male employees, when occupational and organisational characteristics are controlled. This result is consistent with the double burden argument.

There are two significant interactions between sex and flexible working. Firstly, job sharing is found to significantly increase work-life conflict among the small group of men involved in this practice. Secondly, the number of flexible arrangements in the workplace is found to significantly reduce work-life conflict for men but has no effect for women. The work-life conflict-reducing effect of part-time work and the work-life conflict-increasing effect of home working operate equally for men and women.

In Model F we test whether the relationship between flexible work practices and work-life conflict varies in the public and private sector. We find that the association between flexitime and reduced work-life conflict is confined to the public sector; this echoes the results found for work pressure.[12]

The results cast doubt on home-working as a means of reconciling work and family life. So what is it about home working that has such a negative impact our outcome measures? There are two possible mechanisms. The first is that home-working involves additional work-time over and above hours put in the office. This could be work that cannot be fitted into normal working hours or an expansion of work time for example due to the 'always on' technology like mobile phones/home e-mail etc. The second possibility is that regardless of working time, working from home leads to a greater intrusion into family life and therefore to greater work-family conflict.

In order to examine this question further we look at the working hours of those involved in home-working. There is a strong link between working from home and long hours of work. Mean weekly working hours for those involved in working from home is 41.5 compared to 37.2 hours among those not involved. Furthermore 19% of those working long hours (over 45 hours per week) are involved in working from home compared to 6% working less than 45 hours.

But does home-working increase pressure and work-life conflict net of hours worked? To test this we added hours (or log hours) to our base model. [13] Hours of work are strongly associated with work-life conflict and work pressure. However even when we control for hours, working from home is associated with increased work-life conflict and pressure[14] This suggests that the negative impact of home-working is partly due to its association with longer hours (mechanism 1) but that it also increases pressure and work-life conflict regardless of hours of work. This suggests some other mechanism is also involved, such as greater intrusion into non-work time e.g. weekends and evenings and into family space. These findings are consistent with those of Hyman et al., (2003).

Conclusion and Policy Implications

Work pressure is associated with a wide range of psychological distress measures and somatic complaints such as stomach problems, sleep difficulties (Wichert, 2002). Work-life conflict can have a detrimental effect both productivity and family life (Gornick and Meyers, 2003). The potential of flexible working arrangements to reduce work pressure and work-life conflict therefore has important implications for employees' physical and mental well-being and potentially has benefits for employers through reduced absenteeism.

In this paper we examine the influence of flexible working arrangements on work pressure and work-life conflict. Flexible working arrangements are often heralded as a crucial means of balancing work and other life interests; therefore we anticipated that these practices would reduce pressure and work-life conflict. There are significant relationships between flexible working arrangements and work pressure and work-life conflict, however not all the effects are in the direction anticipated. Involvement in working from home is associated with greater levels of both work pressure and work-life conflict. Therefore home-working cannot be considered a work-life balance arrangement. A further investigation of home-working reveals that it is associated with working longer hours but also appears to cause greater intrusion of work into family time and may be justifiably considered as a form of work intensification.

Involvement in part-time working operates in the manner anticipated reducing both pressure levels and work-life conflict. However the positive effects for work pressure are only found for women. Involvement in flexible hours is associated with lower levels of work pressure but does not have a significant effect on work-life conflict when other factors are controlled. Job-sharing had no discernible effect on work pressure or on work-life conflict among women and was associated with greater levels of work-life conflict among men who job-share. Therefore on the basis of the current research it appears that of the four types of working arrangements studied part-time

working hours offer the greatest opportunity for work-life balance followed by flexitime, but neither home-working nor job-sharing have such an effect at least in terms of reducing work-life conflict and pressure. In summary our findings suggest that flexible working arrangements should not be treated as a package: it is important to distinguish between them to discover their potential for reducing work-life conflict and work pressure. As such these conclusions tend to concur with Glass and Estes (1997) when they highlight the importance of distinguishing the effects of different family-friendly policies in organisations.

The results raise questions about the extent to which men's patterns of flexible working are contributing to work-life balance. The only form of flexibility that was more common among men than women (home-working) was found to be linked with increased pressure and work-life conflict, and the positive impacts of part-time work on work-life conflict was less significant for men, which may partly reflect the lower numbers involved.[15]

The number of flexible policies within the workplace would appear to reflect a family-friendly working environment, and an organisational commitment to accommodating employee needs. Men working in organisations with a greater number of arrangements in place were found to experience lower levels of work-life conflict, this was also found to be associated with less work pressure for men and women. These results suggest that organisational commitment to family friendly working arrangements may be beneficial to all employees and not just those who take up these options.

It is worth noting that our findings focus very much on the effects of current levels of work pressure and work-life conflict. There may well be other benefits of flexible working arrangements which are not touched on here - increased organisational commitment, potentially reduced turnover, less absenteeism. There may also be costs associated with participating in flexible working arrangements. Warren (2004) finds both the current financial situations and leisure lives of female part-timers in lower level jobs in Britain reveals a less positive picture of part-time work than is portrayed in work-life balance debates. She stresses that work-life balance is multi-dimensional, and we should not neglect domains such as financial security and leisure in any examination of it. Previous research also indicates that there may be a penalty in terms of promotion prospects for part-time work, so there may be a trade-off for involvement in certain forms of flexible work between a reduction in *current* work-life conflict and the quality of future employment.

The fact that more women are involved in family-friendly arrangements, particularly part-time work, may serve to exacerbate the longer-term negative effects of participation in family-friendly arrangements. It may also mean that insofar as there are additional overhead costs for employers associated with flexible working arrangements, they will disproportionately be borne by employers of women. It is only in the widespread involvement of men in such measures that gender discrimination in recruitment and gender differences in the negative effects of flexible measures may be avoided.

A more general limitation of firm-specific measures is that they are at the discretion of employers. This tends to privilege valuable, high-earning employees, and those in the public sector, as seen above. Given that, a future avenue for Irish policy might be to take the British lead and legislate for access to flexible working arrangements for all employees: since April 2003, all workers in Britain who fulfil length of service criteria will be entitled to rights to request flexible working. Another avenue would be to guarantee the right to work part-time for either parents or all employees, as is the case in Germany, Holland, Finland, Belgium, France and Sweden.

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Endnotes

[1] Figures are based on analysis of the Quarterly National Household Survey, conducted by the CSO.

[2] Average childcare costs in Ireland are 20% of average earnings while the average for other EU countries is 8% (Expert Working Group on Childcare, 1999).

[3] Capital Grants are available to both Private and Voluntary Sector organisations, staffing grants are available for community/voluntary sector only (up to a max. of €63.5K per year per facility). These grants allow some subsidy to those availing of community/voluntary sector places but the amount of subsidy is variable and the number of places is limited. There is a very small number of directly provided childcare through the Health Boards for 'children at risk'.

[4] A recent Irish survey of public sector managers found that almost all (98%) were experiencing pressure for change from employees needs and preferences for greater flexibility in the workplace, while 18% said this pressure was intense (Williams et al, 2004).

[5] Evans (2001) reports that 7% of female employees with a child under 15 have employer provided daycare in their firm (1995/1996).

[6] Authors calculations based on Table 11 in Evans (2001).

[7] This paper does not investigate the spillover from home to work. Other approaches measure work-life spillover in both directions using time-use diaries (e.g. Fisher and Layte, 2004).

[8] The proportion of involuntary part-time workers in Ireland is very small and declining - 1.3% of those working part-time in 2000. Note that male part-timers are more likely to be involuntary (2.4%) (O'Connell et al., 2003, using Labour Force Survey data).

[9] Some of those not living with a partner or family did not respond to the last two items, therefore where there was missing information we averaged respondents scores on the items that they did answer.

[10] Details of the measurement of these controls can be obtained from the authors on request.

[11] Family status was not significant in the work pressure models and so were removed.

[12] We also tested the interaction between parental status and flexible working arrangements and found they were non-significant, suggests that the positive effects of part-time working and flexitime are not confined to this group nor are the negative effects of home-working.

[13] We did not include hours of work in earlier models because it is too highly correlated with the variables of interest such as part-time work and job share.

[14] Full model results are available from the first author.

[15] In fact as home-working is most common among men with young children, this is of particular concern from a work-life balance perspective.

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